

The Gift of Rain Study Guide

The Gift of Rain by Tan Twan Eng

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Plot Summary

Philip Hutton was an elderly half-Chinese, half-British man living out his days in relative peace in his ancestral home of Istana on Penang, an island in Malaya. Everything changed and he was forced to come to terms with his past when a Japanese woman named Michiko Murakami turned up on his door step. She was seeking information on someone named Endo-san, a mutual friend of theirs whose bonds of love went much deeper than friendship. Upon Michiko's request, Philip told his tale of the life he and Endo-san led together.

Philip had been a lonely child. Being born half-Chinese and half-British made both cultures equally despise him. He felt too Chinese to fit in with his British family, and because he came from a British family, the Chinese customs were foreign to him. When a Japanese man moved onto the island across from Philip's home Philip quickly latched on to him, entranced by not only the Japanese culture but by the man himself. This man, named Endo-san, would come to take Philip as a pupil, teaching him martial arts and sword fighting.

Philip's family was away on holiday in England while he stayed around to watch Istana, their family mansion. He trained with Endo-san and excitedly showed him around the islands. The condition of Europe worsened as Hitler invaded Poland. Miraculously, Philip's family returned to Penang safe, though their journey took longer than expected. With the family back Philip began working for his father's company Hutton & Sons in 1940. Much of Philip's cultural identities entangled themselves there as he reconciled both his British heritage and his Chinese heritage. Philip's brother William joined the Navy, like many, fearing war in Malaya. They held a going away party which represented the last peaceful moments of Philip's life. War broke out soon after with the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor.

When the Japanese arrived to the islands they met little-to-no resistance, as many British had fled when war broke out. The Japanese Occupation officially began on February 15, 1942 when Singapore surrendered. Philip, with his connections through Endo-san, worked for the Japanese, despite his family vehemently opposing it. Philip thought this was the only way to secure his families safety. He was half-right, and while his family was not sent to one of the many labor camps like other British, they all eventually died in resisting their oppressors anyway. William died in battle; Edward, Philip's other brother, was captured while he was on another Island and sent to a death camp; Isabel, Philip's sister, died assisting the Japanese resistance movements; and Philip's father died sacrificing himself to save Philip from execution. Philip resisted the Japanese in the end through subterfuge and spying. Throughout this time, Philip learned that his friendship with Endo-san, and more specifically his showing him around the islands, directly affected the ease of which the Japanese conquered Malaya.

The Japanese eventually lost the war thanks in no small part to the atomic bombs dropped by the Americans, and the British returned to Malaya. Philip saved Endo-san



from his punishment laid out by the war tribunal. Using a sword gifted by Endo-san himself, Philip took his old master's life to save him from a lifetime in some awful