The Eight Study Guide

The Eight by Katherine Neville

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

The Eight, an intellectually and structurally complex novel, follows two narrative lines, each essentially telling the same story: a woman's pursuit of a mysteriously powerful artifact, a chess set known as The Montglane Service. Themes relating to the seductive power of revenge and the universal interrelationship of matter and spirit are woven into a suspenseful tapestry of multi-layered relationships and narrow escapes. Additionally, the story features fictionalized appearances by actual, historically important individuals.

The novel opens in France in the 1790s during the French Revolution. Two novice nuns, Mireille and Valentine, as well as the other nuns of their order, are given a mysterious and dangerous mission by their Abbess: to protect the pieces of the Montglane Service, a centuries-old chess set reputed to have mystical powers, from the greed of the leaders of the French Revolution. Mireille and Valentine are sent into the care of a distant relative in Paris, and are assigned by the Abbess to serve as a collection point - a place for nuns to hide pieces that are in danger of being captured.

The following section introduces the central character and situation of the contemporary narrative - Catherine, a musician and computer genius whose personal and professional integrity leads her to refuse involvement in an illegal land deal. This leads her to being transferred to Algiers and assigned to work for the government. Before she leaves, however, her friend Harry throws a farewell dinner party for her where she receives a mysterious warning of danger by an equally mysterious fortune teller.

This pattern of alternating chapters, between the Mireille narrative in the past and the Catherine narrative in the present, continues as Mireille and Valentine arrive in Paris, encounter one of the very revolutionaries the Abbess specifically warned them about, and become caught up in the violence of the Revolution. At the same time, Catherine finds herself caught up in the political and personal machinations of the world of international chess, attending (in the company of Harry's daughter Lily, whom she detests) at a match played between a Russian champion, Solarin and a British challenger, Fiske. The match is never played out; Fisk is murdered, and Catherine and Lily become the targets of a sniper. Meanwhile, in the past, Valentine is murdered, and Mireille is left to carry on the task of preserving the Montglane Service on her own.

Both Mireille and Catherine, in their respective time periods, follow a complicated path of intellectual puzzle solving, violent confrontations, and increasingly desperate attempts to gain control of the mysterious, apparently all-powerful Montglane Service. For Mireille's part, her journey also includes fictionalized encounters with important historical figures, including Napoleon Bonaparte, Johann Sebastian Bach, Isaac Newton, and (indirectly) Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia.

At around the mid-point of the novel, both Mireille and Catherine (in the company of Lily) find themselves in Algiers where, according to legend, the Montglane Service was forged and, at the same time, the ultimate secret of universal power encoded into its various components. Both Mireille and Catherine have what amounts to key encounters

with what seems to be their hitherto unsuspected destinies. Both Mireille and Catherine return to their previous lives (Mireille to Paris, Catherine to New York) primed for the ultimate confrontation with both their personal missions and their opponents.

While in Algiers, Catherine encounters Minnie, an attractive older woman who not only turns out to be the fortune teller, but also gives her Mireille's journal. As the final pieces of the past and present puzzles fall into place, Catherine comes to realize that Minnie is in fact Mireille, who had in the past uncovered the secret of the Montglane Service - the Elixir of Life, a source of immortality. Catherine also realizes that she has been chosen to take Mireille's place as the head of a secretive organization determined and possibly even destined to ensure that the power of the Service doesn't fall into the hands of those who would use it for evil. At the novel's conclusion, Catherine resolves to conceal the pieces of the Service where they can never be found, but nevertheless wonders what it would be like to follow in Mireille's path and, like her, drink from the Elixir of Life.

Section 1

Section 1 Summary

This intellectually and structurally complex novel follows two narrative lines, each essentially telling the same story - a woman's pursuit of a mysteriously powerful artifact, a chess set known as The Montglane Service. Themes relating to the seductive power of revenge and the universal interrelationship of matter and spirit are woven into a suspenseful tapestry of multi-layered relationships and narrow escapes. The story also features fictionalized appearances by actual, historically important individuals.

Each section of the book opens with a title and a quote. The title of this section is "The Defense." The quote is from a book by philosopher and critic Northrop Frye, analyzing how characters in a great deal of literature are portrayed as being part of a quest, either on it or blocking it, and as such resemble pieces in a chess game.

It's spring in 1790. Novice nuns Mireille and Valentine obey the urgent summons of a tolling bell, and return from their farm work to their convent. As they pass through its gates, they pass a sign carved into the stone walls by the convent's founder, the medieval king Charlemagne. The sign contains a reference to chess - "The King is checked by the Hand of God alone."

Mireille and Valentine join all the nuns of the convent in the office of the Abbess. The gathering is unusual in that the nuns are rarely all together outside of the chapel. The Abbess introduces them to Marie-Charlotte and Alexandrine, two nuns from another convent who bring serious news. They report that violence and revolution are spreading throughout the country and the new head of the people's assembly (the Bishop of Autun, reputed to be a literal child of the devil, complete with a cloven foot) is moving to seize the financial assets of the country's various religious orders. They conclude their speech with the vow that the Abbey's treasure must not fall into his hands. At that point the Abbess rises and tells a story that narration reveals has been passed down to successive abbesses for hundreds of years, on April 4th, the fourth day of the fourth month. She tells the secret story of the treasure of Montglane Abbey.

The Abbess tells of a chess match between Charlemagne and Garin, the man reputed to be the best chess player in the kingdom. The match is to be played with a set given to Charlemagne as a gift by an Arab prince, which is brought into the room by eight silent Arab soldiers. As Charlemagne and Garin sit to play, those watching note that they're both behaving as though they're in a trance, and are deeply surprised when Charlemagne, known to hate gambling, makes a wager on the outcome of the game - a wager that, if Garin loses, would result in his death. Garin wordlessly accepts the wager, and the two sit down to play, engaging each other with an apparently startling intensity (see "Quotes," p. 12). In the middle of the game, Charlemagne jumps up from the table and knocks the set to the floor, breaking what Garin claims is some kind of mystical spell, the influence of which he also feels. One of the Arab soldiers explains that a blood

wager, such as that proposed by Charlemagne, is the foundation of a key belief of his people. It can bring, to the individual making the wager, paradise on earth. He adds that if the wager is played out through a game of chess, it carries out Sar, an act of revenge - but revenge for what is never explained. Charlemagne dismisses the soldier's comments and restarts the game, eventually losing after an intense, well-fought battle. He congratulates Garin, rewards him with the title to the lands of Montglane, and eventually presents the chess set to him as a gift.

The Abbess concludes her story by telling the nuns that as he died, Garin left his lands, the fortress at the heart of those lands, and the chess set, known as the Montglane Service, to the nuns. She also tells them that the Service has a dark, mysterious and violent history, a spirit so dark that Garin pleaded with Charlemagne to place a curse on anyone who attempted to use it for negative purposes. It is a curse carved into the wall that Mireille and Valentine passed on their way into the convent. The Abbess also says that to help dispel the evil believed to be empowered by the Service, its board and pieces were separated and concealed within the walls and floors of the Abbey. She adds that only she knows where they're concealed and that to prevent them from falling into the hands of the Bishop of Autun they must be retrieved and hidden. She suggests that if there is potential for great evil there is also great potential for good. That is why, she says, the pieces must be hidden and not destroyed, in the hope that someday someone will come along with the capacity to use the Service for the benefit of humanity. The Abbess then assigns the nuns to retrieve the pieces of the Service, which they do. The pieces include the board itself, the jewel-encrusted chessmen, and a dark cloth embroidered with the number eight.

The Abbess distributes the pieces among the nuns of the Abbey and sends them all into new lives - some in other convents, others to their families. None of the nuns knows where the others are going, nor who has pieces of the Service; but they each know there is one to whom they can entrust their piece of the Service if they learn they're being pursued and are forced to flee. The Abbess, when she gives Valentine and Mireille their pieces, tells them much to their surprise that Valentine is one of the eight "collection points." When Valentine protests, the Abbess firmly tells her that the circumstances of the new life to which she is being sent—in Paris with a wealthy, well-positioned godfather/guardian— make her the ideal choice. Valentine accepts the responsibility, and along with Mireille accepts two pieces of the service. As they leave, they ask the Abbess where she will be going once the abbey closes. She tells them she's going to Russia to take refuge with a friend. Mireille and Valentine leave the convent early the following morning, watched from a nearby mountaintop by "a solitary rider astride a pale horse."

Section 1 Analysis

The quotes and titles of each section of the book offer illumination, either ironic or genuine, of the events narrated in the section to follow. In many cases, the titles are chess terms. The title of this section is one example of this—in this context, "defense" is a term used to describe a formalized pattern of moves undertaken to protect against

what is often an equally formalized pattern of attack. The reference can be seen as describing the Abbess' actions in this section: even though her plans are not formalized, in the sense that they've been put into action several times (as formalized chess defenses are), they are nevertheless carefully thought out. Meanwhile, the quote from Northrop Frye can be interpreted as foreshadowing of much of the action throughout the novel, in both the past and contemporary narratives, in that the action consists almost entirely of moves and countermoves on each side of the conflict over the Montglane Service.

The French Revolution was an extremely important event in the history of France, the point at which it ceased to be a monarchy and took huge, violent steps towards becoming a republic. The poor and middle classes, united and inflamed by the words and actions of intellectuals and agitators, violently overthrew those that governed them, executing anyone who either actively opposed them, appeared to oppose them, or were believed to *want* to oppose them. Anything and anyone that gave any impression of elitism (wealth, high birth, religious exclusivity, etc) was attacked and in most cases destroyed. The Abbess' actions in this chapter are prompted by awareness of this situation; she and her nuns are in danger because of their religious attitudes and actions, the richness of the Montglane Service puts them in further danger, and the rumored powers of the Service put them in further danger yet. Her actions to preserve the Service and the lives of her nuns are therefore undertaken for a variety of motives.

This section contains the first of several incorporations of real individuals into the fictional action of the novel. Charlemagne was one of the most famous and powerful pre-medieval kings of Europe. Even at the time in which the past sections of the novel are set, stories of his exploits and powers were equal parts legend and fact. The story of the Montglane Service has been carefully integrated into what's known of his life and career, a narrative technique repeated on several other occasions throughout the past narrative when other historically extant characters appear. Meanwhile, the Charlemagne story also contains the first of several references to the number eight, references that appear in both past and contemporary narratives. In all these references, there is the sense that eight is a number of mystical significance, the frequency and variety of appearances adding support to the novel's central thematic premise that everything in existence is connected in the universal, endless loop of relationship embodied in the symbol of the sideways eight, ?, the traditional symbol for infinity.

Aside from the references to the number eight, there are other important elements of foreshadowing in this chapter. The Abbess' reference to Mireille and Valentine being "a collection point" foreshadows the importance that this aspect of their mission plays in future action. The reference to the Abbess staying with "a friend" foreshadows points later in the novel when her relationship with that friend (Catherine the Great of Russia, another real person), puts the Service and the mission to protect it in danger. The appearance of Sister Marie-Charlotte foreshadows her return in Section 13, at which point she sacrifices her life so that Mireille can continue her sacred mission to protect the Montglane Service. The references to the fourth day of the fourth month (April 4th) foreshadow several other references to the mystic importance of that date, the most

important of which is the fact that both Mireille and Catherine were born on this date. This, in turn, is the first of many examples of parallels between the two narratives.

The final piece of foreshadowing in this section can be found in its concluding lines, the reference to the rider on the pale horse. This foreshadows the appearance of a similar figure, that of a pale solitary rider, in the following sections: the rider, who in this case rides a bicycle instead of a horse, appears both Catherine's painting and in her life. In both narrative lines, past and contemporary, the rider can be seen as a reference to one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, described in the Book of Revelation in the Bible. The pale rider represents violent death, of the sort that Mireille and Valentine will soon be surrounded when they get to Paris, and which will end up destroying Valentine. In the contemporary narrative, meanwhile, the pale horse and rider can be seen as representing the death of Catherine's old life, the impending death (see Section 6) of a minor player in the game in which Catherine becomes involved and the potential for death inherent in the Montglane Service—potential she strives to head off by gaining control of the Service.

Section 2

Section 2 Summary

"Pawn to Queen's Fourth"

The meaning of this title is described in the first of the two quotes heading this section. The title is a chess move, part of an attack strategy in which "contact between the opposing forces develops very slowly." The second quote is from an oft=recounted legend of a dying man who attempts to evade death, but finds he can't.

It's December of 1972. Catherine Velis narrates her fall from grace at what she describes as a "Big Eight" accounting firm - her refusal to make an illegal alteration to a document personally prepared by her for the firm, the subsequent irritation of her boss, and the decision by the board of directors to punish her by sending her to Algeria. She describes the posting as described to her, as a job with an oil company loosely affiliated with OPEC, the newly formed worldwide oil production and distribution cartel. As she struggles to learn as much as she can about the oil industry in the few weeks before her departure, she comes to realize there are eight large oil companies that control most of the world's production and distribution, five of which are American. As a result of this realization, she ponders a question that she says many in the oil industry are pondering, with the possible answers leading, as she says, to bloodshed, economic crises, and the brink of a world war. The question? What if America *didn't* control the world's oil supply?

"A Quiet Move"

This title is another reference to a move in chess, "a move that ... contain[s] no direct threats."

Again, it's December 1972. Against her better wishes, Catherine accepts an invitation from her friend Harry to celebrate New Year's Eve with him and his family. When Catherine arrives, she's greeted by Harry, his wife Blanche, and Blanche's brother Llewellyn, an antique dealer who seems excited to hear that Catherine is being sent to Algeria. He explains that he has a client who is collecting the pieces of an ancient chess set reputed to have belonged to Charlemagne, who has heard that there is a piece in Algeria, and is willing to pay large amounts of money to anyone who can help him obtain it. Before Catherine can get any more details, Harry brings a fortuneteller to the table. The fortuneteller, Harry says, knew Catherine was coming and seems to have hinted that she will bring good fortune both to his life and that of his daughter Lily. The fortuneteller, an eccentric looking woman, becomes suddenly and mysteriously still as she studies Catherine. Then, just as suddenly, the women grabs Catherine's palm, studies it, warns her that she's in danger, and issues a mysterious prophecy (see "Quotes," p. 41). As she concludes, the lights suddenly go out and the New Year is proclaimed. When the lights come up the fortune teller has disappeared.

Catherine is somewhat dazed by the encounter. Llewellyn and Blanche are concerned for her and Harry is intent on cheering them up, bringing them champagne as they talk over what the fortuneteller said. Blanche passes Catherine a cocktail napkin upon which Llewellyn recorded the fortuneteller's prophecy, Llewellyn comments on the references to chess in the prophecy, and Harry tells them to stop making such a fuss. After they share some champagne, Harry has his chauffeur drive Catherine back to her apartment. As she returns home, Catherine wonders how the fortuneteller knew that the fourth day of the fourth month (April 4th) is her birthday.

Section 2 Analysis

The title and quote at the beginning of this section can be interpreted as both defining and foreshadowing the way Catherine, at present a pawn in the chess-like game she's unknowingly embarking upon, is moved into action—slowly and carefully, but with clear intent (clear, that is, to those who are manipulating her). That said, the first part of this section is essentially exposition, defining the initial circumstances of Catherine's life. The key element here is the portrayal of Catherine as an individual of clear and strong personal integrity. This core aspect of her character serves to both foreshadow and define her decision at the novel's conclusion; specifically, her resistance to the attraction of power promised by the Montglane Service and her determination to conceal the Service for the ultimate good of humanity. The exposition also contains one of the few references to actual historical circumstances in the contemporary narrative - specifically, the existence of OPEC (Oil Producing and Exporting Countries), a powerful consortium that at the time the contemporary narrative is set was just beginning to come into its own. The question Catherine poses at the end of this part is something of a red herring - in the narrative position it occupies it gives the impression of being one of the novel's key questions. It isn't; it is, however, an important element of the action in the contemporary narrative's later stages. As such, therefore, the question is a key piece of foreshadowing.

The title and quote of the second part of this section continue to define and foreshadow Catherine's role in the game - a game that, ironically, she doesn't know she's playing. For both her and the reader, the events of this section introduce mystery and intrigue, but no real drama or stakes. Catherine takes none of these events too seriously, and she and the reader both are, it seems, intended to be merely titillated. On the level of the entire contemporary narrative, however, it turns out that none of the characters who appear in this section (Harry, Llewellyn, Blanche, the fortuneteller) are who or what they seem. The events Catherine experiences here are the opening moves ("quiet" moves, to use the title of this section) in a game that will eventually draw her deeper and deeper into the mysteries of the Montglane Service. In other words, everything that Harry, Llewellyn, Blanche and the fortuneteller (who is eventually revealed to be the ageless Mireille) say and do is part of their game to test Catherine to the point where they can be sure she's the person they think she is. They are determined to find out whether she is, as they believe, the person destined to be the new Black Queen in a centuries-old, international chess match of power.

Catherine's final lines, including the reference to her birthday being April 4th, function on several levels. First, because of the Abbess' reference to April 4th in Section 1, the reference here heightens the sense of mystery in the reader - what is the significance of both the date and the fact that it receives such emphasis in both narrative lines? It's important to note, however, that Catherine is unaware of this connection. The technique of giving the reader more information than the characters is one oft-employed in novels of this type, the suspense/thriller puzzle genre; the reader is left wondering when the characters will, in effect, catch up, and what affect their (to them) new knowledge will have. On a second level of function, the reference further defines the sense, pervasive throughout the novel, of linkage, of time-transcendent relationship and power, between past and present - the novel's key thematic point inherent in the figure of the sideways eight - ?. Thirdly, the reference foreshadows further references to the date throughout the novel, and the eventual revelation of the date's ultimate importance (Section 24, Part 3).

Section 3

Section 3 Summary

"Fianchetto"

The title of this section refers to a series of moves in chess that results in the empowering of the piece referred to as the bishop. Meanwhile, the quote heading this section is from a medieval pope, commenting on how the bishops under his control are taken advantage of because of their gullibility.

It is summer in 1791. Valentine and Mireille pose, barely clothed, for a painting being done by Valentine's godfather/guardian, Jacques-Louis David. Their carefully arranged pose is disturbed, however, when they react to the arrival of a very handsome man dressed in the purple robes of a bishop. As David tells the man how to put the draperies covering the girls' bodies back in place, narration describes how the man walks with a slight limp. The girls are shocked to learn the man is in fact the Bishop of Autun, the man they were warned about by Sisters Alexandrine and Marie-Charlotte (Section 1).

Later, as David and the Bishop wait for Mireille and Valentine to dress and join them for lunch, David lets it slip that the girls were studying to be nuns, while the Bishop comments that he feels unsuited to holy orders and the restrictions they impose. When Mireille and Valentine appear, the irrepressible Valentine admits that they've heard rumors about the Bishop, including that of his supposed cloven foot. He tells them that his foot was deformed as the result of a childhood accident. As conversation continues —conversation in which the unguarded Valentine reveals that they came from Montglane Abbey—narration reveals that she and Mireille buried their pieces of the Montglane Service beneath trees in David's garden. At the same time, the Bishop asks them whether they know anything about the Service. Mireille quietly tells him they know it's nothing but a legend, adding that the Abbey has been disbanded. The Bishop asks where the Abbess has gone and David tells him she's gone to Russia. The Bishop, seemingly aware that Mireille and Valentine know more than they're telling, changes the subject and invites them to attend the opera.

Narration describes how the opera is a stimulating excitement for the girls, particularly since they're in the company of not only the Bishop but his sophisticated ex-mistress (and now friend), Germaine de Stael, as is the cognac they share with the Bishop afterwards in his home. Once again, the impulsive Valentine goes into tricky conversational territory as she asks the Bishop whether she can see his deformed foot. Much to Mireille's embarrassment the Bishop agrees; Valentine tenderly kisses the gnarled club-foot, and the Bishop tenderly kisses her in return (see "Quotes," p. 57).

After an evening of storytelling, the Bishop convinces Mireille and Valentine that they will be safer if they spend the night in his home. He finds them nightclothes that have evidently belonged to his mistresses, tucks them into bed, and tells them a bedtime

story. He tells them the story of how he encountered the ghost of the renowned bishop and politician Cardinal Richelieu, how he pleaded with the ghost to tell him how to achieve his degree of power, and how the ghost guided him to Voltaire, the famous novelist. The Bishop visits Voltaire, who comments that he's sick and tired of being visited by people guided to him by Richelieu's ghost, and confesses that he knows what all the visitors are after: Richelieu's papers and journals, which Voltaire describes as containing Richelieu's theories about the Montglane Service. These theories, Voltaire contends, describe the Service as holding "the key to a mystery, a mystery older than chess ... that explains the rise and fall of civilizations."

The Bishop stops speaking, thinking Mireille and Valentine are close to sleep. They are, however, awake and very nervous. Sensing this, the Bishop explains that after Voltaire's death, Richelieu's papers were purchased by someone who wanted to understand the secret of power contained in the Service, which he still wants. He also explains that he knows the Abbess has removed the Service from the Abbey and says it's no coincidence she has gone to Russia, since the person who purchased Richelieu's papers and is so desperate to gain control of the service is none other than Catherine the Great, power hungry empress of the Russians.

Section 3 Analysis

The title and quote at the beginning of this section can be seen to be something of an ironic combination, in that the quote about the gullibility—and by extension the helplessness—of bishops is a direct contrast to the denotation of bishop power in the term "fianchetto." In terms of the action of this particular section, the combination of title and quote can be seen as a reference to the way the Bishop has political and personal power, but loses his sense of responsibility and perspective when he falls under the seductive spell of Valentine and, eventually, Mireille.

There is, in fact, relatively little action in this section. Most of the important narrative material manifests as information - the identity of the Bishop, the revelation that he's not the monster portrayed by the Abbess and Sister Marie-Charlotte (Section 1), the first hints of the nature of the secret contained in the Service, and the fact that the Service is being sought by Catherine the Great. On one level, the reference heightens the novel's ever-increasing sense of mystery and suspense, in that no one (Mireille, Valentine or the reader) knows what will transpire between the Abbess and the already powerful, ambitious Empress. On another level, her appearance both continues and increases the significance of one of the novel's principal narrative techniques - the way actual historical persons play fictionalized roles in the narrative.

Catherine is not the only real-life historical figure to appear in this section. The Bishop, Germaine, Cardinal Richelieu, Jacques-Louis David and Voltaire all, like Charlemagne in Section 1 and many other characters throughout the novel, played significant roles in history. The real Bishop, Maurice Talleyrand, was a politician and philosopher with a reputation as a manipulator and a survivor—he did indeed have some kind of disability in his foot. Germaine de Stael was a socialite, writer, and backroom politician. She was,

to coin a phrase, a pre-feminism feminist. David was, as the narrative suggests, a painter and revolutionary activist. There are two important facts to consider here. First, the Bishop, Catherine and David play much more significant roles in the action than many of the other historical figures, significant both in terms of size (i.e. the number of times they appear) and their impact on the story. The impact of most of the other characters is peripheral - none of them, for example, have the direct, intense, multifaceted relationship that the Bishop or David develops with Mireille or that Catherine has with the Abbess.

Secondly, as is the case with all the historical appearances, there is a resonance with one of the novel's key themes, that of the eternal presence of interrelationship. As it explores the nature of a number of universal interrelationships (matter/ spirit, mathematics/music, men/women, the various elements), it also explores the relationship between fact and fiction, suggesting that one intertwines with the other, affects the other, and provides clues about the meaning of the other. This aspect of the novel's focus on interrelationships manifests in several guises throughout the book. Meanwhile, Germaine's appearance here, and the portrayal of her apparent relationship with the Bishop, foreshadows the role she plays later in the action in both his return to influence after a period of exile and the unwitting role she plays in bringing together the Bishop and Mireille after a period of separation. Meanwhile the appearance of the Bishop here foreshadows the increasingly important role he plays in the action and in the life of Mireille - in particular, as the father of her prophetic child and the means she uses to gain control of a number of pieces of the Montglane Service. David, meanwhile, is the most important and most consistent ally she has in Paris.

In narrative/stylistic terms, this section contains an excellent example of the use of misdirection, another technique often employed in books of this genre (mystery / suspense / thriller). This technique can be described as the author suggesting that one set of circumstances is about to play an important role, when in fact a completely different set of circumstances is to take focus. In this case, the technique is employed in the intimacies between Valentine and the Bishop - there is the sense that the relationship is going to develop and deepen, and that Valentine is the more important of the two young nuns. Later in the novel (Sections 7 and 9), however, the action takes a decidedly different course as Valentine is killed and the Bishop and Mireille find themselves attracted to each other.

Section 4

Section 4 Summary

"A Game of Chess"

The quote heading this section is from a poem by T.S. Eliot that comments on the playing of a game of chess while waiting for a significant event.

It's now March of 1973. Three months have passed since Catherine's encounter with the fortuneteller. Her travel arrangements have been made, she has completed her research, and her friends have had their goodbyes—except for one friend she's desperate to get in touch with but who's unavailable and who, as she says in narration, she'd be desperate to ask for help after events she's about to speak of. Later in the narrative, in Section 6, it becomes clear that the friend she's referring to is the reclusive mathematician and chess master Ladislaus Nim.

Before she leaves, Catherine fills her time with painting. Her work is interrupted by the unexpected arrival of the flamboyant, self-centered Lily and her obnoxious little dog Carioca. Lily's first comment is on the subject of Catherine's painting - a man on a pale bicycle, who Lily says resembles a spookily lurking man outside Catherine's apartment building and which Catherine says she painted in from memory. Over the course of barbed conversation filled with references to the politics of international chess tournaments, Lily manipulates Catherine into accompanying her to an important chess tournament in which the featured player, an enigmatic Russian named Solarin, bumped Lily from the coveted position of star attraction.

Lily and Catherine arrive at the site of the chess game, leaving their chauffeur and Carioca in the car. Lily is shocked to discover that the game is being held at a men's club and that she is denied access. She goes off in search of the tournament sponsor, Hermanold, leaving Catherine in the room where the match is to be played. As she watches tables and chairs being set up, she observes a thin, elegant, fair-haired man issuing instructions to the workers. She finds herself fascinated by him and becomes troubled when he comes to her and in an urgent voice tells her she's in great danger and must leave. As he goes out of the room, Catherine realizes he reminds her of the fortuneteller.

A moment later, Lily returns, having secured their right to stay. She and Catherine take their seats, the room fills up with spectators, and soon the two competitors appear. Catherine realizes that the fair-haired man is Solarin. She watches, fascinated, as Solarin and his opponent, Fiske, begin their game. Their moves are posted for the audience to see, and Lily plays along with a small portable set she rests in her lap. Lily becomes more and more astonished as the game progresses, commenting that neither Solarin nor Fiske is playing in their usual style. Both Lily and Catherine are surprised when Solarin stands and whispers to Fiske, and Fiske responds with only one word:

j'adoube, a French chess term that Lily defines as a touch or an adjustment of a piece. Catherine and Lily are even more surprised when Solarin, against all the rules of chess, suddenly calls an intermission. As the people in the room disperse, Lily voices her belief that Fiske has been wired to a transmitter and is playing moves prescribed to him from elsewhere. In narration, Catherine comments on how right she was and on how things might have been different if she (Catherine) had believed her.

The narrative voice shifts at this point, taking the third-person objective as Fiske runs out of the room and Solarin follows him into a washroom. There, Solarin reveals that he knows Fiske is transmitting through the large signet ring he's wearing and demands to know how he Fiske is receiving signals. Fiske reveals the small transmitter in his ear, which Solarin removes and destroys. Fiske attempts to remove the ring but Solarin tells him not to, suggesting that the ring is big enough to contain a tiny explosive. Solarin persuades Fiske to reveal his circumstances. Fiske, with increasing hysteria, confesses that he was manipulated into playing by a group of men who told him that they wanted "the Formula" that they say Solarin both possesses and promised to anyone who beat him. At the mention of the Formula, Solarin laughs, but quickly sobers up when he realizes Fiske is taking off the ring. Believing it to promptly explode Solarin runs out of the room and takes cover, but there is no explosion. He explains to concerned chess officials that Fiske is ill and that he (Solarin) was on his way to fetch a doctor. He and the officials return to the washroom, where they discover Fiske dead - his neck has been broken in what the officials instantly assume was suicide. Solarin notices that the ring is gone.

Catherine resumes narrating the story, while back in the game room, Lily tells her that Fiske is dead and suggests that they leave. When they get into the street they discover that Lily's car is parked in a different place than they left it and that the chauffeur is gone. They then discover that someone is shooting at them. Lily, whom Catherine told about Solarin's warning, thinks Solarin is the shooter, but Catherine thinks not. As they jump into the car and race away, Lily talks Catherine into not going to the police right away, saying that if the police become involved Harry (her father) will never let her participate in the tournament. She takes Catherine to a restaurant, saying she needs to eat if she's to think clearly. She takes her portable chessboard out of her bag and puts Carioca in, saying she needs to keep him hidden in the restaurant and handing Catherine the chess set, saying if they're to unravel what's happening to them she (Catherine) needs to both learn about and practice the game. As they go into the restaurant, she tells Catherine it's time for them to join forces and figure out what's going on.

Section 4 Analysis

The quote at the beginning of this section is a reference to the experience Catherine and Lily undergo in this section. The difference between what happens to them and what happens in the quote, however, is that while they're watching the chess game between Solarin and Fiske they don't know that something important is going on around them. Yes, Catherine as she's narrating the story knows that something is happening,

but that's only because she's narrating from the third person past omniscient perspective. In other words, she's telling the story already knowing how it ends. In short, what the novel portrays here is the interaction between event and perspective. As Catherine details events, her perspective at times adds detail but more often withholds detail, both choices performing the function of creating suspense - the primary function of novels of this genre. Another example of the interaction between event and perspective can be found in the way the narrative includes incidents Catherine couldn't possibly know about, i.e. the confrontation between Solarin and Fiske in the bathroom. As discussed in the "Style - Point of View" section of this Analysis, it can be understood that she gleans knowledge of these incidents from Solarin later in the action, after they've established trust in their relationship. The narrative here, therefore, can be seen as being told after she's obtained this information - once again, perspective adds both detail and suspense.

All that being said, for the most part in this section Solarin is portrayed as yet another element of the mystery with which Catherine is becoming increasingly involved. As is the case with Harry et al in Section 2, however, Solarin's actions must also be considered within the context of the contemporary narrative arc as a whole - in terms of the international, power-oriented Game he's involved with, and into which he's initiating Catherine. On the one hand he's being manipulated into events he doesn't fully understand (the chess game, Fiske's death). On the other hand, he is in turn manipulating Catherine - he, like Harry and the Fortune Teller, is testing her and challenging her to see whether she has what it takes to be the new Black Queen.

In short, for Solarin the two sides of the Game are interacting; he's involving Catherine in his mystery, as well as her own. His role in testing her is perhaps one reason why he reminds Catherine of the fortuneteller - both are in on the challenge. Another reason, of course, is that Solarin, as it's revealed in Section 20, is actually the fortuneteller's grandson.

All in all, this section begins in earnest the process of weaving new threads into the complicated tapestry of lies, truth and relationships at the heart of the Game being played with, and eventually by, Catherine. The chess game she and Lily witness, the disappearance of the chauffeur, the shooting and the handing over of the portable chess set are all are pieces of an increasingly complex puzzle that both Catherine and the reader struggle to understand. As such, they are all foreshadowings of future important events - points at which pieces of that puzzle fit together and Catherine begins to see the whole picture. At this stage in the narrative, the point must be made that in suspense novels such as this, the puzzle is the point. Character development, theme, dialogue, imagery - all have less overall significance than creating intrigue and suspense, a sense of ever-deepening, increasingly complex, and occasionally frustrating mystery. All these narrative manifestations materialize throughout *The Eight*, a process that in the contemporary narrative kicks into high gear in this section, and in the past narrative in Section 7. Everyone—reader and characters alike—one way or another is now deeply involved in The Game.

Section 5

Section 5 Summary

"An Exchange of Queens"

The quote at the beginning of this section is from *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, the first of several Alice- related quotes in this book. This specific comment refers to the way queens never make bargains.

It's autumn of 1791. The Abbess arrives in Russia to visit her friend (Section 1), Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia. When the women meet, they reminisce for a while, at one point comparing their futures as foretold by a fortuneteller years ago when they were children. As their conversation continues, Catherine dismisses her current lover (Plato) from the room. When he's gone, the Abbess reveals the piece of the Service she's brought with her - the Black Queen. Catherine, eager for the power reputed to be associated with the Service, demands to know where the rest of the Service is. The Abbess, doubtful of her intentions, tells her she's scattered the components of the Service across Europe and also tells her that she knows Catherine is behind attempts involving the Bishop of Autun and other political leaders to gain control of the Service.

Catherine tells the Abbess why she's so desperate to do so. She relates that, as a princess being groomed for marriage, she was warned by a court mathematician called Euler against a secretive society called the Freemasons, who according to rumor know the secrets of how the pyramids and other ancient architectural wonders were built. She describes how her husband and other men of power joined the Freemasons, how she continues to struggle against their power and authority, and how she obtained Richelieu's papers from Voltaire in order to understand more about them. She shows the Abbess those papers, which indicate that Richelieu was convinced that the Freemasons' secrets were encoded in the Montglane Service, and that the Freemasons are determined to gain control of it. The Abbess, however, is unmoved by her arguments, suggesting that the Freemasons might not be the force of evil that Catherine believes them to be and that while she (Catherine) believes herself to be acting out the destiny for power revealed in her palm, she (the Abbess) must live out the destiny revealed in hers. To remind Catherine of that destiny, the Abbess shows her palm, across which the lines form a figure 8. She also reminds Catherine that she (the Abbess) is under the protection of the greatest chess master of all - God.

Section 5 Analysis

The quote at the beginning of this section is a reference to, and an ironic foreshadowing of, the ultimate lack of concord between the Abbess and Catherine. Meanwhile, this section contains more examples of parallels between the past and contemporary

narratives. Among them are the appearance of a fortuneteller, whose words have a profound impact on the women who hear them in the same way as the words of the fortuneteller in Section 2, and the reference to the mark on the Abbess' hand. The latter foreshadows several references later in the novel to a similar mark on Catherine's hand, as well as on Mireille's. The sense is that the three women are linked across time not only by their relationship to the physical Service but also the spiritual power and responsibility associated with it - another example of the novel's dramatization of its theme relating to universality and infinity. That said, the most obvious parallel between the two time lines is between the women named Catherine—the Empress of Russia in the past narrative, the about-to-be-crowned Black Queen in the contemporary narrative—and the White Queen of the past narrative who appears in the novel's latter sections, beginning with Section 15. It is in this context that the Abbess' presentation of the Black Queen from the Service has, perhaps, the most significance, albeit an ironic one - Catherine in the past wants the power of the Black Queen but doesn't get it, while Catherine in the present doesn't want it but gets it anyway. There is also irony in present Catherine, who fights to gain control over the Service for what amounts to the good guys, being given the same name as two women who fight to control the Service for their own, selfish, power hungry purposes.

Once again in this section, history is incorporated into fiction. This occurs not only in the appearance of Catherine the Great, but also in the appearances of Euler, a renowned mathematician, and of the Freemasons, a male-dominated organization that continues to function in great secrecy in contemporary society. The Freemasons, whose name is often shortened to simply The Masons, are in fact as well as fiction reputed to hold ancient secrets and to maintain clandestine relationships focused on obtaining and maintaining power. There is no substantial, available, evidential basis for this reputation, but the fact remains that the Freemasons' secrecy and rumored ritualistic meetings are intriguing and, to some, frightening. It's interesting to note, meanwhile, that the Masons are, as mentioned, a male dominated organization, while the most powerful players in the Game dramatized in *The Eight* are female.

There is one particular piece of foreshadowing worth noting in this section: the passing reference to Catherine's lover Plato, who plays a key role later in the narrative (Sections 21 and 23) in freeing the truth of the Montglane Service, when he gets information about the Abbess to Mireille.

Section 6

Section 6 Summary

"The Knight's Wheel"

The title of this chapter refers to the quote at its beginning, which in turn refers to a mythological king who dreamed his life was changed by the turning of what seemed to be a Wheel of Fortune, one of the most powerful and evocative cards in the mystical Tarot Deck.

It's now March 1973. As Catherine and Lily discuss the events of the tournament, Lily comes to the illogical conclusion that Solarin is behind it all. Catherine points out the various reasons he couldn't be, still convinced there's something deeper going on. They agree to part for a few days to do some investigating on their own. As part of her investigations, Catherine tries to uncover the identity of the Fortune Teller, but discovers that there are no such records of her anywhere. Her unease increasing, she again attempts to contact her friend and mentor, Dr. Ladislaus Nim (last referred to, without being named, in Section 4) but has no success. She leaves intriguing messages for him in the hopes that he will get in touch before she leaves for Algeria.

The next day, Catherine is in a restaurant making notes on everything that's happened to her when she suddenly notices a pale, lightly dressed man on a bicycle. She realizes he's the figure she incorporated into her painting (Section 4) and decides to pursue him. Her efforts to find him lead her to a quiet, dark room; the man is gone, but Solarin is there. He tells her again she's in great danger, adding this time that she's playing a game that she doesn't know she's playing, that he's the master of the game, and that she is under his protection. He tells her again to stay away from the tournament and then ushers her out of her room. A few steps away Catherine realizes she left behind the briefcase containing her notes. She goes back to the quiet room, where she discovers that Solarin is gone and that the body of Lily's missing chauffeur is there, recently killed. As she runs away in terror, her narration reveals that events about to profoundly affect her life were taking place only a few blocks away.

Narration shifts into third person objective as Solarin encounters his bodyguard and an agent of the Russian Secret Service (Brodsky) who tells Solarin that the Secretary of the Russian Secret Police is getting impatient and that he (Solarin) has 24 hours to accomplish his mission. Solarin, glancing at Catherine's briefcase (which he has taken with him) tells him the mission is accomplished; the pieces, he says, are in Algeria.

Catherine, meanwhile, hides out in her office and busies herself with work. That afternoon her briefcase is returned to her with a note from Solarin, suggesting that she not go into her apartment alone. Later that night Catherine finally gets a call from Nim, who accompanies her to her apartment and is shocked to see the painting of the pale figure on the bicycle. He asks to borrow the painting for a while, sends her in search of

the cocktail napkin with the Fortune Teller's words on it (Section 2), comments with surprise on how she managed to unwittingly get herself into such a complicated situation, and then asks whether she's heard of the Montglane Service.

"The Knight's Tour"

The title of this chapter refers to a mathematical formula in which the knight in a chess set is moved around so that it lands on each square of the board without landing on the same piece twice. The quote, meanwhile, is from a film by Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman, in which a knight tells Death that he (the knight) is the better chess player.

March 1973. Nim drives Catherine out to his isolated country home. On the way he tells her about the Montglane Service, its legendary association with Algeria and a convent of French nuns (the nuns of Montglane), and the stories of great power with which it is apparently endowed. Safe inside Nim's home, Catherine and Nim analyze the fortuneteller's words, decoding two secret messages - one warning of Satanic evil, one containing the word "j'adoube," the last word spoken in public by Fiske (Section 4). They also discuss Solarin and the formula he supposedly possesses (Section 4), which Nim suggests is probably a new formula for a Knight's Tour.

The messages and the conversation combine with visions and recollections of the man on the bicycle to give Catherine nightmares, and she wakes the following morning feeling uneasy. Nim calms her with a good breakfast and a visit to his aviary, where he keeps a collection of birds (see "Quotes," p. 143), the prize of which is a falcon. Catherine gives voice to her frustration at being caught up in the middle of something she knows nothing about and at not knowing who her opponent is. Nim suggests that she's known all along, offering an explanation of the man in the painting and the man on the bicycle that seems, to Catherine, farfetched and full of mystical mumbo jumbo - that the figure is a manifestation of some kind of spiritual quest she's on, and that he's both a guardian and a foe. He relates the figure to the first card of the ancient, mystical Tarot deck, the Fool, a representation of the human spirit at the beginning of a journey towards a deeper physical and spiritual understanding of life. At that point Catherine indicates she's had enough - no more mumbo jumbo, and no more manipulations, no more going along with "the game," whatever it is. Definitely, she says, no trip to Algeria since it seems likely to bring even more danger into her life. Nim assures her he's got the capacity to get her protection wherever she goes, and then touches her shoulders gently. "J'adoube," he says.

Section 6 Analysis

The puzzle deepens for both Catherine and the reader in this section as mysterious and violent complications combine with multiple meanings of various messages to create layer upon layer of possible meaning to the events in Catherine's life. On one level, "meaning" refers to the sense of purpose is being served by the incidents Catherine is experiencing. On this level, the Game is very much afoot as both an initiation being played out by Solarin (and by Nim), and a larger game in which even they don't know

what's going on. The key incident in this latter game is the death of the chauffeur, which tells both Solarin and Catherine that things are more serious than either of them thought - even though neither has any real idea why he was killed and what the presence of his body is meant to tell them. While considering all of this, it must be remembered that Nim is a powerful ally of the Black Side, which means that everything he says and does is undertaken with the intent of bringing Catherine onto the team, eventually into the position of Black Queen. This is perhaps an explanation for his reference to the falcons, and in particular the female of the species - he is, in a sense, telling Catherine not only that she has more power than she thinks, but also that she should not be afraid to use it.

Meanwhile, the novel takes one of its rare direct forays into deeper thematic meaning. For the most part, developments in theme take place subliminally or subtextually. Here, however, there is a direct exploration of *The Eight's* thematic emphasis on destiny—specifically in the quote at the beginning of the Knight's Wheel section and in Nim's reference to the Tarot Cards in the Knight's Tour section. The sense arises from both that Catherine is living out her destiny. She is not only involved in an earthly game involving killing and codes, but a spiritual game in which she is being maneuvered into discovering something important about herself, her essential character, and what she is meant to bring to the world. This is one of the book's key overall themes: individuals, as well as humanity as a whole, cannot escape that which is ordained for them.

There is a blending here of the two levels of action - playing the earthly game (level one) is, as Nim implies, Catherine's way into a fuller understanding the spiritual nature of her existence (level two). In other words, events of the material world are entwined with growth on the spiritual level - the two sides of existence, the two paths of life, converging in the central point of Catherine's very being, a convergence both symbolized and embodied by the pervasive symbol of the sideways eight - ?. Nim, and through him the novel, seems to be suggesting that might in fact be called the universal convergence encountered by every individual, at some point and on some level, throughout their lives.

In that context, therefore, the man on the bicycle can be seen as a literal manifestation of that convergence, given that he actually turns out to be Solarin who is, as previously discussed, another member of the Black Side acting to test Catherine and bring her into the fold, into contact with her destiny. As Nim himself indicates, Solarin (in the painting and in life) is a manifestation of Catherine's intuitive attraction to her true self. This is portrayed as being the key reason Nim takes the painting; he intends to use it to illustrate to Catherine the necessity of taking what seems to be a dangerously mysterious, and mysteriously dangerous, path. All that being said, there may be another reason why Nim insists upon bringing the painting away from Catherine's apartment. Solarin is, as it turns out, Nim's brother. There is, therefore, the possibility that Nim recognizes him, wants to bring the painting home as a memento, and tells the story of the Tarot Cards as a cover-up for his impulsivity.

Section 7, Part 1

Section 7, Part 1 Summary

"Sacrifices"

The quote at the beginning of this section comes from Germaine's mother when she says, "people do not care to play chess on the edge of a precipice."

September 2, 1792. This section opens with ominous suggestions that the characters in this narrative time frame - Germaine, David, the Bishop, Valentine and Mireille - began the activities of this particular day with no idea that at 2 p.m. that afternoon, "the Terror would begin."

Valentine and Mireille receive a letter asking that they meet a nun, Sister Claude, from the same convent as Sisters Alexandrine and Marie Charlotte (Chapter 1). The urgent tone of the letter leads them to believe Claude is in danger and that they are about to be given pieces of the Service. Their journey to the appointed meeting place, an abandoned abbey converted to a prison, is stalled when their carriage is blocked by a violent mob. Valentine catches a glimpse of Sister Claude and darts out of the carriage. Mireille attempts to stop her but does not. She convinces their reluctant driver to wait, gets out of the carriage, and fights her way through the crowd to get to Valentine. She is soon overwhelmed by the number and rage of people around her and loses sight of Valentine. As she's being swept along by the crowd, she comes across Sister Claude, who has been severely beaten and mutilated. Before she dies, Claude manages to tell Mireille that Valentine has been taken into the Abbey. As Mireille tries to figure out what to do next, she sees the head of her driver being carried by on a spear. At first Mireille believes that Valentine's only hope is for Mireille to find David, but then comes to realize that in fact the only thing that can help is for Mireille to get into the Abbey right away and save Valentine herself.

Meanwhile, as Germaine attempts an escape she is abducted and taken to a notorious prison for aristocrats. There she encounters an ally, Camille, and by proving to him that she's pregnant convinces him that she must be spared the trials and executions faced by those imprisoned with her. At the same time, David sits through a chaotic political meeting and realizes the only thing that will save France from both self-destructive anarchy and external invasion is real leadership, from one such as a man he sees listening calmly to the arguments - Robespierre. After the meeting, David sets out to search for Robespierre and finds him in a public gaming house playing chess with the renowned chess master and composer, Philidor. David introduces himself and asks Robespierre to help him get Valentine and Mireille out of the country. Robespierre explains the potential difficulties in helping anyone leave France, but promises to do what he can.

Section 7, Part 1 Analysis

The title of this section is another term taken from chess, a "sacrifice," which is a move in which a player allows one of his pieces to be taken in order to advance his march towards victory. The title, therefore, can be seen as a reference to the deaths of both Valentine and Sister Claude: sacrifices necessary to preserve the sanctity of the Service. The quote, meanwhile, is a reference to the dangers of playing chess, and by implication the game in which Mireille is becoming increasingly involved, when the players are themselves in a position of great risk - of potential sacrifice.

This section contains a pair of references to actual individuals: Philidor, who was in history as important a mathematician as he's portrayed to be here, and Robespierre, a key figure in the French Revolution. It's interesting to note that in both history and this novel, Robespierre plays a prominent role. In history he played a key role in bringing several French aristocrats to trial and execution, and in the fictionalized action of the novel he provides several key pieces of information to David and others. That being said, the context in which the action of this section, its various "sacrifices" plays out, is also historically accurate. The so-called "terror" was the high/low point of the Revolution - many, many people, both aristocrats and rebels, lost their lives in a surge of violent desperation effectively evoked here in one of the novel's most powerful (and rare) instances of descriptive, rather than puzzle-making, writing. Meanwhile, the reference to Germaine's efforts to save herself foreshadow her eventual freedom, and her role in winning the Bishop his.

It's important to note that this section, and the action of the following section, marks the point at which the novel's focus on the two nuns shifts from Valentine to Mireille. Up to this point Valentine has been the more colorfully and vividly portrayed character of the two - impetuous, emotional and sensual. Contrarily, Mireille has been portrayed as retiring, cautious, and restrained. On one level the differences between the two characters effectively set up Mireille's novel-long journey of transformation, from timid and gentle young girl to vengeful woman to wise, wounded, gender-transcendent spirit. This section, in fact, marks the beginnings of that transformation. On the level of storytelling, meanwhile, the focus on Valentine to this point is, as previously discussed, an effective example of the suspense novel technique of misdirection - putting the reader's attention on one character and/or set of circumstances while all the while, the novel's actual focus is on another. In other words, up to now the reader has been convinced that Valentine is the central character in the past narrative - in this section, and that which follows, both the reader and Mireille are in for a surprising shift.

Section 7, Part 2

Section 7, Part 2 Summary

As Robespierre leaves, David and Philidor strike up a conversation. When Philidor hears that Mireille and Valentine have come from Montglane, he tells David he knows all about the Montglane Service, having heard about it from Euler (the same mathematician who warned Catherine the Great about the Freemasons - Section 5) whom Philidor met in the company of the composer Johann Sebastian Bach. Philidor then relates in some detail the story of that encounter, in which the musician Bach and the mathematician Euler surprised each other with displays of the direct, symbiotic relationship between mathematics and music - both of which, according to Bach, are manifestations of the language of God, whom he calls the Architect (see "Quotes," p. 165-166). Bach maintains that the Service holds the key to both understanding that language and making use of its power.

As Philidor and David discuss the implications of this story, Philidor refers to the Biblical architect Nimrod, who designed and constructed the Tower of Babel in order to reach Heaven. David recalls that Nimrod and his plans were destroyed by God, and Philidor agrees, adding that Nimrod understood the language of God and conveyed it in his architecture, but God didn't want his language to be used for such mundane purposes and so created all languages to make it impossible for Nimrod's interpretation of his language to be passed on. Philidor concludes the conversation by telling David that the Montglane Service contains the secret of God's language - as Bach said, the powerful music of God which can be used to both create and to destroy. At that moment David receives word from a servant that Mireille and Valentine have disappeared.

At the Abbey where Valentine has been taken prisoner, Mireille's desperate attempts to get in are interrupted by the arrival of David, who has evidently rushed straight to the prison. Mireille tells him what happened and David manipulates his way into the blood-soaked courtyard, coming face to face with the tribunal handing down judgments on those it deems to be enemies of the people - aristocrats, priests, etc. David pleads with the head of the tribunal, a pockmarked, pus-faced monster of a man, to release Valentine. The man tells him Valentine has already been interrogated and is about to be executed.

At that moment Valentine, having evidently been tortured, is brought out. Mireille runs to her, and Valentine manages to tell her that Sister Claude told her where she had hidden six pieces of the Montglane Service, and passes the information on to Mireille. Mireille is dragged away and the sentence of death is passed on Valentine. Mireille confronts the Tribunal Man, who says he'll release Valentine if (Mireille) tells him what Valentine wouldn't - the hiding place of the pieces of the Service. Mireille, desperate to save Valentine and his evil face burned into her memory, tells him (see "Quotes," p. 172). She pleads to know who he is, he describes himself as "the rage of the people," and proclaims his determination to possess the Service and also his vow to hunt Mireille

down if she proves to be lying. He then orders Valentine's death. As the executioner's sword swings down towards Valentine's neck, Mireille throws herself across her body.

Section 7, Part 2 Analysis

The action of this section builds effectively to what might be described as the first climax of this narrative line, the encounter in the courtyard between Mireille and the Tribunal Man, who turns out to be Jean-Paul Marat, another real-life character who, as history records, was one of the main leaders of the French Revolution. Their relationship here and in sections to come is one of the most vivid examples of the novel's intertwining of fact and fiction. The technique is employed again in this section in the story of Bach, Philidor and Euler, all of whom were actual people. At this point it's possible to see that this technique has a possible thematic resonance. The way in which historical and fictional characters know each other and are connected can be viewed as a manifestation of the novel's thematic statement, and indeed the statement of the Montglane Service itself - that all existence is interrelated. In fact, many aspects of the novel as a whole can be seen in this light - fact (i.e. Marat) and fiction (i.e. Mireille) are interrelated in the same way as music and mathematics (Bach/Euler), and vengeance and mercy (Mireille going after Marat, Mireille refusing to take any more revenge).

Other such interrelationships are those between women and men (Mireille and the Bishop in future sections of this narrative, Catherine and Solarin in future sections of the contemporary narrative); past and present (Catherine the Great and Catherine Velis); Mireille's Arab protector and Catherine's Arab protector) etc. Yet another interrelationship is between Nimrod the architect, El-Marad a character who appears in Section 14, whose name roughly translates to Nimrod and who, like the Nimrod referred to here, is an architect who acts in opposition to the will of God. There is also an ironic interrelationship here, in that the names of both Nimrods can be seen as echoing that of Catherine's friend Nim in the contemporary narrative, who is an "architect" of the manipulations to get Catherine involved in the Game.

The most important interrelationship in the book is, of course, the relationship between the physical elements of the periodic table which, when mixed in the right proportions and at the right moment of universal alignment, create the possibility of eternal life. In short, interrelationship is everywhere - in life, the novel suggests, as in fiction. The other narrative technique worthy of note in this section can be found in its final moments, as the author ends the action at a key point of suspense. At this moment, the reader can't help but wonder what's going to happen to Mireille and Valentine, not to mention the chess service they've been enjoined to protect. Another manifestation of this technique is the way the narrative deepens that sense of suspense by detouring, albeit briefly, into action in the contemporary story in the following section.

Section 8

Section 8 Summary

"The Fork"

The quote at the beginning of this section is from the Bishop. It indicates that an individual must always ensure that there are alternatives to each choice.

March 1973. As Catherine travels through the city to meet Lily, she reflects on events since she left Nim's. These include Nim providing her with a potentially protective contact in Algeria, her telling told Nim she would help Llewellyn's client find the piece of the Montglane Service (even though she has no intention of doing so), there being no mention of the discovery of Saul's body, and there being no mention of Fiske being murdered.

When she meets Lily, Lily introduces her to Mordecai, a mathematician and chess master who has coached Lily in several tournaments and who has, he says, also played with Solarin. During their conversation several other pieces of information come into play - among them, Mordecai comments on Catherine being a computer expert and jokes about computers being the "eighth" wonder of the world, Lily tells Catherine that the chauffeur came to the house and resigned, and then is shocked when Catherine tells her she saw the chauffeur dead. Mordecai insists on being told the full story from the beginning. When the story ends he shocks both Lily and Catherine by saying the only thing all these incidents have in common is Catherine, suggesting that "although [she] may have nothing to do with these events, they have something to do with [her]." Catherine then narrates how he leaves the conversation, winking at her as he goes.

Section 8 Analysis

The title and quote at the beginning of this section are both references to the situation in which Catherine finds herself - at a point in "the game," which she now accepts that she's playing even though she doesn't know its rules, its objectives, or her opponents, where she has to make a decision on what to do next. Essentially, she's at a so-called "fork" in her road. Also in this section, the novel develops its theme of interrelatedness by having Mordecai be acquainted with, and an old opponent of, Solarin. That said, however, this section also contains an instance of the novel's concealing interrelationship for the sake of building suspense, the previously discussed tendency towards complications existing solely for their own sakes. To be specific, Mordecai and Lily conceal their real relationship, that of grandfather and granddaughter. Why? It seems that there's no really good, character-motivated/defined reason - only the author-defined choice to delay the inevitable surprise until a point of greater drama (the dinner party at Harry's in Section 10). In other words, once again in this section heightening the dramatic impact of the puzzle for its own sake is the narrative's chief purpose.

Section 9

Section 9 Summary

"A Pawn Advances"

The quote at the beginning of this section is from an Arabic text dramatizing the sexual tension between a beautiful woman and the sensually distracted man with whom she's playing chess.

September, 1792. Camille (Germaine's ally, Section 7 Part 1) encounters the Bishop at the home of Robespierre, and tells him of the horrors that have taken place all over Paris that day. He assures him that Germaine is safe, but informs him there is little likelihood that either he or Mireille and Valentine (who neither man knows is dead) will be able to escape. Deeply concerned, the Bishop returns to his home where he discovers Mireille unconscious and wounded. As he and his valet nurse her back to consciousness, she becomes hysterically concerned for the safety of her suitcase and he learns that Valentine is dead. Later, after Mireille has recovered her suitcase and been put to bed, the Bishop lies awake, tortured by memories of Valentine. He hears a soft sound; he investigates the sound and discovers that Mireille has left her bed. He searches the house and finds her naked on the terrace. He immediately feels a powerful lust for her that he tries to resist, but she comes to him, speaking and moving seductively. They make passionate love, but at the moment of orgasm the Bishop cries out Valentine's name. Afterwards, Mireille tells her she doesn't mind - she says that for a moment she felt as though Valentine were still alive.

Later, the Bishop tries to persuade Mireille to return to David's home, but she says if she does she will be in great danger, and then shows him why - eight pieces of the Montglane Service. The Bishop looks at one of them and discovers a symbol representing Mars, the Roman god of war. He quotes from the Biblical Book of Revelation, referring to one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse - the one dressed in red, the horseman of war. Mireille adds to the quote by referring to the name of the horseman's sword - Sar (a term last referred to in Section 1 as an act of revenge). Mireille then explains what happened at the Abbey - she was dragged away from Valentine at the last moment, that the hideous man at the tribunal (whom the Bishop identifies as Marat) has vowed to hunt her down, and that she has, in turn vowed to hunt HIM down. She tells how she raced back to David's house to dig up the two pieces entrusted to her and Valentine, worked out the meaning of Valentine's last words and retrieved the pieces hidden by Sister Claude, and tells the Bishop that those words were also an order from Valentine that she should trust him. She then tells him her plan - to collect the pieces of the Service herself and gain power over those who want power over her. At that moment passes from Robespierre arrive - they'll be able to escape after all.

Mireille and the Bishop spend the rest of the day packing his books for shipment to England, where he intends for them to take refuge. As they pack, they conceal the pieces of the Service in the boxes, and Mireille, more determined than the Bishop thought possible, tells him her true plans. These are to notify the Abbess of what has happened, to get her to send another nun to serve as a "collection point," and once that nun arrives, to travel to the source of the Service in order to investigate and understand it. The Bishop is aghast at her plans, but she is determined to go to Algiers.

Section 9 Analysis

The title of this section refers to Mireille's move forward in the game she's now playing whole heartedly, if vengefully - the game fought over possession of the Montglane Service. Until now she has been a pawn, but from hereon in she advances on her determined march towards becoming the Black Queen. Even though she doesn't know that's where she's heading, she's certain that she's never going to be played as a pawn and/or victim again. Meanwhile, the quote refers to and foreshadows the sexual distraction experienced by the Bishop as he comes to realize not only how beautiful and sensual Mireille can be, but also how determined she is to play, and win, the game.

This section marks the beginning of the novel's active exploration of the theme of revenge, as dramatized in Mireille's determination to have revenge on Marat for Valentine's death. She has, it would seem, fallen under the same sort of dark spell cast by the Service as Charlemagne fell under in the story told by the Abbess in Section 1 - a normally noble soul has, under the influence of the mysterious power of the Service, succumbed to the desire for violent power. Unlike Charlemagne, however, Mireille succumbs more deeply and actually ends up killing the object of her revenge (Section 15) before realizing, as Charlemagne did before it was too late, the dangerous power influencing his/her actions. It's important to note in this context that both hunter and hunted, Mireille and Marat, avenger and killer, make the same vow - to take revenge on those who did them wrong. In short, they are portrayed as being the same person, an aspect of their relationship that on one level plays a key role in Mireille's eventual realization of the dark power of the Service and, on another level, once again dramatizes the novel's theme about interrelationships - those that seem different are, in fact, the same. This is, on some level, the secret at the heart of the power of the Montglane Service - specifically, its understanding and manipulation of alchemy. All the elements, both the Service and contemporary science teach, are ultimately composed of the same thing - atoms, protons and neutrons, matter and energy and space. The spirit of human beings, the novel suggests, are also the same thing: individuals just manifest their sameness differently.

The end of this section marks the beginning of another dramatization of the interrelationship theme: when Mireille indicates her intention to go to Algiers, which the reader already knows is Catherine's destination. In other words, there is another of the novel's many parallels between the past and present narrative lines, between the lives of the protagonists of those two narratives, and between the story's structure and thematic statement. All three levels of action and meaning converge in Algiers, as do the

experiences of the protagonists. This convergence is represented throughout the novel, as previously discussed, by the figure eight, sideways - ? - and/or upright - 8. Also at the end of this section, on a storytelling level the reader is again put in a position of suspense by knowing something the characters do not - that Catherine and Mireille are heading for the same place, and not just geographically. All indications are that it will probably be the same place spiritually/intellectually/emotionally as well. The question now being posed in the puzzle is what will happen when they get there, with the answer being revealed in the following sections.

Section 10

Section 10 Summary

"The Center Board"

March 1973. Catherine attends a farewell dinner party thrown for her by Harry. Other guests include Blanche, Llewellyn and Lily. Catherine reveals that she's going to Algeria and Harry becomes upset, reacting negatively to the thought that she'll be surrounded by Arabs (Harry and his family are Jewish). An argument erupts when the conversation turns to Mordecai and it's revealed not only that Mordecai is Harry's father, but there's been bad blood between the two men for years. As dinner draws to a close, Llewellyn takes Catherine aside and asks whether she's still willing to help him obtain the piece of the Service. She expresses her doubts, but he tells her that the current owner of the piece is a woman, and that he and his client both believe that another woman has the best chance of convincing her to sell. Meanwhile, Harry receives a phone call - a body believed to be that of his chauffeur has been dragged from the river, and the police need him to identify it. As Harry prepares to leave, Catherine asks Lily for Mordecai's telephone number. She gives it to her, leaning as she writes it down on a red-and-black lacquered Chinese cabinet she says is a leftover from Llewellyn's antique shop. They agree to stay in touch as much as possible while Catherine is in Algiers, and Catherine leaves.

When Catherine returns to her apartment, she discovers that despite extra security precautions, Solarin has left a note for her. At first glance it seems to be a warning of danger, but Catherine soon realizes it contains another message, which she decodes to read "I will meet you in Algeria." The mental restlessness triggered by this note combined with increasing confusion about what's really going on leads Catherine to reconsider the warning of the fortuneteller. After hours of contemplation of the napkin on which the warning was written, she finally decodes two messages, the sum of which makes Catherine realize a core truth - she is, as she's been warned, in the middle of a dangerous game (see "Quotes," p. 214). She calls Nim on his private unlisted line and leaves a message: "A pawn advances to Algiers." As she prepares for bed, she discovers a letter without a stamp addressed in unfamiliar handwriting. She opens it, discovers that it's from Mordecai, and learns that not only is he also leaving town for a few weeks and not only that he's arranging for Lily to meet her in Algeria. She also learns that he knows the fortuneteller and that she sends a greeting welcoming her to the Game.

"The Middle Game"

Algiers, April 1973. Catherine arrives in Algeria and encounters unexpected delays as her visa, passport and luggage are inspected. One of these delays comes at the hands of Sharrif, the handsome enigmatic chief of security, as he goes through her carry-on

luggage which contains, among other things, books on mathematics given to her by Nim, and Lily's portable chess set (see Section 4).

Sharrif eventually lets Catherine go. She collects her bags and hails a taxi. The driver offers to take her on a brief tour on the way to her hotel, and she agrees. During the drive, however, she becomes aware that they're being followed, and the driver not only tells her the car is being driven by Sharrif, but he also says that Sharrif is the head of Algeria's secret police. The driver takes several detours in an attempt to evade his pursuer, but to no avail; the car follows them to the door of Catherine's hotel. She pays the taxi driver, goes in, and attempts to register, only to find that there is no reservation for her. She bribes her way into a room, takes a bath and lies down to sleep. However, she is soon awakened by the sound of bicycle wheels. She looks out her window and sees a pale figure parking a bicycle by the railing on her terrace. The figure is reminiscent of the bicycle figure in her painting (Section 4) and the man whom she followed on the day Harry's chauffeur was killed (Section 6). Catherine prepares to confront the figure, but is surprised to see that it's Solarin. He convinces her to go for a walk with him so they can talk without any possibility of their being overheard.

During their conversation, Catherine and Solarin put together what they know about what happened on the day of the chess tournament and make several deductions. These include the realizations that the chauffeur killed Fiske, that Hermanold (the tournament organizer) was behind the manipulations that got Lily and Catherine in as spectators and got Solarin in as a competitor, and that he (Hermanold) shot at Lily and Catherine because they were looking for the chauffeur. Their conversation also reveals that Solarin was the man Catherine followed on the day the chauffeur was murdered, that the chauffeur was listening to the conversation between Solarin and Catherine, and that Solarin killed the chauffeur because he believed Catherine's life would be in danger if he lived. At that point, even though Catherine has many questions, Solarin stops the conversation by taking them into a nightclub. The music is too loud for them to continue talking, and Catherine can't help watching a sophisticated older woman in the audience join the dancers on the stage and move sensuously with them. She's shocked, however, to recognize the woman as the fortuneteller. She tries to speak to her but Solarin restrains her, telling her she's drawing unwanted attention to them. As a means of distracting her, he draws her attention to the mark on her wrist - the lines that join to make the figure 8. He whispers to her that she's been chosen "to unravel the formula ... of the eight," and then suddenly freezes as he looks over her shoulder and sees Sharrif, lurking watchfully. Catherine turns to see what he's looking at, turns back to him—and discovers that he's gone.

Section 10 Analysis

The titles and quotes of both this section's parts refer to Catherine's arrival in what might be described as the middle of the game, in which she is both player and piece. This sense of "middle-ness," for lack of a better phrase, and the resulting sense that movement from this point on is possible in many directions, can be visually represented (as so much in this novel can be) by the figure 8. Catherine is at a point of convergence

where her job (to work for the Algerian government and OPEC) intersects with what seems to be her mission (to understand and play the game), and where her external circumstances (being sent to Algiers) intersects with her inner, spiritual destiny (to become the Black Queen and realize the power of the Montglane Service). Also, this is a point where her previous negative beliefs about Solarin intersect with the beginnings of her physical awareness and sexual desire for him.

On the level of action and mystery, both parts of this section are packed with information and encounters that add layer upon layer of intrigue and mystery to the experience of both Catherine and the reader. Most of these are relatively overt; the death of the chauffeur, the revelation of Mordecai's relationship with Harry, the letter from Mordecai, the revelation of the respective roles played by Solarin and Hermanold in the events of the chess tournament, the menacing presence of Sharrif, the unexpected appearance of the Fortune Teller. They are, for lack of a better phrase, directly mysterious - Catherine and the reader both know they have something to do with the game. Also in this section, however, several elements are introduced in detail that indicates to the reader but not to Catherine that they will become important later. Among these is the naming of Harry's maid (who turns out to be both a player on the Black Side and related to other players Catherine encounters in Algiers - none of whom she realizes are players). Other such elements include the reference to the lacquered cabinet, which turns out to be the hiding place of several pieces of the Service, and the reference to Lily's portable chess set, a piece of which later plays a role in changing the nature of the encounter between Catherine and the White King, El-Marad.

In literary terms, all these references are foreshadowing - their appearance here foreshadows their re-appearance later, and the role that reappearance plays in the action. In puzzle/thriller terms, the detail is as much of a clue to significance as presence - novels such as this one rarely pay such careful attention to things like maids, pieces of furniture or toys unless they are to become important later.

All that said, certain elements of this section again trigger the sense that complication and detail have been added for their own sake. A vivid example of this is the cocktail napkin, which as analyzed by Catherine and Nim in Section 6 and again by Catherine here, is revealed to have not one, not two, not three, but four secret messages. Because the fortuneteller is eventually revealed to be Mireille, desperate to ensure that Catherine is the right person to replace her as Black Queen, it's just possible to believe that all these messages are part of the testing process. It's also possible, however, that the author's determination to create a good, engaging, increasingly suspenseful puzzle is becoming just a tiny bit self-conscious. This same sense also begins to arise in the past narrative, particularly in the following section, as the chain of who-knows-who begins to seem almost too coincidental, even for a novel exploring the theme of universal interrelatedness.

Section 11

Section 11 Summary

"The Isle"

The quotes at the beginning of this section both describe the island of Corsica, on which the Bonaparte family makes its home and where Mireille comes face to face with some deeply troubling truths about her situation.

September, 1792. Mireille's attempt to flee Paris in the disguise of a young servant boy is stopped by a crowd of fellow refugees at the gate leading to the road to Versailles. Mireille's destination is the Convent of St. Cyr, which lies on this road and where Mireille hopes to learn news of the Abbess from the Convent's prioress, an old friend of the Abbess. As she struggles in the seething, anxious crowd, the gates are opened for the arrival of a string of carriages from the Versailles road, one of which bears a handsome young soldier and his beautiful, timid sister. Their conversation with a querulous old man reveals that the road is blocked, a revelation that prompts the terrified Mireille to burst out that she must get to St. Cyr. The soldier and his sister reveal they've just come from there and ask Mireille what her business is. Mirielle, hesitant to reveal too much information but desperate for what information they can offer, speaks of the Abbess. This causes the young girl to tell her that they've come to Paris on a mission from the Abbess, to tell Mireille that she can trust both her and her brother, and that they can talk further in private where they can't be overheard. Mireille, equally desperate to leave Paris and for information, accompanies them. The girl introduces herself as Elisa, and her brother as Napoleon Bonaparte.

Private conversation at an inn reveals that the mother of Elisa and Napoleon was at one time a very great friend of the Abbess, who had over the years paid for Elisa's education. Elisa reveals that years before, as the French Revolution was beginning, the Abbess entrusted her with a message to give to her mother - a message inspired, in part, by Elisa's having been named after Elissa, the famous ancient warrior queen who founded the ancient Arab city of Carthage. Upon hearing the name, Mireille excitedly realizes that Carthage is near Algiers, and there may be a link to the origins of the Montglane Service. Meanwhile, Elisa reveals the content of the Abbess' message, "Elissa the Red has risen - the Eight return." Mireille's growing excitement does not go unnoticed by Napoleon, who asks that she tell them what she knows - in particular, about the secret treasure of Montglane. She admits that there was a treasure, that its components were scattered about Europe by the Abbess, and that she Mireille is on her way to Algiers to uncover what she can of its secret. As she speaks, she recalls the doom-filled words about the red horse spoken by the Bishop as he looked at the piece of the service (Section 9), and wonders aloud whether in moving the treasure from Montglane Abbey, the Abbess and the nuns have awakened an ancient curse.

On the journey to Corsica, the home of Elisa and Napoleon, Mireille becomes increasingly ill, and is surprised to see that rather than losing weight as she expects, she is in fact gaining weight. They are met by Elisa and Napoleon's mother, Letizia, who reacts with deep shock when Elisa passes on the message from the Abbess. Mireille demands to know what it means, sharply telling the reluctant Letizia that she has actually handled the pieces of the Montglane Service. Letizia, however, only hints that there is great danger, saying "this is the end that was foretold."

After a hot bath and a meal, Letizia tells Mireille that she has decided to treat her as one of her own family, and to tell her everything she knows about the Montglane Service. For her part, Mireille vows that she will do everything in her power to discover the Service's secret. Letizia then tells Mireille, Napoleon and Elisa the history of her friendship with the Abbess, and the history of her family - she (Letizia) is descended from the Ancient Phoenicians, the people who colonized the area from which the Montglane Service was brought to Charlemagne and whose society and culture were/are founded on the principle of right and justified revenge. She also tells how her mother, a great friend of the Abbess, recounted tales of dark powers associated with the service, and confesses that the message from the Abbess brought by Elisa was a warning that the power of the Service was being unleashed. Mireille, angered that she's already seen two people die in defense of the service (Valentine and Sister Claude), demands to know what the Abbess intends Letizia to do, and also what this all has to do with the formula that she knows is written into the Service. Letizia, frightened by Mireille's intensity, tells her the Abbess had written down the formula contained in the Service and sent it to her. She also says that she had promised the Abbess that once she received word that the Abbess had the pieces of the Service in her possession, she (Letizia) would journey to what was Phoenicia but which is now Algiers to decode the formula. Mireille vows to accompany her, but Letizia tells her it's not the time - firstly she doesn't know the ancient stories the way Letizia does, and secondly, she's about to have a child. This, Letizia tells the astonished Mireille, is the source of her illness.

In England, as Mireille's pregnancy progresses, the Bishop (the unknowing father of her child) contemplates his financial, political and emotional future. In Paris, David speaks with Robespierre (and Robespierre's new friend, the poet William Wordsworth) about the impending death of the king, the ultimate goal of the Revolution, and about the death of Valentine. David tells the increasingly alarmed Robespierre that Valentine was killed because Marat believed she knew about the Montglane Service, that after Valentine's death the place where Mireille told Marat her pieces of the Service were buried had been dug up, and that Mireille has disappeared. Robespierre, who clearly knows the story of the Service, vows to search all of France for Mireille. David offers to help him by showing him her likeness - in the painting he was working on when he was interrupted by the Bishop (Section 3).

Back on Corsica, the news that the king has been executed leads Napoleon and his brother to publicly denounce the revolution, an action which leads them to be condemned. This in turn leads them and their family, including Letizia, to vow revenge. At the same time, however, Letizia realizes she and her remaining family are in danger, so she flees with them to her mother's (the same mother who also knew the Abbess,

who told several stories about being descended from the Phoenicians, who in turn - it must be remembered - lived according to the principle of justified revenge). Mireille is surprised to learn that Letizia has told her mother, Angela Maria, everything about her - and is even more surprised to learn that Angela Maria has made arrangements for Mireille to be immediately transported to a place of safety - the protection of a friend named Shahin, whose name means "Peregrine Falcon."

Section 11 Analysis

This lengthy, informative section begins with what might be described as the most coincidental of all the coincidences in the novel - or, conversely, the point at which subconscious, spiritual destiny converges with outward, physical reality in the most thematically relevant confrontation in the entire novel. To be specific, the initial encounter between Mireille and the Bonapartes (Napoleon and Elisa) can be seen as either the ultimate manifestation of the author manipulating the story in order to create a good puzzle, or the ultimate manifestation of the power/meaning of 8 / ?—infinite possibility, infinite meaning, infinite connection. In all likelihood, it's both.

That being said, the conversation at the inn brings in yet another level of historical context into the playing of the novel's fictional game. The Phoenicians were, in fact, an ancient people renowned throughout history for their mysterious, endless colonization and conquests. Their name, as Letizia points out, bears a singular resemblance to "phoenix," the name of an ancient bird that rose from the ashes of its self-combustion. The name, the image, the connection with the Bonaparte family and the family's connection with Mireille, and therefore with the Service, all illuminate the novel's thematic point about eternity from a different perspective. In other words, that which dies - or is believed to be dead - will rise again, die again, and rise again, in an endless cycle that manifests in the repeated returns of the Montglane Service, the repeated struggles over its power, and the cycle of transition between Black Queens (Mireille and Catherine). There is an irony in this latter manifestation, in that the old Black Queen (Mireille) doesn't actually, physically die - she can't, having taken the Elixir of Life. Her death, or more accurately the death of her power, is a kind of suicide - she deliberately ends it, but makes room for Catherine - the phoenix rising, as it were, from the ashes of Mireille's power and influence.

Another of the novel's key thematic explorations, that of the issue of revenge, is also dramatized in this section - and, indeed, may have resonance with the previously discussed idea of resurrection, or rising again. Revenge is, after all, a response to destruction in the same way as the rising of the phoenix. It may not be going too far, in fact, to suggest that revenge is a kind of "shadow" phoenix. Where the emergence of the original phoenix from the ashes death was life affirming, the emergence of revenge from an act of violence (the flight of the shadow phoenix) is an act undertaken in pursuit of death. It's the kind of act that Mireille, her anger and desire for revenge rising from the ashes of Valentine's slaughter, seems determined to undertake - the kind of act that Letizia, Angela Maria, and the Abbess, in their ongoing battle against the service, all seem to have been determined to head off. It is, in many ways, the kind of act

foreshadowed in the prophecies of the Arab who brought the Service to Charlemagne in Section 1.

The irony in all of this is that at the same time the shadow phoenix desire for revenge is growing inside Mireille's spirit, a new life is growing inside her body - a life destined to be, as later narrative reveals, a great prophet. In other words, at the same time as the shadow phoenix is taking flight, a phoenix of hope and vision is arising from the ashes of the death of Mireille's innocence.

The conclusion of this section, the sending of Mireille to Algiers, functions on several levels. First, it brings her story one step closer to convergence with Catherine's - the point at which they're both in Algiers confronting their respective destinies, the point at which the book's key symbol - 8 / ? - is both illuminated and defined. Second, the meaning of her protector's name, Shahin (the Peregrine Falcon) refers back to Section 6 and Nim showing Catherine a falcon (see "Quotes," p. 143). The reference in both cases refers to the way the central women in both timelines (Mireille and Catherine) are about to claim their own power. Finally, the introduction of Shahin as Mireille's protector foreshadows the introduction in the following section of Kamel, who becomes Catherine's protector and who is later revealed to be a descendant of Shahin. The groundwork is laid here for development of another parallel between past and present - and, therefore, another manifestation of the theme of timeless, transcendent connection and universality.

An additional convergence of history and fiction, as well as a key piece of foreshadowing, occurs in the reference to William Wordsworth, an actual poet whose brief cameo foreshadows his appearance in Section 19, where he plays a key role in deepening Mireille's understanding of the Game in which, at that point, she's irretrievably involved.

Section 12

Section 12 Summary

"Positional Analysis"

The title of this section refers to a moment in a game of chess when a player considers how best to both react to his opponent's move and act in support of his own goals. Meanwhile, three short quotes present opposing views of chess - that it's analysis, imagination, and intuition.

April 1973. As she drives to a meeting for which she has no appointment, Catherine reflects on the events of the previous night. These include the way she was taken back to her hotel by Sharrif after Solarin disappeared from the nightclub, how her thoughts kept her awake (see "Quotes," p. 279), and how she spent the early hours of the morning studying the books on mathematics given to her by Nim.

She arrives at the Algerian Ministry of Oil and bluffs her way into a meeting with Kamel, an important government figure who treats her respectfully. He tells her he's ensured that the French employer for whom she was supposed to work is out of the picture and offers her a direct contract with him. To her astonishment, he says he wants her to construct a computer model of what might happen if Algeria cuts off the world's supply of petroleum. Kamel then takes Catherine on a tour of his ministry, introducing her to Therese, a telephone communications expert who agrees to send a message to Nim and tells Catherine that from now on, all her outbound communications will receive top priority. Over lunch, a discussion of the simultaneously violent and peaceful theology of Islam is interrupted when Catherine refers to Sharrif. The mention of his name alarms Kamel, who then tells her that no matter what, Kamel will ensure her protection the entire time she's in Algeria.

Section 12 Analysis

As its title suggests, this section is something of a breather for Catherine, as she considers what has gone before and learns something more of what is to follow. Her previously rhetorical question about what might happen if America were to lose control of the world's oil supply (Section 2) suddenly is given real meaning, as she's asked to construct a computer model analyzing exactly that question. Other key elements here include the introduction of Therese, who on a superficial level provides Catherine with valuable assistance as she navigates the complexities of both her job (for OPEC) and her mission (to find the Service). On another level, as later revealed, Therese is an ally of the Black Side in the international "Game" to gain control of the Service, and turns out to have relationships with characters both seen previously (Harry's maid Valerie) and in future sections (Mahad, the little boy who leads Catherine and Lily to Minnie/Mireille).

Finally, the appearance of Kamel both foreshadows the important role he plays in protecting Catherine later in the action, and parallels the appearance of Shahin, who performs the same function for Mireille and who is later revealed to be Kamel's ancestor. The centuries-spanning relationship between these two men is another example of the way the novel develops the theme of interrelationship - people, like Shahin/Kamel and Mireille/Catherine can be united not only in terms of spirit and mission, but also across time.

Section 13

Section 13 Summary

"The Sound of the Desert"

The title of this section refers to and foreshadows the strange, wind-born music Mireille hears when she enters the spiritually significant Valley of the Statues in this section. The quote is a translation of a proverb, referring to the way the desert both hears and speaks in a way human beings can't understand.

February 1793. Mireille travels across Algeria in the company of Shahin, a taciturn but watchful man of the desert. He tells her she must capture, train, and win control over a falcon that will hunt for them, and guides her as she does so. She names her falcon Charlot after Charlemagne.

That night, Mireille resists the idea of branding Charlot, but Shahin tells her she must learn to do violent things if she is to have the revenge he knows she desires. After Charlot has been successfully branded with what Shahin describes as Mireille's personal mark, a figure eight, he tells her of an ancient prophecy of a blue eyed, blond man who will become a powerful spiritual leader and prophet, adding that the child Mireille is carrying is destined to be that man. Finally, he tells her the prophet will preach the teachings of an ancient, legendary goddess/queen, that the queen still lives in the form of a stone mountain, and that he and his people call the mountain The White Queen (a term for one of the most powerful pieces in chess). Their journey is interrupted by a sandstorm, which Shahin calls "The Singing Sands" and which he says means they will arrive at their destination the next day.

Meanwhile, in Russia, the Abbess contemplates a letter from David telling her that Mireille has disappeared and considers the implications of the news - specifically, her loss of awareness of several pieces of the Service. Her contemplations are interrupted by the arrival of the furious Catherine the Great, who demands that the Abbess sign a document condemning the Revolution. The Abbess, knowing that to sign such a document would keep her from returning to France, refuses, saying she must have freedom to go back and explaining to Catherine why. She needs to be free to search for the missing pieces. As they sit to play a game of chess, the Abbess explains that she's sent Sister Charlotte Corday (Section 1) to Paris to try to figure out where Mireille has gone. Catherine again tries to convince the Abbess to let her help and to give her control of the Service but the Abbess refuses, citing the power hungriness of both Catherine and her near-insane son Paul, whom they discover hiding behind a tapestry. After thrusting him from the room, and after Catherine agrees that the Service is too potentially powerful to fall into his hands, she and the Abbess plan to bury the piece of the Service she brought with her (the Black Queen, Section 5).

At that point the Abbess reveals the board for the Service, which she had concealed in a stone pillar in her room and over which she placed the chessboard that she and Catherine had just been playing on. As Catherine, entranced, contemplates the board, the Abbess reveals that when she unearthed it, she felt a terrifying surge of power. Despite her ambition, Catherine agrees to follow through on the plan and agrees to the Abbess' pointed request to read the letters that she knows have been sent to her but which she also knows Catherine has confiscated and read. Catherine playfully says they contain no interesting information - just chatty comments about the weather in Corsica (from this, it can be inferred that the letters are from Letizia and, presumably, contain coded information about Mireille).

Back in Algiers, Mireille and Shahin journey through a region of mountains and valleys, encountering an increasingly beautiful and evocative series of cave paintings and carvings. After several treacherous days they enter a hidden valley, lined with towering statues of what Mireille at first perceives to be several men, but which she eventually realizes are representations of one man, who over the course of several transformations evolves into Mars, the God of War. The evolution takes place under the watchful, powerful eyes of the only statue of a female in the valley - a representation of the White Queen - and to the accompaniment of an intense sound, almost music, triggered by wind blowing through holes and chasms in the rocks in the valley. As soon as Mireille realizes the true nature of what she's seeing, that the men are all one man, she experiences the onset of labor pains. Six weeks later, with her son in her arms (named Charlot after the falcon), Mireille watches from a mountain ledge as four desert riders approach with what she already knows is a message for her - a letter from the Abbess, calling for her to return.

Section 13 Analysis

The training of Charlot the falcon can be seen as an externalization of the way Mireille must train her anger and ambition if she is to succeed not only in her quest to revenge herself on Marat, but also to succeed in her mission to obtain control of the Service. It's interesting to note in this segment the repetition of several motifs, or images, that reappear throughout the novel. The figure eight is the most obvious, but there is also the reference to the falcon itself, which as previously discussed is a powerful symbol throughout the novel of power—particularly female power. Another repeated motif is in the reference to the statue of The White Queen, which is the name of one of the most powerful pieces in chess and is also the name by which the woman who is eventually revealed to be the opponent of both Mireille (in the past) and Catherine (in the present) is known. It's possible to see, here and throughout the book, that the White Queen in terms of both physical presence and spiritual meaning, is an externalization of the so-called "shadow" phoenix, the ambitious drive for power, knowledge and control that both protagonists in both time lines (Mireille and Catherine) struggle to overcome in themselves. Mireille's eventual triumph over the White Queen is foreshadowed by the birth of her son, who in his purity of vision and spirit, embodies the deeper, spiritual, universal perspective that Mireille eventually understands and accepts - that is, once

she has united with the shadow phoenix, as it were, given in to her so-called "dark side," and had revenge on Marat.

The Russian interlude essentially sets up circumstances that will eventually get Mireille back to France, where she will face that dark side of herself. It also lays the groundwork, and therefore foreshadows, several key incidents later in the book. These include the Abbess' imprisonment, the ascension to power of the crazed Paul, and ultimately the return of Solarin and Nim to Russia to search for the pieces of the board buried by Catherine and the Abbess. In terms of the letters from Letizia, the point must be made here that the narrative contains no explicit indication that the letters are anything but superficial. The circumstances surrounding the existence of the letters, however, give very strong indications of their true meaning. These circumstances include the novel's high number of communications with several meanings (not just between the Abbess and Letizia but throughout the book in both timelines), the previously defined close relationship between Letizia and the Abbess, and the evident result of those letters - Mireille being summoned back to France. This latter wouldn't happen if the Abbess didn't know from Letizia that Mireille had gone to Algiers - information that, the description of the letters suggests, is encoded.

In short, the narrative here makes effective use of context to define content, of implication to define information in the same way as, for example, the detail about the lacquered cabinet (Section 10) implies its importance. The writer is, in these situations, leaving it to the reader's intelligence and perceptiveness to fill in factual gaps.

Section 14

Section 14 Summary

"The Magic Mountains"

The title of this section refers to both the mountains Mireille traversed in the past narrative and those through which Catherine and Kamel travel in the present. The quote is from the writings of Napoleon and contains a commentary on the complex relationship between past and present.

June 1973. As Kamel drives her into the mountains where she plans to visit Llewellyn's dealer friend and begin negotiations for the piece of the Service, Catherine describes how the last few weeks have been filled with her OPEC-related work for Kamel, and also how she's heard nothing from her friends and allies - Solarin, Lily, or Nim. As they drive, Catherine tells Kamel who she's looking for - a man named El-Marad, who lives in what turns out to be Kamel's home village. Kamel tells her El-Marad is ruthless and tricky, and that his name roughly translates as Nimrod - a rebel, one that trespasses on the gods. Catherine notes the similarity to the name of her friend Nim.

After a hazardous trek through mountain passes (described in similar to those navigated by Mireille in the previous chapter), Catherine and Kemal arrive in the village and make their way to El-Marad's home. His daughter meets them there and Catherine feels the urge to give her a little gift. She rummages in her purse and finds a stray piece of Lily's portable chess set - the White Queen (see Section 4). The girl runs into the house to show her father, El-Marad, who comes out in a hurry. After polite small talk, El-Marad asks Kamel to leave him and Catherine alone so they can discuss business in private. Kamel is suspicious, but does as he's asked. Once he's gone, El-Marad's manner changes as he asks Catherine who sent her. At first Catherine is taken aback, but then she realizes that the chess piece must have been some kind of signal from Llewellyn, one that he never explained. She tells El-Marad about Llewellyn's interest in the Service and his belief El-Marad can help her find them. El-Marad explains that a woman in the Casbah is in possession of several pieces, that she refuses to communicate with him, and that he can't get in to see her because she lives in a women-only environment.

He tells Catherine the woman's name, Mokhfi Mokhtar, and says if Catherine uses the secret message he will give her, Mokhfi will see her immediately. Catherine agrees, and he gives her the message - to say that she was born on April 4th, which on the Islamic calendar is a holy day, the day of healing. Catherine suppresses her surprise at this (surprise triggered by the fact that April 4th really IS her birthday), and asks why the message has meaning. El-Marad tells her that April 4th was Charlemagne's birthday, the day the Service was, according to legend, raised from the ground, and the day that "the one who is destined to put the pieces together again, to reunite them" will have been born on that day. They make further arrangements for communication, and Catherine leaves, accompanied by Kamel. As they make their way to a hotel, Catherine

quickly checks her English/Arabic dictionary, and discovers that Mokhfi's name means "The Secret Chosen One."

"The Castle"

The title of this section can be seen as referring to a chess move in which the king is shifted into a place of protection by exchanging it with a rook, or castle. It can also be seen as describing the protected, secretive environment in which Mokhfi/the fortuneteller/Minnie/Mireille lives. Meanwhile, the two quotes at the beginning of this section are both from *Alice in the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll - specifically, the sequence in the book in which Alice becomes a living pawn in a chess game. The quotes refer to her desire to be a queen, to the way another character named Lily is too young to play the game, and how Alice can become a queen.

A few days after returning from the mountains, Catherine's life is thrown into turmoil when Kamel announces that he needs her computer model very soon, and when a coded message from Nim arrives. Also, Catherine has the opportunity to move from the hotel into an apartment, and Lily and Carioca illegally arrive.

Sharrif is very suspicious of Lily but because of his own enthusiasm for chess, he's aware of her chess-master status and her relationship to Mordecai, and so gives her less trouble than he otherwise might. Nevertheless, he seizes her papers and passport, which Lily says isn't a concern - because her mother was born in England, she has dual citizenship and a second passport. That night, Catherine prepares dinner for Lily at the apartment and together they start to reason through all the information they have, new and old, coming to the conclusion that they (as well as several other people they've encountered) are pawns in an unknown chess game. Meanwhile, Catherine has decoded the message from Nim, which leads her (after a complicated, dangerous journey through the Casbah in the company of Lily and a greedy young guide named Mahad) to an encounter with the contact Nim promised to give Catherine earlier (Section 8). Her name, according to Nim's message, is Minnie - but Catherine is astonished to hear her referred to as both the Black Queen and as Mokhfi Mokhtar, and to see that the woman is the fortuneteller.

Section 14 Analysis

Both the title and the quote in the first part of this section can be seen as illustrating the parallels between Mireille's experiences in the previous section and Catherine's experiences here, both of which take them closer to encounters with their true selves. The quote in particular illuminates this aspect to both these two sections and the novel as a whole. As such, it can be seen as summing up one of the book's core themes, relating to exactly that, the close but ultimately unknowable connection between past and present.

Meanwhile, the title of the second part of this section is relatively straightforward; the quotes, however, function on a couple of levels. In one, Alice refers to "a great huge

game of chess that's being played all over the world," a fairly accurate description of the Game of control over the Montglane Service in which Catherine (in the present) and Mireille (in the past) are both involved. The reference to Alice (a pawn) becoming a queen is, in its turn, an accurate description of Catherine's experience - starting out as a pawn in that game but eventually becoming Mireille's replacement as the black queen. Finally, the reference to Lily in the quote is a fairly obvious reference to/foreshadowing of the return of Lily to the action in the second part of this section.

That said, there are several noteworthy elements in this lengthy section, many of which have to do with the repetition of motifs and/or images from both earlier and later in the book. The first is the reference to El-Marad's name having roughly the same meaning as Nimrod, a name that has echoes with stories from the past narrative (see "Section 7 Analysis" for details of this connection). The second is the appearance of the White Queen from Lily's chess set, another example of the way the novel employs narrative devices that seem to walk the very fine line between author-contrived coincidence and a thematically relevant demonstration of universal, subconscious inter-relationship, connection, and meaning.

Another demonstration of this thematic point appears in the reference to April 4th. As the action of the book later reveals, this is a spiritually convergent date for both "The Chosen One" (a term that can be used to describe both Minnie / Mireille and Catherine), as well as for the secret formula (for the Elixir of Life) encoded in the Montglane Service. Meanwhile, foreshadowing of a further convergence appears in Kamel's demand for the computer model, an aspect of Catherine's life that plays an important role later in the action (Section 20) when it becomes necessary to draw upon this particular external, consciously motivated circumstance in order to fulfill the more internal, subconsciously and spiritually and fatefully motivated one.

On a technical, storytelling level, once again the author leaves the reader in a vividly defined place of suspense, as Catherine comes face to face with the woman who has appeared in several guises throughout the novel and who, as is ultimately revealed, the controller of her destiny. The author once again, taking the narrative into the past at a key dramatic point in the present, heightens this sense of suspense. In other words, structure enhances the novel's core purpose - to engage, intrigue, puzzle, and ultimately thrill the reader (hence the genre title "thriller").

Section 15, Part 1

Section 15, Part 1 Summary

"The Death of Kings"

The title of this section is taken from the quote at its beginning, which is from William Shakespeare's play *Richard II*, a play dramatizing the overthrow and death of a weak king.

July, 1793. Mireille, having disguised herself as an Arab woman and returned to Paris on the orders of the Abbess, reunites with David, who tells her five nuns have come seeking her and have disappeared. He also tells her Marat has been taken ill and is confined to his home, from where he still controls the leaders of the Revolution. Mireille tells him forcefully that the only power that can both destroy the power of the Revolution and rebuild France is the power of the Montglane Service, which she is determined to harness (see "Quotes," p. 349). She then, intent upon avenging Valentine's death, goes out and purchases a knife with which she intends to kill Marat. Her plans are altered by the return of Charlotte Corday (Sister Marie-Charlotte, Section 1) who, as Mireille suddenly notices, bears a strong resemblance to Mireille. Corday pledges her devotion to Mireille and her cause, and tells Mireille that she (Corday) has an appointment with Marat that evening - an appointment that Mireille decides to keep in her place.

Charlotte waits as Mireille goes in to see Marat, who recognizes her, taunts her with his knowledge about the location of several pieces of the Service, and offers to tell her about the fate of the five missing nuns if she tells him where her pieces are. When she refuses, he tells her that her rival, his ally, is too powerful for her to destroy, adding that the Abbess knows who the woman is - Catherine the White Queen. Mireille concludes that he means Catherine the Great, and that the only way she'll find out about the missing pieces is to tell Marat where hers are. When she tells him she's shipped the pieces to England, Marat realizes the Bishop has them, cries out that "she [the White Queen] can get them," and refuses to tell Mireille where the missing pieces are. In a fury of vengeful rage, she plunges her knife into Marat's heart. As she struggles to leave the house she is assaulted by Marat's servants and captured before the watching eyes of Charlotte Corday.

Section 15, Part 1 Analysis

Both the title and quote at the beginning of this section function on three levels. The first is as a reference to the state of France at the time in which the section is set - shortly following the execution of King Louis, at the point where France's politics and people are at their most volatile and confused. The second level of function is as a reference to the death of Marat, who can be seen as a White King (a figure of ultimate importance and ultimate weakness), even though he's never actually named as such. The third level

of function is as a reference back to El-Marad, who is later revealed to be the present day White King and who is, eventually and metaphorically, "killed" in the present day Game by Catherine. On both the second and third levels of function, therefore, the title and quote can both be seen as foreshadowing.

This section marks the beginning of Mireille's confrontation with the so-called "shadow phoenix," the dark side of her spirit that rose into life and gained power from the ashes of her innocence, destroyed after the death of Valentine. This power takes its energy and form from the spirit of revenge, referred to several times throughout the narrative as the negative, life-destroying manifestation of the secret formula encoded in the Montglane Service, which as the action later reveals is actually life affirming and extending. This section, therefore, can be seen as the second climax in Mireille's journey, the simultaneous high point (in the sense of emotional intensity) and low point (in the sense of spiritual morality) of her story so far. It's important to note here the sense of convergence - high point and low point, knowledge (of the influence of the so-called White Queen) and ignorance (of the location of the missing pieces), disguise (Mireille posing as Corday) and truth (the raw malice of Marat's soul), and, perhaps most importantly, history and fiction.

In terms of this latter manifestation of convergence, it must be remembered that Corday and Marat both were actual individuals, and that Corday actually did kill Marat - their encounter is the subject of both a famous painting and a famous play (eventually made into a film). The incorporation of the Mireille into their story is one of *The Eight's* most ingenious blendings of fact and fiction and one of the few cases in which the technique has thematic impact. Most of the time, encounters between fictional characters and historical persons comes across as cleverness for cleverness' sake. Here, however, the encounter is used to explore one of the novel's core thematic issues, that relating to the corruptive, destructive power of revenge. It's important to note, meanwhile, that the darkness portrayed here, the soul-and-life destructiveness of Mireille's actions, is powerfully contrasted with the selfless, redemptive actions of Corday in the sections that follow.

The reference to Catherine (the White Queen) functions on several levels. Perhaps the most obvious is the repetition of the White Queen image/motif - that of a powerful force of opposition and challenge that appears throughout the novel. On another level, the reference foreshadows the character's appearance later in this section, and her subsequent (albeit peripheral) involvement in the action in later sections. On the level of storytelling, meanwhile, the fact that Mireille misinterprets Marat's meaning is another example of the genre-related technique of misdirection. The reader, at this point, thinks that Mireille is right - this is the result of Catherine the Great having been previously portrayed as eager to obtain the Service and exploit its power. The truth of the identity of this version of the White Queen turns out to be something very different, and perhaps even more challenging to Mireille and her mission (not to mention her personal happiness) than Catherine the Great could ever be.

Section 15, Part 2

Section 15, Part 2 Summary

That night, Robespierre visits David, telling him that Mireille was behind Marat's murder, that he (Robespierre) assumes they talked about the Service in the moments before Marat's death, and that he (Robespierre) is desperate to know what they said. As proof of his sincerity, he tells David that the Service is the source of power behind the anti-monarchist Revolution that's taking place not only in France but across all of Europe as well. He goes on to explain that he learned about the Service from the rebel philosopher Rousseau, telling a lengthy tale about how Rousseau learned about the power of the service from an Italian courtier, Casanova, who took him on a centuries-old ritual walk through the streets of Venice - a town founded by Phoenicians. The walk, according to the story told by Robespierre, followed a pattern diagrammed by Rousseau (and reproduced as he speaks by Robespierre), which not only repeatedly passed a statue of Hermes, an ancient god of trickery and music. It also follows a figure eight pattern (see "Quotes," p. 364), the same as the twined Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the home of the ancient civilization of Mesopotamia - within which, on contemporary maps, is Algeria. Rousseau, according to Robes-pierre, was desperate to acquire the service in the name of destroying the power of kings, and gave Robespierre the mission to find it.

David, at the conclusion of Robespierre's story, realizes that Robespierre was in league with Marat. Robespierre calmly urges David to join their cause, saying that they work for the White Queen, who Robespierre says is also called the Woman from India. He promises to introduce her to David when she returns from England. They go out to talk further without noticing that Charlotte Corday has been lurking outside the open window. When they've left she comes in, collects the diagram left behind by Robespierre, some paints and some loose clothing, and quickly leaves again.

Charlotte visits Mireille in prison, where she's awaiting execution for having killed Marat. Charlotte, disguised as a painter commissioned to paint her last portrait, tells Mireille the overheard story of the White Queen/Woman from India. Mireille realizes she was wrong about Catherine the Great, and that the Bishop and the pieces he possesses are in grave danger. Charlotte also shows Mireille Robespierre's diagram, the pattern of which Mireille recognizes as having been embroidered on the cloth that covered the Service (see Section 1), and then gives Mireille a letter from the Abbess saying that funds have been put in a London bank for her. She then forces Mireille to exchange clothes with her, saying that she vowed to protect Mireille at all costs and adding that Mireille, not Valentine, was the one chosen by the Abbess (see "Quotes," p. 369) to be the ultimate savior of the Service. Mireille realizes Charlotte's intention - to be executed in her place. Charlotte tells her she has chosen her fate, and that only Mireille can defeat their opponents - she is the Black Queen.

Two hours after Mireille escapes, dressed in Charlotte's clothes and taking with her Robespierre's diagram, Charlotte's prayers are interrupted by the arrival of David and

Robespierre, who have come to get information from Mireille. Robespierre is furious to discover Charlotte and threatens to kill her if she doesn't say where Mireille went. Charlotte calmly tells him she fully plans to die.

Two weeks later, in London, the Bishop receives a visit from a beautiful woman with a strong resemblance to Valentine, who shows him a pawn from the Montglane Service, who introduces herself as Catherine Grand—and who says she comes from India.

Section 15, Part 2 Analysis

The conversation between Robespierre and David includes repetitions of several important narrative motifs - the incorporations of actual persons (Robespierre himself, Rousseau, Voltaire and Casanova) into fictionalized narrative, the appearance the apparently mystically significant number 8, and the revelation that Robespierre is, like Marat, a powerful player in the White Side. It also introduces another facet of the identity of the White Queen, "the Woman from India," an aspect of their conversation that foreshadows the surprising and tension building encounter between the Bishop and the Queen that concludes this lengthy, narratively and thematically essential section. Meanwhile, the diagram drawn by Robespierre, taken by Corday and given to Mireille, plays an important role later in the action - Section 22, when Catherine, Solarin and Lily use it (as copied by Mireille into her journal) to decode the secret formula in the Service.

As previously discussed, the role played by Corday in the action functions on two levels. The first is as an extremely clever incorporation of fiction into fact - Corday was, in real life, executed for the murder of Marat. The narrative here re-envisions that actuality in a way that, more than any of the other past/present conjunctions in the novel, has a deep narrative and thematic purpose. This purpose is manifests in the sequence's second level of function - the selfless sacrifice made by Corday is a powerful, and for Mirielle a perspective-altering, contrast with the selfish evil she encounters in both herself and Marat. From this point on, Mireille acts out of a commitment to the greater good, a commitment that defines her actions not only through the rest of her narrative line but also, as her presence in Catherine's narrative line indicates, through the rest of her mystically extended life. In this context, Mireille's journey can be seen as taking on an almost Christian-based perspective. Traditional Christian teachings suggest that selfless actions undertaken for the greater good can and will lead to "eternal life" - which, in the context of these teachings, is generally interpreted to mean a life with God in heaven. Mireille, her murderousness redeemed by the Christ-like selfless sacrifice of Charlotte Corday, from this point on acts selflessly. Her reward? Eternal physical life, after she consumes the Elixir of Life, the formula for which is encoded in the Montglane Service she has fought so hard to obtain and preserve. The irony here is that for Mireille, eternal life becomes as much of a curse as of a blessing - as she herself indicates, she is doomed to see those she loves age and die while she remains young.

The reference to Mireille as the Black Queen foreshadows the appearance of Minnie (who is, as later revealed, the ageless Mireille), who is described as the Black Queen in the following section. It also foreshadows Minnie's designation of Catherine as the new

Black Queen, which is in turn another manifestation of the novel's thematic and narrative focus on convergence. Once again, in both this section and the following one, past and present converge, the journeys of Catherine and Mireille converge, and the union of past and present, matter and spirit, choice and consequence are all defined by the reappearances of the figure eight. In this section, the figure reappears in Robespierre's diagram, and in the following section in the cloth cover for the Montglane Service.

At the end of this section the author again heightens the novel's suspense by ending on a note of intrigue. In this case, the incident in question is the meeting of the Bishop and the seductive Woman from India - Catherine, the White Queen. Their encounter is rife with potential for drama. How will Catherine's resemblance to Valentine affect the susceptible Bishop? Which of them will gain control of the pieces of the Service in the other's possession? What will happen when Mireille returns to the Bishop's life, which she inevitably will given what's been established both in terms of their sexual/emotional relationship and her determination to gain control of the Service?

Section 16

Section 16 Summary

"The Black Queen"

The title of this section refers to Mireille/Minnie, the Black Queen both past and present - in other words, the title is another manifestation of the novel's thematic perspective on the union of all things, all times, and all experiences. The quote, meanwhile, is taken from the text of Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute* - specifically, the text of a song sung by the Queen of the Night (essentially a black queen), who comments on her existence outside the bonds and borders of nature.

June 1973. In her pillow-strewn drawing room in Algiers, Minnie - the Black Queen - welcomes Catherine and Lily to the Game. She outlines its purpose (the struggle for control over the Service and the possibility that that control can also lead to control of humanity) and also the identity of several players (including Nim, whom she says is another player on the Black Side). She also reveals that agents of the White Side have discovered the board for the Montglane Service (buried by the Abbess and Catherine the Great in Section 13). Meanwhile, Catherine realizes El-Marad is the White King and Lily uses her portable chess set (which she retrieves from Catherine) to map the positions of the opposing sides (see "Quotes," p. 377). Minnie then reveals the embroidered cloth used to wrap the Service (last seen in Section 13) and together she, Catherine and Lily examine it - the figure eight with which it has been embroidered as well as a series of symbols that Catherine suddenly realizes are those of the elements. She explains to Lily the complex relationships between the Periodic Table of Elements, chemistry, music (many of which have been previously discussed - specifically in the conversation, recounted in Section 7 Part 2, between Bach and Euler).

Minnie adds that there is a relationship between all these disciplines and the "science" of alchemy, the study of transmuting one element into another. Minnie and Catherine describe how the theory of alchemical transformation has been studied by scientists for thousands of years, but only a few have the true secret - "the Eight," Minnie says, "those who could hear the music of the spheres." At this Catherine realizes why she's been chosen to be the new Black Queen - not only is she a computer and mathematical specialist, she's also a former music major.

As Catherine's realizations fall into place, she explains to Lily that science has discovered that everything - matter, light, sound - is held together by waves of power. Minnie tells them the formula for calculating ways in which that power could be used, including converting other elements into nuclear-weapons grade plutonium, is contained in the Montglane Service. This is why, she adds, the White Side is so desperate to gain control of the Service - they are determined to use it to create weapons of mass destruction. She goes on to say she's hidden the largest known collection of pieces in the desert, but doesn't know where the rest are, and adds that she wants Catherine and

Lily to collect the hidden pieces before El-Marad can get his hands on them. She draws a map and Catherine a small book, "a document of great importance." The book is written in French, and is revealed to be Mireille's diary.

Section 16 Analysis

This section has two essential purposes. The first, and perhaps most straightforward, is to bring awareness of Catherine's role as the new Black Queen into the understanding of both Catherine and the reader. This awareness deepens, again in both Catherine and the reader, as Catherine reads further into Mireille's diary. Its presentation in this section, and the revelations it contains in following sections, all foreshadow the ultimate revelation in the book's final moments - that Mireille and Minnie are one and the same, and that Mireille decoded the secret of the Montglane Service, concocted the Elixir of Life, drank it, and is now immortal.

The second purpose of this section is exposition - to explain the scientific theory defining the secret message encoded in the Montglane Service. There are several important things to note here. The first is that many of the theories Catherine and Minnie discuss (the mathematical component to music, the relationship between the various elements, light and sound being transmitted in waves, the history of alchemy) are all actual, scientifically explored theories. Their incorporation here, into the fictionalized, mythic story of the Montglane Service, is yet another example of the way the author has skillfully combined fact and fiction. Another important element, related to the first, is the way interest in alchemy is manifested - in the past, knowledge of alchemy was pursued in the name of its potential for creating wealth; i.e. transmuting other elements into gold. Here it's being sought in the name of the potential for other elements to be transmuted into those that can be used in atomic weaponry. In other words, the White Side isn't interested in control through finance, but control through violence. The implication, therefore, is that the Black Side seeks control to prevent the White Side from committing such violence.

The third noteworthy element here is technical - the classic, often used and always effective technique of offering essential information to the reader by having one character offer it to another character, ignorant of essential details in the same way as the reader is. To be specific, here Lily becomes a surrogate for the reader, her need for and receipt of the information paralleling the same experiences in the reader. This technique is commonly employed in novels of this genre, but is also employed in works of many genres and disciplines, including dramatic writing (plays and screenplays) and functions effectively and realistically in all.

Section 17

Section 17 Summary

"The Lost Continent"

The title of this section is a reference to the ancient, some say mythological, continent of Atlantis. The quote is from an ancient Greek history and describes the citizens of Atlantis as being unlike anyone else on earth.

Upon leaving Minnie, Catherine tells Kamel that she has to leave. He becomes irritated that she's leaving his desperately OPEC project so close to her deadline but nonetheless understands her reasons for going - some of the things he says, in fact, lead Catherine and Lily to believe he's part of the game, on the Black Side, as well. They leave the city on their mission, driving across the desert in Lily's car; Lily follows the route on Minnie's map, which she has committed to her excellent, chess-trained memory, while Catherine reads Mireille's journal aloud, translating as she goes and discovering that according to Mireille, the area they're passing through was once believed to be Atlantis. Meanwhile Carioca, Lily's dog, rides quietly beneath Catherine's feet.

After encounters with a suspicious border guard, a friendly trucker, intense desert heat, a sandstorm, and a fortuitous transport plane landing at a fortuitously located landing strip, Catherine and Lily arrive at the destination as marked on Lily's memorized map - the point at which the road becomes a walking trail into the mountains. After a four-hour hike, Lily recognizes signs from the map that they're coming to the right place, but tells the exasperated Catherine that she doesn't have the exact directions, explaining that Minnie said they would see a sign that meant something. As they look around, the light of their flashlight illuminates a painting on the side of a mountain - an ancient hunting party, at the center of which is the giant figure of a huntress, a woman whose body is shaped in the form of a sharp-cornered figure eight. Lily recognizes the shape from one of the books on chess given to her by Mordecai - the double-headed ax of Ancient Crete, which Lily says and Catherine remembers was a culture originally founded by the Phoenicians. Lily comments that the connection between chess and the ax was that they had the same purpose - to Kill the King. At that point Catherine recalls an ancient, mythic ritual that saw the marriage of a mortal man to the moon goddess, a marriage that ended after eight years - the time required for the lunar and solar calendars to cycle back to return to their starting points at which time the king was sacrificed and a new king was chosen. "The ritual of death," Catherine recalls, "was always celebrated in the spring, when the sun was smack between the zodiacal constellations of Aries and Taurus - that is, by modern reckoning, April fourth. It was *the day on which they killed the king!"*

She also recalls that the name of the goddess, Car, shows up in the names of cities, civilizations - all sorts of manifestations from the past to the present (see "Quotes," p. 408).

Catherine and Lily follow the indications of the spear held by the female hunter into the heart of a mountain, where they travel down a steeply inclined spiral pathway, fall unexpectedly into a cavern, survive being swarmed by angry bats, and lose sight of Carioca. As they search for him, Catherine notices a faint glow coming from a cavern a distance away. They go towards the glow, which seems to brighten as they draw closer. As they enter the cavern they discover that the glow comes from moonlight, shining into the cavern from a hole several feet above. They also discover Carioca, digging in the corner under a large figure eight carved into the wall. Catherine and Lily join Carioca, and together they unearth eight heavy, jewel-encrusted pieces of the Montglane Service.

After spending a few moments contemplating the pieces, Catherine packs them away and devises a way out - she'll cut their blankets into strips, wind the strips into a rope, climb the difficult but not impossible rock face, and throw down the rope so Lily can climb up. Catherine has no problem with her part of the plan, but as she climbs Lily becomes stuck. Catherine challenges her to find a way to move, in the same way as she would find a way to move when stuck in an impossible chess position. Lily makes her way out, tells Catherine that the position she described is called "zugzwang," and they head back to the car, only to discover that it's being inspected by Sharrif's security forces. Catherine suggests they head on foot for the last village they passed. Lily is reluctant to leave the car behind, but sees Catherine's point. Together they start off on their journey back to civilization, the pieces and Carioca securely in their backpacks.

Section 17 Analysis

There are several layers of function and/or meaning to the action in this section. On the first and most accessible, it is essentially a treasure hunt, with Catherine and Lily encountering both good and bad fortune as they search for the pieces of the Montglane Service. On another level, the treasure hunt is an archetypal quest story, a tale with external characteristics and internal meanings that are common to other such stories in other cultures and mythologies. The essential pattern of these stories is this: characters go off in search of a physical prize and as a result, whether they return with the sought object or not, come to a deeper spiritual understanding - of self, of the nature of life, of the nature of God, etc.

It's interesting to note the characteristics that this particular quest shares with other similar stories. These include monetary and spiritual value in the object being sought (the Service), hardships (the heat, the desert, the bats, the way out), sudden good fortune (coming upon the airstrip, finding Carioca), and the assistance and/or obstruction of various individuals (Carioca, the border guard, the pilot of the transport plane). There is also, more often than not, at least one puzzle - in this case, the painting guiding Catherine and Lily to the cave.

The cave itself is a manifestation of yet another archetypal characteristic of such stories - the third level of meaning inherent in the story of this section. Many quest stories climax with their protagonists journeying into a cave, which in psychological, metaphorical or spiritual terms usually represents core of an individual's hitherto unexplored psyche. In the case of the quest here, both Catherine and Lily encounter core truths - that Catherine is destined to gain control of the Service as the Black Queen, and that Lily is destined to be a stronger, more courageous person than she ever believed herself to be. That being said, neither of these women (like most heroes of most quest stories) is aware of the psychological resonances of their experience - they don't know what it all means. Interpretation and understanding of these experiences is up to the author to define and the reader to understand. While Catherine and Lily understand that they are close to achieving their external goal of controlling the Service, they don't understand just yet the spiritual consequences of that control, both in terms of their individual spirits and that of humanity as a whole.

One further level of meaning to this section can be found in the drawing of the woman on the wall. Here, as in the case of the conversations between Lily, Catherine and Minnie in the previous section, information is offered about the meaning of what has gone before - specifically, the significance of April 4th. This particular section of the puzzle is almost complete. It isn't until Mireille successfully decodes the formula in the Service, events narrated in her diary (Section 24 Part 2) that both this section of the mystery and its relationship to its other components is revealed. Meanwhile, the woman on the wall can be seen as a parallel figure to the female statue encountered by Mireille in Section 13 - both are symbols of the larger power, both as individuals and as women, that Mireille and Catherine encounter and claim as their own as the result of their quests.

Yet another layer of meaning can be found in the passing reference to the shape of the entrance into the cave - a "spiral" cave. The figure eight, sideways (?) as well as upright (8), is essentially a spiral, as is human DNA (the material that contains the genetic codes defining all aspects of human physical existence), the figure embroidered into the cloth of the Montglane Service, the shape of Robespierre's diagram, etc. As previously discussed, the figure is also a representation of infinity, of universal connection and interrelation. The fact that Catherine and Lily enter the cave through such a symbol suggests they are beginning an encounter with a universal truth, with infinity, which, in a sense, they are - the formula encoded in the Montglane Service, which as previously discussed and eventually revealed, is that for the Elixer of (Eternal) Life. One final point to consider: Catherine's analysis of the goddess Car, her name and its resonances. There is the sense that this goddess is fierce, powerful, determined, and omnipresent. Is there perhaps a connection here between the goddess and the name of Lily's equally fierce, equally omnipresent dog (Carioca), the first syllable of which is, in fact, Car?

Section 18

Section 18 Summary

"Zugzwang"

The meaning of this section's title is found in the previous section, when Catherine bullies Lily out of "zugzwang" - being stuck without apparent options. The title foreshadows action in this section, in which Catherine and Lily believe themselves to again be caught in "zugzwang," but like Lily in Section 17, discover a way out.

Catherine and Lily manipulate their way to a car rental office in the city of Oran, some miles from Algiers, where Catherine (using her authority as a representative of the government) to rent a previously reserved car. She uses that same authority to place a call to Therese, who tells her that Sharrif is after her, that Kamel's meeting (at which Catherine supposed to be presenting her proposal) has begun, and that the White Side (meaning El-Marad) has guessed who she really is. Without pausing to consider how Therese knows so much about her, Catherine and Lily take off in the car for Algiers. As Lily drives, Catherine reads further into Mireille's journal (see "Quotes," p. 420), reopening the book at the point where Mireille refers to having to go to England, but refusing to leave Paris so she can see her son "born into the Game." Eventually, Catherine and Lily reach the outskirts of Algiers, and believe for a moment that they're again in "zugzwang" - neither can afford to be found by Sharrif, who (they reason) has police posted at all the hotels and airports in the area. Catherine, however, remembers a nearby restaurant and leads Lily inside, for food and for a chance to consider their options. "It was," Catherine comments in narration, "the worst suggestion I'd made since we began our trek."

Inside the restaurant, Catherine and Lily are confronted by El-Marad, who challenges them to an ancient balancing game involving stacks of matches, and also with the knowledge that he knows where they've been, what they've been doing, and they've no place to go. Catherine recognizes the game, realizes she can win, and also realizes she has a way out of dealing with El-Marad. She tells him she knows he's the White King, Lily tells him Catherine is the Black Queen, and El-Marad becomes nervous and fearful, anxious because he belives Minnie (his known opponent) has left the Game and has been replaced by someone (Catherine) whose tactics and skill level he doesn't know. Catherine and Lily attempt to get out of the restaurant but are blocked by the sudden arrival of Sharrif, who attempts to arrest them. Carioca attacks him, Catherine knocks him to the floor, Lily follows, and all three are pursued by Sharrif, El-Marad, and everyone else in the bar. All three jump into the water, and Catherine feels "the heavy weight of the Montglane Service pulling [her] down, down toward the bottom of the sea."

Section 18 Analysis

At this point, Catherine actively embraces both her role as Black Queen and the fact that she's an active participant in this Game, making what in chess terms might be described as aggressive counter moves designed to gain control. Up to this point her choices have been active, but have been made under the influence and control of others. Here she clearly and definitely becomes a player, no longer the one being played. The game she plays with El-Marad is a manifestation and/or symbol of this situation. Just as she takes control of the match game, she takes control of the big Game - at least as much control as she can take under the circumstances. This sense of control increases throughout the rest of the narrative, as Catherine becomes more and more aware of both the circumstances within which she's playing and the dangers posed by her opposition.

Again in this section, the author employs the effective tension building technique of leaving the protagonist at a point of high danger. An interesting element in this case is Catherine's narration of how she felt the pieces of the Service "pulling her down." This description can be seen as a metaphor for her overall experience to date, but one that functions on two very different levels. On one hand, the Service and everything associated with it has pulled her "down" from her life, away from what she believes to have been her role, her place, her function, and her job. On the other hand, the Service has also pulled her "down" into her true spiritual self, a metaphorical journey first symbolized by her descent into the cave. Ironically, there is the sense in these final moments that she is, in effect, "drowning" on both levels. She is about to lose her physical life in the same way as she's lost her external defining characteristics, while her hitherto fairly strong sense of self is being "drowned" by the new identity she is being forced to assume (that of the Black Queen).

Section 19

Section 19 Summary

"The White Land"

The title of this section is drawn from its quote - from *The Faerie Queen* by Edmund Spenser, in which England is referred to as a land of dangerous white rocks. As this section's action reveals, it's also a reference to England being the home of the White Queen, in the game being played for control over the Montglane Service.

November 1793. The section begins with the Bishop receiving news that he is perceived as a potential enemy of the British people, and has been given three days to leave the country. He comments to his servant that England is "The White Land" referred to in a quote from a French philosopher, a land "that deceives by trust." He resolves to try to extend his stay, but his plans are interrupted by the sensual appearance of Catherine Grand. The narrative then recounts Catherine's life story as discovered by the Bishop - born in India, married to a Briton in her teens, sent to England to avoid scandal, there living the life of a socialite, and coming to the Bishop with a story of Mireille's execution, carrying with her a piece of the Service as a token of her honesty. Narration describes how the Bishop knows she's lying but finds her sexual charms irresistible, and allows himself to be intimate with her knowing they're both using each other.

Narration describes how Mireille, on board a ship crossing to England, imagines what's happening to Charlotte (see "Quotes," p. 430), and worries whether she wasted too much time returning to Algiers to collect her son, Charlot, who along with Shahin stands beside her on deck. As Sharin speaks mystically of "The White Land" to which they're journeying and of the adversity he feels in the air, none of them are aware that a ship carrying the Bishop to America is traveling just across the Channel from them - in the opposite direction, back to France. On the Bishop's ship, he congratulates himself for getting away from England with nine pieces of the service (Mireille's eight and Catherine's one) and for the cleverness of his plans for life in America, where he plans to meet with Thomas Jefferson, with whom he became acquainted when Jefferson was a diplomat in Paris. His thoughts are interrupted by the arrival of his servant, who scrambles to collect the pieces of the Service as he tells the Bishop the ship has struck some rocks and is sinking. He and the Bishop, carrying the pieces of the Service, fight their way through the crowds of panicked passengers to the deck, where they experience the destruction of the ship.

Mireille arrives at the Bishop's abandoned home, already having sensed that he's gone. Shahin, however, counsels her that there are always ways to follow someone. The Bishop, meanwhile, has survived the destruction of his ship and has arrived in the Channel Islands, where he feels safe from both French and English governments but nonetheless worries about how long he'll have to wait to get to America. While there, he encounters an American citizen, and asks about his American contacts, including

George Washington. The American says he knows them well, but when the Bishop asks him to write a letter of introduction the man wryly says such a letter isn't likely to get the Bishop a positive response. He then introduces himself as Benedict Arnold.

As Mireille searches for signs of the Bishop, she discovers that Philidor (the chess master last referred to in Section 7) is participating in an exhibition chess match. She bullies her way into meet him, and discovers that he is in the company of Wordsworth (the poet last seen in Section 11) and another poet, William Blake. With the nervous Shahin and the watchful Charlot by her side, she challenges Philidor to reveal what he knows about the Montglane Service. To her surprise it's Wordsworth and Blake who have information - they tell her that Voltaire (Sections 3 and 6) worked with the famous scientist Isaac Newton on Richelieu's papers, and that Newton claimed to have decoded the formula in the Service. They tell her that what he discovered was believed to be the formula for what they call "the philosopher's stone," a dry reddish cake of material that when mixed with other elements could perform miracles of alchemy and, ultimately, heal any/all human illnesses - in other words, confer immortality. Suddenly Mireille has an intuition she is in danger, and rushes away, Shahin and Charlot close behind. Shahin draws her into the shadows as a cloaked woman passes accompanied by one of the men Mireille bullied her way past in order to see Philidor. The woman lowers the hood of her cloak, and is astonished to see that the woman strongly resembles Valentine. As Shahin whispers to her that it is "the White Queen," the reader understands that the woman is Catherine Grand.

Back on the Channel Islands, the Bishop develops a friendship with Benedict Arnold, a friendship that culminates with Arnold telling the Bishop that several efforts have been made by American thinkers to decipher the code in the Montglane Service. The most successful of these efforts was made by Benjamin Franklin, who passed on the information he uncovered to his fellow Freemasons.

Section 19 Analysis

The title of this section, and the action of one of its narrative lines (the development of the relationship between the Bishop and the White Queen) can be seen as having echoes of the title and situation in Section 3, in which the Bishop loses some of his strength after falling under the sensual, intimate spell cast by Valentine. It's interesting to note in this context that the American with whom the Bishop comes in contact on the Channel Islands, Benedict Arnold, is an infamous traitor - in America, his name is in fact synonymous for treachery. What exactly his betrayal was is not the concern of the analysis - what is of concern is the fact that the Bishop himself can also be seen as a traitor, betraying what he claims to be his unconditional love and desire for Mireille with the White Queen. Yes, he tells himself his actions are justified so he can get his hands on her piece of the Service - there is the sense, however, that this is merely a rationalization for his inability to control his sexual desires.

Benedict Arnold is, as mentioned, another of the many historical personages populating the novel. Others in this section are Wordsworth and Blake, Philidor, Jefferson, Newton

and Richelieu. This section contains another of the more skillful blendings of history and fiction in the novel, as Newton - who, as history records, had an intense and varied interest in all things scientific - is portrayed as having discovered the secret encoded in the Montglane Service. It is the legendary Philosopher's Stone, a source of eternal life. This point of information is key, in that Mireille and the reader now both know their ultimate goal - possession of this powerful secret. It's important to note here that Catherine is the only principal character, in either timeline, who doesn't know this secret. Here again, the reader knows something a character does not, and is placed into a position of suspense waiting for her to find out. In other words, the author is again employing a narrative technique used frequently in stories of this genre.

There is a significant parallel in this section between the two narrative lines - between Mirelle's and Catherine's quest. Both have, by this point, made significant incursions into white territory - Catherine into El-Marad's lair in Algeria, Mireille into the White Queen's country. Once again the novel defines their quests as essentially the same.

The Freemasons make another shadowy appearance in this section (their last was in Section 5, in the warning about their power received by Catherine the Great). Their presence remains shadowy, a threat that never fully materializes. This aspect of the story can be seen as a manifestation of the technique of misdirection (creating possibilities for conflict when, in fact, the main conflict is elsewhere), or as another example of the author creating complication for its own sake (typical of this genre). It might also be seen as an example of the author's attempts to awaken in the reader's mind even the smallest belief that this story might have actually happened. Finally, it might, unfortunately, also be seen as an example of what seems to be becoming an authorial habit - bringing in actualities for the sake of showing off the quality and depth of research conducted for the book.

Section 20

Section 20 Summary

"The Eighth Square"

The title and quote of this section refer to the moment at which a pawn on one side of a chess game arrives at the opposite end of the game board and is crowned a queen. Both the quote and title can be seen as a reference to the action of this section, the one preceding and the one following, in which both Catherine and Mireille arrive at their respective places of fullest power and assume their positions as Black Queens in their respective games.

June 1973. Catherine and Carioca make it to shore, where a patrolling soldier immediately discovers them. Catherine attempts to bully her way past him, but the soldier explains that the hotel is secure because of a conference being sponsored by OPEC - the same conference at which Catherine is supposed to be presenting the computer model she's constructed for Kamel. Catherine produces her identification, the soldier takes her to her apartment where she can clean up, and then taking Carioca and the pieces of the Service with her, she goes into the conference, where Kemal, in the company of several other officials, is surprised and glad to see her. As the conference continues around them, they manage to confer in whispers and plan to rescue Lily, who Catherine says is being held prisoner in the port where she and Catherine confronted El-Marad. Meanwhile, both Kamel and Catherine are surprised at the ostentatious arrival of Muammar Khaddafi, military leader of Libya, who is attending the conference and indicates that he knows Catherine, referring to her as "the one." Too intent upon their plans to be distracted for long, Catherine and Kamel take Kamel's government car in search of Lily. During the drive, Kamel tells Catherine that he is part of the Game, playing on the Black Side - and that Minnie is his stepmother, having married his father, the then Black King.

Catherine, Kamel and Carioca arrive at El-Marad's headquarters, where they stage a successful surprise assault on El-Marad and Sharrif, who is about to use violence to interrogate Lily. Catherine uses the heavy bag of Service pieces as a weapon. Carioca's fetish for ankle biting and Kamel's prowess at fisticuffs combine to subdue El-Marad, his henchmen and Sharrif, and free Lily. As they race off in Kamel's car with Sharrif in hot pursuit, Kamel gives them directions for a secret route to the Casbah and Minnie's home. As they drive, Kamel tells Catherine and Lily that Therese and her children (Harry's maid Valerie) and Mahad (the guide that first led Catherine and Lily to Minnie) are all in the game as well. They arrive at the Casbah and are shown to Minnie's private quarters, where they are surprised to see Solarin. There is no time for explanations, however, as Minnie demands to see the pieces of the Service and Catherine shows them to her. Minnie takes a moment to enjoy seeing them again, and then tells Catherine that her next task is to take them (and the cloth cover, which she hands over) to America, where they will be reunited with the nine pieces there - which she says are

in Mordecai's possession. She bids a tearful farewell to Solarin (whom she calls Sasha), tells Catherine that arrangements have been made for them all to be transported by ship to America, and bids them all farewell, telling Kamel to keep them safe. As Catherine, Lily, Carioca, Kamel and Solarin all make their way to port, hurrying in order to evade an approaching sandstorm, Catherine asks Solarin what his relationship is to Minnie. He tells her that Minnie is his beloved grandmother.

Section 20 Analysis

This section is among the most action packed of the novel, featuring the brawl in what Kamel describes as "El-Marad's summer home" in which Lily is rescued. One of the key noteworthy elements here is Catherine's use of the pieces of the Service, with the physical violence she does to the White Team with them serving as a metaphor for the violence the Pieces would do in an actual chess game. There is also the possibility that this metaphor can be extended to the violence that the human race might do to itself if the wrong side gained control of the Service's power and used it for the wrong reasons.

Another noteworthy element in this section is the appearance of Muammar Khaddafi, the real life dictator of the African state of Libya. This is one of the very few, if not the only, occasion in which the technique of incorporating an actual person into the narrative takes place in the contemporary/Catherine storyline. Unlike many of the historical personages in the past/Mireille narrative, Khaddafi doesn't play a direct role in the action. In fact, on first glance there seems to be little real reason for him to be there at all, other than giving the OPEC meeting a sense of realism and danger. Upon closer examination, however, the value of his presence deepens when his comment about Catherine being "the one" is examined. It seems possible from this comment that he knows she has been named as the new Black Queen, which would mean that he is a player on the White Side, and probably a highly placed one. Khaddafi in life is a powerful player in African politics; therefore his presence here implies that he is just as powerful player in the Game.

Two surprises conclude this section, both adding layers of mystery and suspense to the action. The first is Minnie's revelation that several pieces of the Service are in Mordecai's possession. The second is Solarin's revelation that Minnie is his grandmother. Questions raised at this point include how Mordecai came to have the pieces and what he's done with them, and what exactly is Solarin's story - if Minnie is in Algiers, how did he come to be in Russia? By placing these revelations at the end of this section, the author is again employing the technique at leaving the action at a high point of reader intrigue, and increasing that intrigue by returning to the past/Mireille narrative.

Section 21

Section 21 Summary

"The Silence before the Storm"

The title of this section is based on an excerpt from its quote, a section from a poem by William Wordsworth in which he refers to a sense of power gathering before a windstorm.

Vermont, May 1796. Four years after leaving France for America, the Bishop has been reduced to selling land to French immigrants - the American authorities, while respecting his background, are all too aware of the charges of treason awaiting him in France and have given him no political or social room to do more than just survive. He has, however, received a letter from Germaine, last heard of in Section 9 as having escaped the terror, now back in France and more politically active than ever. In it she promises him safety and prosperity if he returns. Narration reveals that he has made plans to do so, and also that he has heard nothing of Mireille for four years. He has, as a result, decided to bury the pieces of the Montglane Service - in a cavern in the Green Hills in Vermont—and, at the end of this part of this section, does so.

Russia, 1796. As Catherine the Great lies dying, her lover Plato (last seen in Section 5) worries about what's to become of him when Catherine's despotic, insane son Paul (Section 13) inherits her kingdom. Meanwhile the Abbess sits at Catherine's bedside as Catherine slips closer and closer to death, praying that she regains consciousness long enough to reveal what she did with the Black Queen. It never happens; Catherine dies, Paul assumes power, and the Abbess comes close to panic, a feeling that intensifies when Paul visits her in her chamber, reveals that he has the Black Queen, and threatens to throw the Abbess in prison if he doesn't tell him how to obtain the other pieces. As the Abbess stalls for time, Paul taunts her with his plans for the future, including a humiliating burial for Catherine and equal humiliation for Plato - banishment from the kingdom. He tells the Abbess that she has until after the funeral to decide what to do, and leaves. The Abbess quickly writes a letter to Mireille, whom she knows to be alive and in contact with the bank in London where the Abbess deposited money for her use (Section 15). As she plans to hand the letter to Plato, who she intends to send to London, she sews the Service Cloth into her robes and draws, from memory, a diagram of the Service's board and the symbols on it onto her skirt.

Paris, 1797. At a glamorous ball hosted by the Bishop and Germaine in honor of Napoleon, now a war hero, David and Napoleon are both introduced to Catherine Grand, who introduces herself as "The Woman from India." David, who understands the implications of this description, seems shocked, a reaction that the Bishop attributes to Catherine's resemblance to Valentine. His comments lead to reminiscences about Valentine and Mireille, reminiscences that in turn startle Napoleon. He withdraws with the Bishop and David, and as the three men compare notes the Bishop discovers that

Mireille gave birth to what he assumes is his child, David discovers that Catherine the Great is dead and the Abbess has disappeared, and the Bishop realizes that David has an idea what happened to Mireille's pieces. Most importantly, David tells the Bishop and Napoleon that before Robespierre died he told David that the five missing nuns sought by Mireille and Valentine (Section 15) were killed by "The White Queen," for whom Robespierre and Marat both worked, and that Robespierre also called her "The Woman from India."

Section 21 Analysis

The title and quote at the beginning of this section function on several levels. The first is as a reference to the moments of calm in this section before the emotional storm between Mireille and the Bishop in Section 23, as well as to the calm in this section that presages the near-fatal ocean storm encountered by Catherine and Solarin in the following section. The second level of function can be found in the source of the quote - the real life poet William Wordsworth, who makes a couple of fictionalized appearances in *The Eight* (Sections 11 and 19). The incorporation of his writing here reinforces the previously discussed link between fiction and fact - that they are, in some ways, indispensable to each other, with fact giving context to fiction and fiction illuminating the meaning (spiritual, emotional, universal) of fact. This link, as previously discussed, can be seen as a manifestation of the novel's thematic focus on the interrelationship of all things, physical and spiritual and intellectual, universal and personal, past and present, fact and fiction.

The essential purpose of this section is to provide information to both the reader and the characters. The American sequence reveals a possible answer for the question posed at the end of the previous section about how Mordecai got hold of so many pieces of the Service - it would seem that he located and dug up those hidden by the Bishop. Exactly how and when this occurred, or may have occurred, is never explicitly defined. It does, however, seem that this is the most likely explanation. In a similar fashion, the Paris sequence is essentially about David, the Bishop and Napoleon all getting information about Mireille, Robespierre and the White Queen that will affect their actions in Section 23.

The Russian sequence, by contrast, contains more plot than information, as the Abbess, her secrets, and the Service itself are placed in direct danger from Paul, yet another ambitious power seeker. The Abbess' actions here are the catalyst for, and therefore foreshadow, the action in Section 23, in which the cloth she sews into her dress is used by Mireille and her allies to decode the secret of the Service.

Section 22

Section 22 Summary

"The Storm"

The title refers to the literal storm endured by Catherine, Lily and Solarin on their journey to America. The first of two quotes at the beginning of this section is from a work by William Blake, imagining a prophecy about the future violent destiny of America. The second quote is from a Greek philosopher, inspired by a terrible inner storm to feel less alone.

June 1973. Catherine, Solarin, Lily and Carioca board the boat chartered for them by Minnie. Solarin pilots it out to sea as Catherine and Lily collapse from exhaustion and lack of food. They're suddenly awakened by jarring motions of the boat; it's been caught in the storm they were attempting to flee. Lily is too seasick to help, so Catherine secures the pieces of the Service and goes up on deck to help Solarin who, as she arrives, is about to be washed overboard. She hauls him to safety, they struggle together to save the ship, and gradually emerge from the storm. The ship is a wreck but still sails, Solarin has been wounded, Lily is barely conscious - but they're alive. As Catherine tends Solarin's injuries, however, something happens between them: a release of feeling and energy that in spite of their precarious position leads to them making passionate love (see "Quotes," p. 488). When they finish, Solarin points out the land they're approaching and says they're in bigger trouble than they thought - the storm has blown them too far off course to make the rendezvous Kamel had arranged for them to get to America. He proposes an alternative - put in at a concealed port on a small nearby island, make repairs and get in stores, and then sail across the Atlantic to America. He tells Catherine and Lily that at that time of year, the Atlantic Ocean is at its calmest. Catherine, eager to spend more time getting to know her new lover agrees, as does Lily.

As the days and weeks pass, the ship is repaired, Lily and Catherine replenish their bodies and spirits, and the relationship between Catherine and Solarin deepens. One night the subjects they've all been avoiding come up - the pieces, the Game, and the formula represented by the Service. Together they reason out the relationship between the various components of the game (the board, the pieces, the cloth), and the relationship between music, the game and physics. They deduce that the placement of pieces on the board in some kind of ax-shaped figure eight (similar to the shape spotted by Lily and Catherine in Section 17) will provide the key information for the formula, which Catherine suggests will lead to the creation of the philosopher's stone. They stay up all night to determine what configuration the pieces should be placed in, using what they've got of the Service as well as Robespierre's diagram (Section 15, Part 2) which Mireille coped into her journal, to come up with what seems to them to be the only possibility. They agree that the only way to test their theory is to collect the rest of the

pieces and the board (which remains in Russia) and test it. With that, they begin their months-long journey to America.

Section 22 Analysis

The title of this section, as discussed, refers to the stormy, near-fatal weather encountered by Catherine, Solarin and Lily in this section. When juxtaposed with the second quote, it can also be seen as referring to the storm of emotion that breaks out into sexual and romantic union between Catherine and Solarin. The second quote, meanwhile, foresees and foreshadows the storm of conflict that awaits Catherine upon her return to America, and her assumption of the title of Black Queen there. At the same time, the quote from Blake functions on a similar level to the quote from Wordsworth at the beginning of Section 21- as a reinforcement of the thematically relevant portrayal of the interrelationship between fact and fiction.

The development of the romantic/sexual relationship between Solarin and Catherine can be seen as a manifestation, and/or a positive side effect, of Catherine's quest. As previously discussed her story is, on some level, a version of the traditional quest myth and as such one of its spiritual/emotional outcomes is a deepening sense of inner truth. On the novel's primary level of focus, Catherine's inner truth is defined by her assumption of the role of Black Queen. It may be that the development of a deeply felt sexual and emotional relationship is another aspect of this truth: she is becoming a more fully rounded, more broadly experienced woman. The point is not made to suggest that without a man Catherine is less of a woman or less fulfilled, but rather to suggest that by enjoying sexual and emotional intimacy she taps into an additional, deeper source of emotional and spiritual strength. This female power is embodied in, among others, the statues of the White Queen encountered by Mireille (Section 13) and the female hunter encountered by Catherine and Lily (Section 17), as well as the female falcon referred to by Nim (see "Quotes," p. 143).

Further to this point, it's possible to see yet another parallel between past and present here. The process of Mireille's awakening to her full power, after all, began shortly after (and possibly as the result of) her making love with the Bishop. Catherine, following lovemaking with Solarin, follows a similar path into fully realized womanhood and embodiment of the Black Queen.

The other key purpose of this section is to narrate the discovery, or at least the possible discovery, of the secret of the Montglane Service. Previously discussed theories about the relationship between matter and spirit, between music and physics, between matter and emptiness, all come into play, as well as several of the many physical components of the puzzle - the cloth, the pieces, the map in Mireille's journal. In all of this, the novel's key thematic focus on convergence and universal interrelationship comes vividly into play, defining action in terms of theme and theme in terms of action.

Section 23

Section 23 Summary

"The Secret"

The title of this section refers to the secret of the Montglane Service. The quotes at the beginning of this section refer to the ultimate realization of the power of numbers - that through the proper and enlightened manipulation of mathematics, deep universal truths can and will be understood.

October 1798. Alexander, grandson of Catherine the Great and fated to be Russia's ruler, learns from his hysterical father Paul (Catherine's heir) that the Abbess is imprisoned, and has for years refused to speak of the Service. Paul tells Alexander he has one of its pieces, ranting hysterically about how it represents the power of the Service and how he needs that power to defeat Napoleon, who is marching with an army across Europe. Upon leaving his father, Alexander rides deep into the forest where he meets Mireille, Shahin and Charlot. Dialogue between Alexander and Mireille indicates that Mireille has been in Russia for some time and that Alexander has been trying to get information about the Abbess from Paul in her (Mireille's) name. He then leads them to the Abbess' prison, where Alexander's influence gets them through the door, and out again with the weak and dying Abbess. Back in the forest, and as Mireille weeps, the Abbess musters enough strength to let them know that the Cloth from the Service is stitched into her dress. They retrieve both the cloth and the diagram of the board she drew onto her dress. The Abbess dies, telling Shahin that she is going to meet "this Allah of [his]" and promising to give him Shahin's love. Mireille vows to give her a Christian burial.

January 1799. The Bishop is shocked by the sudden appearance of Mireille in London. Overwhelmed by long suppressed passion, he makes love with her, vowing to give her another child. Afterwards, they discuss everything that's happened, including Mireille's having sent Shahin and Charlot to Egypt to confront and stop Napoleon, whom she realizes is in search of the truth about the Service. Meanwhile, the Bishop reveals that he buried eight pieces of the Service in America and also that he's become involved with the White Queen, who he says has seven other pieces. Upon hearing this, Mireille vows to regain control of the pieces and end the Game at any cost, which, as she suggests to the Bishop, includes losing him. She tells him that to get control of the White Queen's pieces he must marry her - at that time, when she married a woman's property became her husband's. The Bishop protests - as an official of the church he cannot marry, and also says he cannot marry where he does not love. Mireille tells him that to end the Game they must both be prepared to do anything.

February 1799. In Egypt, Shahin and Charlot confront Napoleon, who rejects the prophecy offered to him by the visionary Charlot - an offering of ultimate power if Napoleon returns immediately to France instead of pursuing his current mission. After

Napoleon has left Shahin explains to Charlot that he (Napoleon) refused his warning because he was afraid (see "Quotes," p. 513), and they continue their journey through Egypt. At one point, as they pass the pyramids, they encounter one of the scientists traveling with Napoleon, who reveals that he's attempting to discover the secret of how the pyramids were constructed. He has a conversation with Shahin, in which Shahin reveals that his people are believers in the ancient, mystic science of numbers. He goes on to explain that one of his people discovered the secret power of the relationship between mathematics, music and alchemy—and encoded it in the Montglane Service.

Section 23 Analysis

This section effectively dramatizes the extremes to which individuals will go to gain power - and in particular, the extremes to which the characters in this novel will go in order to gain, or retain, control of the Service. An example of this is Paul, whose hysteria and determination are perhaps as intense as those of Napoleon, who is just simply more skilled at keeping his emotions under control. Another example can be found in the experience of the Abbess, who is described in narration as having drawn the board of the Service onto her skirt in her own blood. Yet another example is the way in which Mireille, now in full command of her powers and responsibilities as Black Queen, tells the Bishop, the man whom she loves and who loves her, to marry the hated and feared White Queen to gain control of her pieces of the Service - for the Black Side, in the name of good.

There is a very small but very important detail embedded in this section, perhaps in the same way that jewels are embedded into the various components of the Montglane Service. This is the reference by the Abbess, in her moment of death, to Allah - a comment that, for someone as advanced in the Christian hierarchy of the time as the Abbess, is close to heresy. On one level, the comment shows how truly spiritually advanced, how compassionate and sensitive, the Abbess truly is - she is, in this moment, a truly enlightened woman. On another level, however, that of the novel's thematic development, her comment is a manifestation of the novel's emphasis on universal connection and interrelationship. In this comment the Abbess expresses the belief that ultimately, God and Allah are one - that they are the unified, and unifying, spirit at the core of all existence. In the theology of the time, and perhaps in both the Christian and Muslim theologies of today, this statement might be seen as radical. On the other hand, it can also be seen as an manifestation of both the power of the Service and the philosophy behind the Black Side's determination to control it, in both time frames - that philosophy being one of transcendent, universal understanding. This in turn can perhaps be seen as the real "secret" referred to in the section's title - that the science/mystery/art of alchemy, the formula for which is encoded into the Service, is in fact a formula for peace.

Section 24, Part 1

Section 24, Part 1 Summary

"Endgame"

In chess, the term "endgame" is used to describe a formalized series of moves by which one opponent seals and confirms victory of another. The quote at the beginning of this section is among the longest single quotes in the book, and describes a game of chess in epic poetic terms, commenting at one point that the pieces in the game have no idea that their moves are being plotted by an unseen, omnipotent player - here referred to as destiny.

September 1973. Catherine, Lily and Solarin arrive in New York harbor on Labor Day. Their boat blends in with a number of other boats filled with holiday partiers, so they're able to slip in and dock without having to go through customs. They agree that Lily should go and fetch Mordecai and his pieces and rendezvous with Catherine and Solarin at Nim's. Catherine leaves a message for Nim; she and Solarin catch a train and are met at the station by Nim, who expresses his immense relief at seeing Catherine (having lost track of them after the storm in Algiers) and his immense joy at seeing Solarin, who is also deeply joyful. The deep emotions in the two men surprise Catherine, who becomes even more surprised when they reveal that they are brothers.

As they drive to Nim's home they tell Catherine their story - how their peaceful life in Russia was interrupted by the arrival of Minnie, who then called herself Minerva, who says she's being pursued, and how she presents the boys' father with three pieces of the Service, which she says she gathered from across Russia. They tell how she bullied their father into helping the entire family escape, how he left to prepare a boat for them, how Minnie and their mother referred mysteriously to the Game, and how they and Minnie escaped, their mother fending off their pursuers. They also describe how Minnie separated the boys, giving to Nim pages from what Nim describes as a leather bound book (apparently Mireille's diary) and telling him to run for the boat.

Nim makes it and waits with his father for Solarin and Minnie, who never arrive. As they escape to America, Nim's father tells him that he promised his mother years ago to protect whatever pieces might come into their possession no matter what the cost. Nim tells Catherine that he later learned that his father had known about his mother's connection to the Game when they were married, and had the boat prepared for whenever the Game re-entered their lives. Minnie and Solarin, meanwhile, hide in the forest until the danger was passed. Minnie then put Solarin into an orphanage and went back to try to rescue his mother, but failed and disappeared. Their father died soon after reaching America, so Nim and Solarin were each left to grow up on their own a world apart.

As Catherine, Nim and Solarin continue their conversation, it's revealed that Minnie has left the Game and replaced herself with Catherine; that each brother thinks the other is in love with Catherine; and that someone has to go back to Russia to try to find the Service's chessboard. Just as Solarin passes Catherine a note given to him by Minnie for her, Nim is contacted on a secret phone line - not by Mordecai, whom everyone expects, but by Harry. His conversation with Catherine reveals that he's with Mordecai, and also provides hints that make Catherine realize that he is the Black King, and has been manipulating her all along into becoming the Black Queen. She also realizes that that Harry's wife, Blanche Regine, is the modern White Queen, and that he was persuaded to marry her - "just as Mireille," Catherine realizes, "persuaded [the Bishop] to marry the Woman from India."

Harry asks where Lily is, indicating she hasn't shown up to meet Mordecai as planned. Catherine hangs up and gets Nim to check his messages. He discovers one from Lily in which she, apparently terrified, tells how she tried to get a spare set of car keys out of the red-and-black lacquered chest (see Section 9), discovered it was locked, tried to hammer the handles off to get in, and discovered that at least two of the handles were pieces of the Service. She realizes she is about to be discovered, left in a hurry, and is too frightened to go back. Catherine tells Nim and Solarin they have to go, and as they collect the pieces and rush out, she calls Harry and tells them to meet them at the apartment. As Nim, Solarin and Catherine race to the meeting, Catherine reveals that when she spoke with Harry he told her that Kamel had arrived, and that he (Harry) felt that together the group of them could overcome Blanche, Llewellyn (another player on the White Side), and collect the pieces from the lacquered chest. As they speak they realize that the end of the Game is at hand - "nine pieces at Mordecai's," Catherine narrates, "[plus] the eight in [her] bag, and the six Lily said she'd seen at the apartment. That was enough to control the game - and maybe to decipher the formula as well. Whoever won this round would have it cinched."

When the Black Side (Catherine, Nim and Solarin) arrive at the apartment they discover Blanche has arranged for Sharrif, Brodsky (the Russian Secret Service chief, Section 6) and Hermanold (the director of the chess match, Section 4) to kidnap Harry as he walked to the apartment in an attempt to force Catherine to hand over her pieces of the Service. As Blanche talks, Llewellyn carves the last pieces out of the lacquered set. As Lily, Nim and Solarin unobtrusively position themselves about the room, however, Catherine tells Lily she has some extra "pieces" of her own in play - Mordecai, Kamel and Valerie (the maid - Section 9), who she told to enter the apartment by the servants' entrance. At that moment confrontation explodes, during which Nim is shot, Blanche, Llewellyn, Hermanold and Sharrif are subdued, Harry is freed, and the six pieces are retrieved. In the aftermath, Solarin passionately kisses Catherine and tells her he has to go to Russia to retrieve the Service's board so the game can truly be over. Harry, however, comments sadly that the game will never be over.

Section 24, Part 1 Analysis

This section of the novel develops its climax at an ever-increasing level of intensity, as pieces of various puzzles begin to fall into place. True identities are revealed, true motivations uncovered, and secrets brought into the open. In short, all the complications, all the theories, clues, and pieces of information carefully stitched together throughout the novel are now, finally, coming together to form a complete tapestry. Here, as is the case throughout the other parts of this section, the novel's thematic emphasis on convergence can be seen as coming into play - here again, action illuminates theme, theme defines action. In other words, the action here is both a narrative and thematic climax, the intensity of which is dramatized and amplified by the writing style in which events are described. Essentially, style shifts in this section from the more analytical/intellectual tone of much of the contemporary narrative and into a more active, energy-and-conflict driven tone more appropriate to the climax of a thriller/suspense novel. This use of language peaks in the confrontation between White and Black Sides in Harry's apartment, a section in which the writing also suggests that the movement of individuals throughout the apartment is akin to the movement of pieces on a chessboard.

Minnie's choice of the name "Minerva" is an interesting one, Minerva being the Roman name for Athena, the classical Greek goddess of wisdom and of war. Minnie, as the Black Queen, embodies both these aspects of the goddess - acting out of wisdom in preserving the lives of her grandsons (the story told here), and also acting out of wisdom in choosing Catherine as her heir. Later, of course, it's revealed that she is in fact the now ageless Mireille, whose hard-won wisdom manifests in transcendence of her determination for violent revenge. Meanwhile, the story of how Nim and Solarin became, and have remained, separated can be seen as a metaphor for the experience of the Service - separated for so long, but with reunion bringing a rejuvenation of power.

All that being said, in spite of the apparent victory of the White Side, Harry's comment at the end of this section seems to be the most accurate expression of the overall situation. This particular manifestation of the Game, the struggle between those who intend to gain power for good or for evil, may be over, but the universal struggle between such forces will last forever. It is this aspect to eternity, this aspect to interrelation and balance, that is perhaps the ultimate expression of the universal truth embodied in the figure 8 / ? - life/death, birth/destruction, eternity and finite (human) life.

Section 24, Part 2

Section 24, Part 2 Summary

Harry, Kamel and Nim make arrangements to send the White Side to Algeria, where they will be charged with plotting to destroy OPEC - something they may very well have been involved with. Meanwhile, Mordecai leads the rest of the Black Side (Catherine, Lily and Solarin) back to his home, where he keeps three pieces brought to America by Nim's father. Catherine asks where her eight pieces came from, and Mordecai tells her that story is told in something else he has to show her - the pages Minnie ripped from the leather bound book and gave to Nim when they escaped from Russia. At Mordecai's house, they place their collected pieces (all but six of the entire set) on a table, where they sit gleaming and beautiful and powerful, with the Cloth, as Mordecai and Lily prepare dinner and Solarin and Catherine read the pages - the last entry in Mireille's journal.

The pages tell how Mireille gave birth to a daughter she formally named Elisa but nicknamed Charlotte, in memory of Charlotte Corday. They also tell how Mireille, in the company of Shahin and Charlot and with the help of Newton's analytical papers, procured for her by Blake (Section 19), uncovered the secret of the formula in the Service. The prophetic Charlot pronounces that the formula can only be put into full effect on the day of her birthday, April 4 - the formula for creating not only the philosopher's stone, but using it to create an elixir of immortality, foretold in the many various religions and myths that spoke of "the eight" gods, or paths to eternal life. The pages speak of Mireille's last meeting with the Bishop, at which he bitterly speaks of his ongoing love for her and his having obtained the White Queen's pieces of the Service in her name. He tells Mireille he'll give her the pieces only if she gives him Elisa and Charlot. She agrees, knowing she can never be a good mother to them, but Charlot tells him he (Charlot) must return to the desert to fulfill his destiny. He also tells the Bishop that he will gain great power, but only if he betrays Napoleon to Alexander of Russia in exchange for the last piece of the Service - the Black Queen. The Bishop agrees, and Mireille's pages narrate how Napoleon fell, how the Black Queen came into her possession, and how she labored with the help of trusted physicists and the drawing of the board on the Abbess's robes (Section 21) to solve the formula.

Finally, she says, after thirty years of work they uncovered the truth, created the Philosopher's Stone, and prepared to distill it into the Elixir of Life. Mireille says that before she completed the preparations she traveled to Algiers and, with the aid of another of the Bishop's illegitimate children (the painter Delacroix), buries several pieces of the service (the pieces later found by Catherine and Lily, guided by the painting done by Delacroix to mark the burial spot - Section 17). At that moment, watched by Shahin, Charlot and Delacroix, Mireille prepares the Elixir and drinks.

At that moment the journal entry concludes, and Catherine is in shock, wondering several things - principally whether the 8-shaped helix of DNA/genetic material recently

discovered by scientists is part of the Service's formula, part of the relationship between music, physics and life. Suddenly she pulls out the letter from Minnie given to her by Solarin, and realizes that the handwriting in the letter and the journal are the same. She and Solarin read the letter, which reveals that Kamel is descended from Shahin, Nim and Solarin are descended from Charlot, and that Minnie and Mireille are one and the same. The implications are clear - that the potion Mireille drank was, in fact, an elixir of immortality, and that the formula in the Montglane Service, long thought to be a rumor, does in fact work. The letter also states that Catherine, now the Black Queen, has a choice - destroy the pieces and eliminate the danger posed by the Service forever, or recreate the formula.

Harry and Nim, who have just arrived, join Solarin, Mordecai and Lily as they talk through the options with Catherine - who admits to feeling a mystical bond with the Service which she says, in narration, prevents her from destroying it. She instead announces her decision to bury the Service, in the hopes that "in a thousand years ... there'll be a nicer crop of humans on this planet who'll know how to use a tool like this for the good of all."

Nim wonders whether it might be best to make the Service's formula common knowledge, but Catherine reminds him that there are dangerous people in the world whom she doesn't want living forever. Harry and the others compliment her on her strength, courage and hope. Nim and Solarin announce their intention to journey together to Russia to find the board, and Mordecai, who has been pouring champagne, proposes a toast to the Service. Harry proposes a toast to the friendship of Catherine and Lily. Catherine proposes a toast to the Game - the Game they've just won, for another round. As she drinks her champagne, Catherine wonders what it would be like if she were drinking the Elixir of Life instead.

Section 24, Part 2 Analysis

The final pieces of the puzzle, for both Catherine and for the reader, fall into place in this section, the point at which its central theme relating to convergence and interrelationship is explored in a very interesting way. In essence, the story portrays Catherine and Mireille arriving at the same, apparently pre-destined point at the same time - Mireille does it in her journal while Catherine does it in her present day experience, but they are both in the same place. They are both at the point of putting together the secret of the Service and debating what to do after they uncover it. Once again the parallels between their respective journeys are apparent.

Another repeated motif, another "once again" moment, is the reference to the painter Delacroix, one of the most important painters in French art history. Here, for the last time, the novel portrays the convergence of fact/fiction as part of the overall, eternal and multifaceted interrelations at work in the universe. This interrelation, in turn, is once again embodied by one last manifestation of the figure 8 / ?, this one the most scientifically contemporary in the book - the DNA spiral helix, or what some might say is a microcosm of infinity. The description is not inappropriate - what, after all, carries the

human race forward in time and space but the genetic material encoded in the DNA of every human being?

There are a few questions left unanswered as the novel concludes. First, why does Minnie not refer to Robespierre's diagram as one of the sources of information she uses to decode the Service? She has it (copied into her journal), and Catherine (in the contemporary timeline) has already proved its usefulness. Why does Minnie not use it? Second, if Catherine is so determined to keep the Service hidden, why is it necessary for Solarin and Nim to go back to Russia to find the Board? It's already hidden. Finally, why does no one realize that they don't necessarily need to have the complete Service in order to encode its secret? Surely Minnie/Mireille, who has already decoded it, remembers enough to help them at least come close to the missing information.

One possible answer to this last question might be the ultimate manifestation of the novel's theme of universality, and might also provide an explanation of why Catherine isn't just told everything about the Game she's playing in the first place. Throughout the journeys of both Catherine and Mireille, in situation after situation they are presented with the opportunity to make choices. It's these choices, and the morality motivating them, that contribute to their ultimate assumption of the role and responsibilities of the Black Queen. For Catherine, her choices are judged by those observing her and who guide her to her destiny, while Mireille's acceptance of hers emerges solely from herself as an individual. The point is, however, that they both chose "good," for lack of a better phrase, of their own free will - they had, in other words, free choice, and their choices and motivations are, ultimately, the focus of the novel. This, in Christian theology and teaching, is the ultimate manifestation of God's love - He gave His human creations (and some would say some of His animal creations) the power of independent thought, the power to choose, one of the few universal aspects of each person's existence, the one that defines humans as humans. In *The Eight*, the key manifestation of this power is the choice made when confronted with the power of the Service. Mireille is confronted by it, and in the book's final moments, Catherine is as well, the idea being that in the moment of choice, is manifesting the ultimate universal power that will shape the course of the infinity to come—that being the power to choose.

Characters

Mireille (The Fortune Teller, Minnie)

This character is the protagonist of the narrative set in the past. She initially appears to be a secondary character - her personality is more retiring and her role in the action less direct than that of Valentine, her cousin, friend, and ally. When Valentine is killed, however, Mireille's strength of character begins to emerge - she takes what control she can of the situations in which she finds herself, and when the source of that control isn't readily apparent she finds ways to make it so. In some ways, then, it's not as much a surprise as the novel seems to want it to be when, around the mid-point of the novel (Section 15), Charlotte Corday tells Mireille that it is in fact she and not Valentine who was the focus of the Abbess' plans. The Abbess' apparent faith in Mireille is more than amply rewarded as she (Mireille) displays increasing determination and courage as she struggles to accept the responsibilities thrust upon her.

It's important to note Mireille's character transformation Mireille during this struggle. At first, her motivation for getting control of the Montglane Service is revenge—the desire for which is the dark side of the Service's apparent power. Later, however, she comes to realize how dangerous that desire is, not just for her but for anyone who comes in contact with the Service, and consequently develops the more selfless desire to protect the world from similar, power-and-revenge hungry inclinations. Meanwhile, Mireille appears in the "present" narrative in three guises, including the Fortune Teller, whose prophecies fuel Catherine's curiosity and motivate her actions throughout the "present" narrative, and the dancer in the nightclub Catherine visits when she first arrives in Algiers. Most importantly, Mireille also turns out to be Minnie, who at first is believed to by a mysterious, powerful woman but who turns out to be the essentially immortal Black Queen, a title she gained as Mireille two hundred years in the past and which she passes on to Catherine in the present. As Minnie, she continues to exhibit the characteristics that motivated and defined Mireille - determination, integrity, and passion. As Minnie, however, she also exhibits fatigue, a sense that she's tired of the game and indeed tired of life. It's ironic, therefore, that having partaken of what the novel calls "the elixir of life" she is fated to be essentially immortal, fatigued forever.

Valentine

This character is Mireille's companion in the first quarter of the novel. Both she and Mireille begin the story as novice nuns at Montglane Abbey - both napve, both uncertain of their religious calling, both obedient to the will of the Abbess. Valentine is the more impetuous, the more direct, and the more impractical of the two girls. These characteristics get her into trouble and eventually lead to her death (Section 7), the direct result of impulsively venturing into the angry crowd to meet Sister Claude before judging the dangerous, violent mood of the crowd first.

The Abbess

The Abbess is the head of Montglane Abbey, and the keeper of the secret of the Montglane Service. She sets the action of the "past" narrative in motion when she disinters the Service from its burying place and distributes its various pieces among the nuns in her charge. Her attempts to protect the Service and the world from each other lead her to Russia, where she attempts to enlist the aid of Empress Catherine but ends up, after several years, in prison. In terms of her character she is something of a paradox - full of insight, foresight and apprehension, she also has certain blind spots in her vision of the world and the place of the Service in it. For example, while she manages to think ahead far enough to make preparations for preserving the plan of the Service's board and its cloth cover (Section 21), she fails to anticipate the depth of the lust for power in both Catherine and Paul, her heir. Nevertheless, she is a woman of exceptional determination and integrity.

The Bishop of Autun

This character is based on, and given the same name and many of the same physical characteristics as, an actual historical person - Maurice Talleyrand, a politician and philosopher in pre-revolutionary France. He is first spoken of, in Section 1, as a source of pure evil, but as the action of the novel reveals he is actually one of its most complex, shaded characters. He is simultaneously vulnerable and ruthless, capable of passionate love for one woman and indiscriminate sexual desire for all women, a man of God and a man of earthly, fleshly desire.

Ultimately, it's clear that a profound pragmatism is at the core of everything he is - realistically, to restrain one aspect of his character at the expense of another would ultimately lead to suffering, misery and guilt, so he resolves to feel guilt about nothing, accommodate everything, and accept what is for what is. It's important to note that the suffering he experiences as the result of this perspective, particularly the suffering he experiences as the result of his deep love for Mireille and his awareness that she can never be his, is as pragmatically accepted as everything else he experiences. He faces the world and his feelings head on, living life fully and with an unusual kind of integrity.

Catherine Velis

Catherine is the protagonist of the novel's "present' narrative. In her very first appearance (Section 2), she proves herself someone of integrity, when she refuses to illegally manipulate a business deal. In this sense, she is different from Mireille, the "past" protagonist, in that she (Catherine) already knows where her moral center is - Mireille discovers hers over the course of the action. On the other hand, where Mireille is determined and clear about her purpose throughout the book (even though she's less clear about the moral context of that purpose), Catherine spends most of her narrative in the dark; she does what she has to do, but for the most part doesn't know why. Mireille, on the other hand, does. Throughout the novel, depending on the situation,

Catherine is by turns napve or insightful, confused or focused. She is, however, consistent about one thing - she cannot and will not let herself be taken advantage of.

Harry and Mordecai

These two are key characters in the "present" narrative - Harry is a friend of Catherine's, while Mordecai is his father. Early in the novel, they are portrayed as being estranged, but later in the narrative it's revealed that Harry has kept his father away from the rest of the family for his protection. Both Harry and Mordecai are high-ranked players on the Black Side of "the Game," but Blanche and Llewellyn, equally high-ranked players on the opposing White Side, don't know about Mordecai. Therefore, for Harry to keep Mordecai at what Blanche and Llewellyn perceive as a distance is an advantageous game-related position.

Blanche and Llewellyn

These two characters appear, in the novel's early stages, to be both peripheral to the action and superficial in terms of their characters. Later, however, they are both revealed as key players on the power-hungry White Side of "the Game." Llewellyn plays a more overtly direct role in the action, in that he asks Catherine to be an intermediary in his efforts to get pieces of the Montglane Service out of Algeria - but given that Blanche is in fact the White Queen (the leader of the White Side), it stands to reason that Llewellyn's actions are in fact her idea.

Lily and Carioca

Lily is Blanche and Harry's daughter. Catherine reasons late in the narrative that she (Lily) was named for a white flower because Blanche originally hoped that she (Lily) would eventually take her place as White Queen. Harry and Mordecai, however, know differently, and manipulate Lily into willingly playing on the Black Side. Lily is one of the few women grandmasters in chess - a strong player, a feminist, and something of a free spirit, doing what she wants when she wants. An example of this aspect to her character can be found in the fact that she carries her little dog Carioca with her wherever she goes. This comes in handy, at times, since Carioca turns out to be an effective ankle biting weapon in a fight and also an intuitive knower of the truth - it's Carioca, for example, who knows where to find the buried pieces of the Montglane Service.

Hermanold and Fiske

Hermanold plays a key role in the "present" narrative, in that he is the organizer of the chess tournament that sets the events of that narrative in motion. He is a player on the White Side - there is the sense that he, like Llewellyn, acts on orders of Blanche, the White Queen. Among those orders is the command that he bring Fiske to the tournament as a lure to get Solarin out of Russia. Fiske, for his part, is a pawn in "the

Game," an unwitting and unwilling player on the White Side. Nervous, intelligent and neurotic, he leaves himself open for manipulation and sacrifice so that the secret agenda of the White Side remains a secret. Hermanold, meanwhile, shows up in the novel's final sections as an agent of the White Queen's determination to win the Game. He becomes, essentially, a thug - a physically violent manifestation of that determination.

David and Germaine

These characters are both based on historical individuals and both play key roles in the "past" narrative. David's role is more significant, in that he serves as a guardian and refuge for Mireille and Valentine when they first arrive in Paris and later serves as an unwitting source of information about them for those pursuing them. For her part, Germaine is a relatively minor character, but does serve the important function of getting the Bishop safely back to Paris so that he can, in turn, eventually reconnect with David, and subsequently with Mireille.

Alexander Solarin and Ladislaus Nim

These characters are both Catherine's allies in the "present" narrative, although for much of the novel Catherine is inclined to suspect that Solarin is an enemy. Both men are intellectual, both men are significantly gifted chess players, both men are secretive, both men have Russian ancestry - and both men, as it turns out, are brothers whose childhood happiness was sabotaged by manipulations of the Game and who, nevertheless, became heavily involved in playing the Game as adults. They are, perhaps coincidentally and perhaps not, both players on the Black Side - and are both, again perhaps coincidentally and perhaps not - in love with Catherine. Solarin, in fact, becomes her lover. Nim, it seems at both the beginning and at the end, is content to love her in a more platonic, brotherly fashion.

Kamel and Shahin

These two Arab characters both serve as protectors and/or guides of the female protagonists - Kamel in the present, Shahin in the past. Both taciturn, both rich in wisdom and perspective, both powerful, both are players on the Black Side - the side of integrity and wisdom. Later in the novel, Minnie/Mireille reveals that Kamel is, in fact, a descendent of Shahin.

Charlot

There are two characters with this name, both existing in the "past" narrative. The first character, who appears only briefly, is the falcon tamed by Mireille as she crosses the desert. The second, Mireille's son, is named after the first - named appropriately, as it turns out, since Charlot (the boy) has the same gift of far sight as Charlot (the falcon).

The boy's sight, however, is metaphysical - he can see into the future. Later in the book he prophesies future events in the lives of several of the characters, visions that are followed by some and disavowed, to their detriment, by others.

El-Marad

This character is an important antagonist, or opponent, in the "present" narrative. He first appears as a carpet trader encountered by Catherine and Kamel as they search for buried pieces of the Service, but is later revealed to be the White King, a powerful player in the Game. He attempts to trap Catherine and Lily as they leave Algiers, but is ultimately outwitted. Later, he reappears in New York as part of Blanche's plans to wipe out the Black Side and win the Game. This time he is physically defeated and sent back to Algiers for criminal trial. Short sighted and foolish, El-Marad ultimately proves to be a more threatening than effective opponent.

Charlemagne, Richelieu, Voltaire, Catherine the Great, Robespierre, Bach, Euler, Philidor, Marat, Wordsworth, Napoleon, Rousseau, Charlotte Corday, Letizia Bonaparte, Casanova, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Benedict Arnold, Isaac Newton, Blake, Khaddafi, Delacroix

These individuals are real-life historical persons who appear throughout the novel as characters of varying degrees of importance. Among them are rulers (Charlemagne, Catherine), writers (Voltaire, Wordsworth, Blake, Rousseau), politicians (Richelieu, Robespierre, Jefferson), philosopher/politicians (Franklin, Rousseau), composers (Bach, Philidor), scientists (Newton, Euler), warrior/politicians (Napoleon, Khaddafi), a painter (Delacroix), activists (Marat, Corday), a traitor (Benedict Arnold), a famous lover (Casanova), and a mother (Letizia Bonaparte).

It's interesting to note that of all these characters, only Khaddafi appears in the context of the "present" narrative - and only Khaddafi is portrayed as having no direct, overt connection with the Montglane Service. The presence of these characters anchors the novel's action in a particular time and place, and creates a heightened sense of realism - their appearances give the sense that it just might be possible that the events described in the narrative took place. On another level, there is the very clear sense that the author has put a great deal of time and energy into research, working out ways in which the real-life actions and lives of these individuals can shape the novel's action. There is also, unfortunately, a sense of self-consciousness here, the impression that the author is, at times, drawing attention to that research. It's almost as though she is, on some level, saying "Look how clever I am at bringing these people into my story."

Objects/Places

The Abbey of Montglane

The action of the "past" narrative begins here - the home of Mireille, Valentine and the Abbess, the place where the Montglane Service has been hidden, and the place from which its various components are distributed.

The Montglane Service

The Service is a chess set (board, pieces, and cloth cover), the possession of which serves as the focus of conflict in both "past" and "present" narratives. It was originally presented to King Charlemagne, believed to be cursed and therefore hidden, and also believed to be the source of great power and therefore pursued by many (in both past and present) who would use that power for good or evil. It is constructed of gold and silver, its pieces thickly inlaid with precious jewels, and ultimately proves to be the source of a secret formula for "the philosopher's stone" (see below).

The Figure "8"

The number eight appears in several manifestations throughout the novel. It is, essentially, a number associated with various aspects of control and power - from the number of internationally important accounting companies with which Catherine's company (Section 2) is involved to the shape of chess pieces on the Montglane Service that both define the Service's power and the secret formula of the Philosopher's Stone (see below). At the core of all its manifestations, however, is the fact that when placed on its side (?) it is the traditional symbol for "infinity," which is, in turn, the core of the Montglane Service's power. When its secrets are correctly decoded, it provides the formula for the Elixir of Life (see below).

The Cocktail Napkin

When Catherine encounters the Fortune Teller (Section 2), Llewellyn writes the Fortune Teller's prophecy on a cocktail napkin and gives it to Catherine. Later (Section 9), she decodes the message and reveals that it contains several warnings.

Catherine's Painting

After being fired from her job but before being sent to Algeria, Catherine occupies herself with painting (Section 4). One painting is of particular interest - a pale man on a bicycle. Lily recognizes the subject of the painting as a man she's seen outside Catherine's apartment. Catherine herself recognizes the man as someone following her,

follows him in turn, and discovers that he is Solarin, the mysterious Russian chess master. Later, Catherine's ally Nim takes the painting for himself. The novel never explains why, but when it's revealed that Solarin and Nim are brothers (Section 24), it becomes possible to theorize that Nim recognized the man in the painting as his brother and wanted to keep it as a memento.

Lily's Chess Set

The set first appears in Section 4, when Lily takes it out of her purse to play along with Solarin and Fiske during their match. At the end of this section, to make room for Carioca in her bag, she gives the set to Catherine. Pieces of the set play variously significant roles in the action, the most significant occurring in Section 14 when Catherine gives the White Queen from the set to El-Marad's daughter. When he sees the piece, El-Marad (who, as is revealed later, is the Game's White King), believes Catherine to be an emissary from the White Queen (Blanche) and treats her with more respect than otherwise.

Paris

The French capital is the setting for much of the action in the novel's "past" narrative. Its placement at the center of the French Revolution in the late 1700s is particularly important, in that the Revolution was a period of intensely violent upheaval - upheaval that in many ways can be seen as metaphorically representing the upheaval in society that would and / or may result if the secrets of the Montglane Service fell into the wrong hands.

Algeria

This Arab country is the setting for a great deal of action in both "past" and "present" narratives. Protagonists in both narratives (Mireille in the past, Catherine in the present) undergo difficult trials as they struggle to understand the truths of the Game in which they've become involved. In the distant past it was also the mystic source of the universal understanding encoded in the Montglane Service - the understanding of connection between all things, and ways in which that connection can be used for either good or evil.

The Valley of the Statues / The Casbah / The Cave

All three of these places are in Algeria, are essentially similar in physical structure, and are the settings for important, apparently mystical encounters. The Valley, a geological phenomenon deep in the heart of Algieria, is lined with massive, apparently mystically inspired statues and carvings and is the site of a key incident in the "past" narrative. Here Mireille encounters a manifestation of the universal power, the secret of which is encoded in the Montglane Service. This encounter (Section 13) triggers the premature

birth of her son, Charlot, a son who seems in some way to be connected to that power - he is born with the gift of prophecy, a manifestation of that power that transcends time and place. The Casbah, meanwhile, is a maze of narrow streets and crowded buildings deep in the heart of Algiers, the capital of Algeria. Here (Section 14) Catherine encounters her version of the universal power - Minnie/Mireille, who has uncovered the secret of the Montglane Service and has, as is revealed, partaken of the Elixir of Life. She, like Charlot, is connected to the universal power and, as a result of taking the Elixir, lives a life that also transcends time and place.

Finally, the Cave is also found in Algeria, and is the place where Mireille buried several pieces of the Montglane Service. The cave and pieces are discovered by Catherine and Lily in Section 18 after an intense, trying search - a search that, in its adversity and strengthening of those who undertake it, has echoes of Mireille's search in Section 13 and Catherine's search of the Casbah in Section 14.

Corsica

This small European island is the home of the Bonaparte family, with whom Mireille takes refuge after fleeing Paris (Section 11).

Formantera

Another small European island - this one is the place Catherine, Lily and Solarin take refuge after the storm that drove the boat in which they escape from Algeria off course (see Section 22). Here they conduct repairs on the boat, strengthen their personal relationships, and come close to decoding the secret of the Montglane Service.

The Philosopher's Stone and The Elixir of Life

The philosopher's stone is a combination of elements, mixed in a proportion and in a way defined by the Montglane Service, that has the power to perform feats of alchemical transformation. It also has the power, when mixed appropriately with just the right amount of water collected at just the right time, to form a potion (the Elixir of Life) that grants eternal life to anyone who partakes of it.

Themes

The Game

The phrase "the Game" has two principal layers of meaning in *The Eight*, one perhaps more obvious than the other, both of which underline the action in both narrative lines. The first is the game played by the various members of the White and Black Sides for control of the pieces of the Montglane Service. On this level, the Game is defined in terms similar to that of a chess game. The Queens (Mireille and the Woman from India in the past, Minnie/Catherine and Blanche in the present) are the most powerful, but there are several other powerful pieces (the Bishop and the Abbess in the past, Lily and Solarin in the present). There are also a number of relatively weak pawns sacrificed so that other, more powerful pieces might gain more power and freedom (Corday, Robespierre, and Valentine in the past, Valerie and Therese, Fiske and Hermanold in the present). The kings, in chess and in this level of the Game, are relatively powerless and are protected at all costs (it's interesting to note that while the narrative defines the identities of the present Black and White Kings, Harry and El-Marad respectively, it does not identify the Black and White Kings in the past).

On the second level of thematic meaning, however, "the Game" can be seen as a manifestation of the eternal struggle between what might be described as good and evil, with the Black Side fighting to ensure that the Montglane Service is used for good - or, at the very least, not used for evil by the White Side. There is a significant irony here, as pointed out by Lily (see "Quotes," p. 377). Irony or not, on both levels "the Game" can be interpreted as being played on both the microcosmic and macrocosmic scales - the personal and universal. The central characters in both narratives - Catherine in the present, Mireille and the Bishop in the past - both play "the game" internally as well as externally. In other words, while they are fighting outward societal and personal opponents, they are also fighting inner, spiritual opponents - lust for power, desire for immortality, and perhaps most relevantly, the drive for revenge.

Revenge

The hungry power, or powerful hunger, of revenge is at the heart of the power of the Montglane Service, if the Moorish soldier in Section 1 who brings the Service to Charlemagne is to be believed. It certainly forms the heart of Mireille's actions, at least for much of the novel, as she struggles to complete her revenge against those who hurt her beloved Valentine (Marat in particular). Interestingly it's relatively absent from Catherine in her struggle for control over the Service - all she wants to do is survive, she doesn't want to take revenge on anybody. If revenge drives anyone in the present narrative, it drives Lily (who wants revenge for being treated like a second class citizen in the world of international chess) and Solarin (who wants revenge for the way his family was torn apart by players on the Black Side of the Game). Nevertheless, the desire for revenge is, to one degree or another, at the heart of the struggle between

Black and White sides of the Game in both timelines - they both want revenge for having lost control of the Service, a situation each side believes to have been caused by the other.

One of the key thematic points of the novel, however, is that the desire for revenge can be transcended. Yes, Mireille gives in to it when she kills Marat, but it's important to note that once she accomplishes this particular goal she feels its ultimate emptiness and realizes that to take revenge on those allied with Marat as part of her revenge would be perpetuating Marat's evil. In the present narrative, meanwhile, Lily and Solarin transcend their desire for revenge sooner than Mireille does - in other words, they don't have to kill someone before realizing how empty revenge is. Interestingly, Mireille, Lily and Solarin are all game players on the Black (Good) side - there can be little doubt at the end of the novel that players on the White Side, in both time lines, go to their punishment more determined than ever to get revenge. The perspective of the Black Side is, perhaps, a manifestation of the third of the novel's key themes. This relates to the transcendent power operating beneath the spiritual surfaces of the quest for both power (as embodied in the Game) and for revenge, the power of the universe as defined by the Montglane Service - the destined realization of the unity and connection of all things.

Destiny / Union

In the present narrative, as Catherine, Lily, Solarin and other players on the Black Side analyze the various components of the Service, they spend a great deal of time theorizing about the inter-relationship of various theories about the function of the universe, theories defined in terms of music, mathematics and faith (among others). At the core of all their theories and debates is the sense that musical, mathematical and spiritual constructions are all manifestations of the truth that mankind is simultaneously destined to realize and desperate to avoid. That truth is this: all things are born of the same matter, are governed by the same spiritual laws, and exist on the basis that ultimate union. This is the principle fought for, consciously or not, by the White Side of the Game. This is the principle opposed, consciously or not, by the Black Side, desperate to gain the power and control that comes from separation rather than union.

The struggles of the central characters in both narratives (Catherine and her allies in the present, Mireille and her allies in the past) are, at their core, the struggle to come to grips with their destined, deeper awareness - their spiritually ordained understanding of the union of all things. It's important to note, however, that only Mireille/Minnie takes the ultimate step towards that understanding. After solving the puzzle of the Service and partaking of the Elixir of Life, she becomes one with the eternal source of life, living forever, self-renewing and self-healing, transcending evil and those who seek to control, living the universal mathematical music (or the universally musical mathematics) at the heart of existence. Through her experience, it's revealed that a key aspect of this universality is the constant playing out of the relationship between suffering and joy, the ebb and flow of feeling mirrored in the ebb and flow of the universe's cycles of expansion and contraction, the oceans' cycles of tide, and the ebb and flow of good and

evil. In other words, the Universal Game—the unavoidable destiny, playing out in relationships large and small throughout time, throughout space, and throughout the soul of each and every member of the human race.

Style

Point of View

The action of the novel is narrated from two different points of view. The "past" narrative, set in the 1790s and following the story of Mireille, is told from the third person omnipotent perspective. The "present" narrative, set in the 1970s and following Catherine's story, is told from the first person objective point of view.

There are occasions, however, when the point of view in the "present" story changes to third person objective, once in Section 4 and once in Section 6. On both these occasions, the narrative perspective shifts to accommodate information Catherine says she learned later - information about Solarin's actions that he, it can be assumed, revealed to her when they realized they were on the same side and comparing notes about their experiences. When this occurs is never explicitly defined, but it's possible that it takes place during the time Catherine and Solarin (and Lily) are marooned on Formantera (Section 22), or in the time between Sections 22 and 24, when they're sailing across the Atlantic to America. Why the differing points of view? Use of the first person objective point of view is often intended to involve the reader more directly in the experiences and emotions of the central character. In that context, and taking into account the fact that Catherine is a (relatively) contemporary character, it's possible to see that the choice of making the present narrative first person was made because a reader might be more likely to identify with Catherine than with Mireille. It could be argued, however, that because what Mireille experiences (the horrors and violence of the Revolution, her encounters with the mysticism of the Valley of Statues in Section 13), a reader might be more viscerally involved and empathetically moved if the past narrative had been written in first person subjective. Indeed, writing both narratives from first person subjective might have increased the sense that the two women are, across the centuries, living parallel lives. On the other hand, the differing narrative points of view reinforce the sense that while much of what they go through is the same, the circumstances of the two women are very different.

Setting

The first aspect of setting to note is time - one narrative, focusing on Catherine, is set in the present (the 1970s), while the other, focusing on Mireille, is set in the past (the 1790s). The second, and perhaps most important, element of setting is that in both these time frames, society (historically as well as narratively) is undergoing a significant upheaval. In the present narrative that upheaval is essentially economic - the Arab world, in the 1970s, was beginning to emerge as the dominant center of the oil production and exporting industry.

As the source of much of the world's energy it was gaining much more power than it had had before - more, in fact, than the traditional economic and oil producing powers (such

as America and Britain) were comfortable with it having. Meanwhile, the past narrative is set during the French Revolution, a time when economic, social and political power was shifting from the wealthy aristocracy to the less wealthy lower and middle classes. In both time periods, the status quo was and is changing dramatically - more violently in the past, and more thoroughly (the process of economic change in the present narrative is just beginning). Nevertheless, the societal shift in power inherent in the settings of both narratives can be seen as a manifestation and/or an externalization of the intensifying search for/struggle over the power of the Montglane Service.

The third noteworthy aspect of setting in *The Eight* is location - Catherine's narrative starts in New York, while Mireille's narrative truly begins (after the introductory section in Montglane) in Paris. Both narratives take their central characters to Algeria, and both narratives eventually take them back to the cities where their journeys began. In other words, there is a sense of separation and convergence here - at the beginning and end of the book, the narratives are geographically separated, but in the middle they are together. It might not be going too far to suggest that there is yet another manifestation here of the figure 8 - specifically, the sideways eight (?) with the Paris-New York sections represented by the two circles, and the Algiers sections in both time frames represented by the point in the middle at which the circles intersect. It is, after all, in Algiers where Catherine begins to read Mireille's journal and begins to connect with her.

Language and Meaning

One way *The Eight* carves out its niche in the suspense/thriller/puzzle genre is by its use of language, which is used throughout the novel as much to conceal as to reveal, to create and build suspense as much as to release it by revealing answers. Catherine's narrative in particular, probably because it's written in first person subjective and after the fact, contains frequent phrases like "it wasn't until later that I found out ..." or "If I knew before opening the door what I would find ..." These are, for lack of a better phrase, building blocks of narrative suspense, telling the reader something important is about to happen and that it's not going to make life for the characters any easier.

It's important to note, however, that an additional component of this structure of suspense is the underlying sense throughout both narratives that something other than the most obvious level of action is going on, and more than one layer of something. To look at it another way, the first layer of narrative action is the pursuit of the pieces of the Montglane Service. The second layer of action is the pursuit of the meaning of the Service. The third layer of action is the pursuit of a universal truth, clues to which are provided by the meaning of the Service. These layers of action are skillfully explored and inter-related throughout the novel by its use of language which at times is exceptionally direct in defining which layer is being explored at which moment and is also, at times, slyly evocative, suggesting these layers by hint and implication.

It must be said that there is much more of the former use of language than the latter - the generation of suspense in novels such as this, in which the cleverness of the puzzle is much more of the point than evocations of meaning, is not a subtle art. On the other

hand, when there is a moment of subtlety, such as the novel's very last moments, it carries with it the power of rarity - such moments are all the more effective because there are so few of them.

Structure

There are several key structural elements at work in this novel, all apparently designed to create the most narrative suspense and the most complex intellectual puzzle possible. The first and most obvious of these is the parallel narrative lines - past and present, for the most part alternating throughout the novel. Then, each section of each narrative line is given a title, most of which have some kind of relation to the rules, mythologies and/or manifestations of the game of chess. There is the general sense (although there are exceptions) that as the action of the narratives advances, the titles of each section relate to the advancement of a chess game.

Thirdly, each section of each narrative is headed by a quote, each of which also has something to do with chess. Both title and quote are, to varying degrees in each section, an illumination or ironic commentary on the action of the chapter. Fourthly, each section ends at a point of particular suspense - either a piece of the puzzle has been figured out only to lead to more questions, or a new question has been posed, or a new threat has emerged. A particularly effective manifestation of this structural technique is the way in which the parallel narrative lines, for the most part, alternate. In other words, the resolution of a section-ending point of suspense in the past narrative is delayed until after a section of the present narrative, which itself ends with a point of suspense, the resolution of which is delayed until after the following section of the past narrative, and so on and so on until the end of the book.

In many ways, the structure of the novel is akin to that of a jigsaw puzzle, except the framing pieces are not put together first. The puzzle at the heart of the book's structure is pieced together from the inside out, with the connections between the pieced-together sections only becoming apparent as more and more puzzle sections are completed.

Quotes

"Perhaps it was the tension of the situation, but it appeared as the game progressed that the two players moved their pieces with a force and precision that transcended a mere game, as if another, an invisible hand, hovered above the board. At times it even seemed as if the very pieces carried out the moves of their own accord." p. 12.

"Just as these lines that merge go form a key are as chess squares, when month and day are four, don't risk another chance to move to mate. One game is real, and one's a metaphor. Untold times, this wisdom has come too late. Battle of white has raged on endlessly. Everywhere black will strive to seal his fate. Continue a search for thirty-three and three. Veiled forever is the secret door ... on the fourth day of the fourth month, then will come the Eight." The fortuneteller to Catherine, p 41.

"As [the Bishop] gazed at Valentine with his beautiful angelic face, his golden curls haloed in the firelight, Mireille found it difficult to remember that this was the man who ruthlessly, almost single-handedly, was destroying the Catholic Church in France. The man who sought to capture the Montglane Service." p 57.

"Madness is the occupational hazard of chess, but ... it only happens to men ... chess, my dear, is such an Oedipal game. Kill the King and fuck the Queen, that's what it's all about." Lily to Catherine, p 73.

"Birds are more intelligent than people ... the peregrine is my favorite. As with many other species, it's the female that does the hunting." Nim to Catherine, p. 143.

"[Music] has a force of its own that few would deny. It can tranquilize a savage beast or move a placid man to charge into battle ... Music, you see, has a logic of its own. It is similar to mathematical logic, but in some ways different. For music does not merely communicate with our minds, but in fact *changes* our thought in some imperceptible fashion." Bach to Euler and Philidor, p. 165-166.

"Mireille watched the dreadful face, contorted beyond imagining, and vowed that as long as she lived, as long as he lived, she would never forget. She would etch his face into her mind, this man who held the life of her beloved cousin so ruthlessly in his hands. She would always remember." p 172.

"J'adoube. I touch thee. I adjust thee, Catherine Velis. Call unto me and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not. For there is a battle going on, and you are a pawn in the game. A piece on the chessboard of Life." p. 214.

"Life exists everywhere ... even at the very bottom of the sea. And everywhere it is extinguished through the stupidity of man." Solarin to Catherine, p.237.

"From the moment when [Mireille's] hired carriage had been stopped before the gates of [the Abbey], events had engulfed her so she'd only had time to act instinctively ... it was as if a lid had been lifted for an instant from the thin eggshell of civilization so she could glimpse the horror of man's bestiality beneath that fragile veneer." p. 247.

"Every time I put two and two together - I kept coming up with eight. There were eights everywhere. First the fortuneteller had pointed it out with regard to my birthday. Then Mordecai, Sharrif, and Solarin had invoked it like a magical sign: not only was there an eight etched in the palm of my hand, but Solarin had said there was a *formula* of the Eight - whatever that was supposed to mean." p. 279.

"I yanked a piece of paper out of my briefcase in the moving cab and drew a figure eight. Then I turned the paper sideways. It was the symbol for infinity. I heard the voice pounding in my head as I stared t the shape hovering before me. The voice said: *Just as another game ... this battle will continue forever."* p. 281.

"The secret was not hidden beneath a rock in the desert. Nor was it tucked inside a musty library. It lay hidden within the softly whispered tales of these nomadic men. Moving across the sands by night, passing from mouth to mouth, the secret had moved as the sparks of a dying bonfire are scattered across the silent sands and buried in darkness. The secret was hidden in the very sounds of the desert, in the tales of her people - in the mysterious whispers of the rocks and stones themselves." p. 294.

"[Mireille's] heart was pounding, her mind spinning. She had to act at once ... they were all like pawns on a chessboard, driven toward an unseen center in a game as inexorable as fate. The Abbess had been right in saying they must gather the reins into their own hands. But it was Mireille herself who must take control. For now, she realized, she knew more than the Abbess - more perhaps than anyone - about the Montglane Service." p. 349.

"'... the path [has] sixteen stops, the number of pieces of black or white on a chessboard ... the [path] describes a figure eight - like the twined serpents on Hermes' staff - like the Eightfold Path the Buddha prescribed to reach Nirvana - like the eight tiers of the Tower of Babel one climbed to reach the gods. Like the formula they say was brought by the eight Moors to Charlemagne - hidden within the Montglane Service." p. 364.

"[Charlotte] grasped Mireille's hand and held it beneath the lantern's light. 'The mark is on your hand! Your birthday is the fourth of April! You are the one who was foretold - the one who'll reunite the Mopntglane Service!'" p. 369.

"So if Minnie's the Black Queen, we're all on the black team - you and I, Mordecai and Solarin. The guys in the black hats are the *good* guys. If Mordecai picked Solarin, Maybe Mordecai's the Black King - which makes Solarin a kingside knight ... and Saul and Fiske ... were pawns that were knocked off the board." Lily to Catherine, p. 377.

"... If a pawn passes the ranks of opposing pawns and reaches the eighth square on the opposite side, it can be transformed into ... a Queen." Lily to Catherine, p. 379.

"She appeared in carmine, cardinal, and cardiac, in carnal, carnivorous, and Karma - the endless cycle of incarnation, transformation, and oblivion. She was the word made flesh, the vibration of destiny coiled ... at the heart of life itself - the caracole, or spiral force, that formed the very universe. Hers was the force unleashed by the Montglane Service." p. 408.

"I felt as if I were hearing the tale of my own quest from the lips of someone who sat beside me - a woman engaged in a mission I alone could understand - as though the whispering voice I heard were my own. Somewhere in the course of my adventures, Mireille's quest had become my quest as well." p. 420.

"As the coast of France melted away behind her, Mireille thought she could hear the groaning wheels of the cart that would now be carrying Charlotte to the guillotine. In her mind she heard the heavy steps on the scaffolding, the roll of the [drums], the swish of the blade in its long descent, the cheers of the crowd ... [she] felt the cold blade cutting away whatever remained of childhood and innocence, leaving only [her] fatal task. The task for which she'd been chosen - to destroy the White Queen and reunite the pieces." p. 430.

"In Solarin I saw beneath the mystery, the mask, the cold veneer - to what lay at the very core. And what I saw was passion, an unquenchable thirst for life - a passion to discover the truth behind the veil. It was a passion I recognized because it matched my own." p. 488.

"Imagine you were in a dark forest where you could see nothing ... Your only companion was an owl, who could see far better than you because his eyes were equipped for the dark. This is the kind of vision you have - like the own - to see ahead where others move in darkness. If you were they, would you not be afraid too?" Shahin to Charlot, p. 513.

"... Did I want to spend thirty years of my life trying to solve [the] formula? Though it might not take that long, I'd seen from Minnie's experience it had quickly turned to an obsession - something that ruined not only her life, but the lives of everyone she knew or touched. Did I want a long life at the expense of a happy one? By her own testimony, Minnie had lived two hundred years in terror and danger, even after she'd found the formula. No wonder she'd wanted to leave the Game." p. 548.

Topics for Discussion

Does Catherine make the right decision at the end of the novel? Is her choice to bury the pieces ultimately good for humanity, or bad?

Consider the recurrent images of birds that appear throughout the novel - in particular the mythical phoenix and the real-life falcon. What are the various levels of symbolic meaning to each of these birds? What are the parallels and contrasts between them? Also consider the meaning of the quote on p. 143. What is the relationship between this quote and the symbolic value not only of the falcon, but also of the phoenix?

Is Mireille justified in killing Marat? What might have changed about her journey/quest if she hadn't?

Consider the action/analysis of Section 17 - the quest undertaken by Catherine and Lily in search of the pieces of the Montglane Service. Discuss ways in which the patterns of this archetypal story also play out in Mireille's quest. Further, consider the ways in which these patterns play out in other stories, histories, cultures and media. Explore narratives found in ancient myths (Greek / Roman / Egyptian / Far Eastern / Scandinavian), contemporary films, fairy tales, etc. Specifically relate the characteristics of Catherine's and Mireille's quests to those of other quest stories.

Debate the philosophical premise at the heart of the novel's action and themes. How far can the principle of inter-relationship be applied? How is humanity's perception of that inter-relationship limited by DNA, the very aspect of humanity that connects us to infinity? What are ways in which interrelationship manifests? Is there such a thing as coincidence?

Consider the various characters associated with the Christian faith - in particular, the Bishop, the Abbess, Mireille and Valentine, and Corday. Discuss ways in which Christianity, and the rules associated with it, affect their actions - are the characters supported? Are they obstructed? When they transcend these rules, do they evolve into something spiritually larger, or spiritually smaller? Then, in this context, discuss the novel's overall attitude to Christianity.

Discuss the various parent child relationships in the book - not just biological relationships, but also spiritual relationships such as those between the Abbess and Mireille, and between Mireille/Minnie and Catherine. What are the tensions and/or similarities between fathers and sons, fathers and daughters, mothers and sons, mothers and daughters? Where are the parallels/differences in these relationships? How do these parallels/differences reflect the novel's thematic focus on interrelationship?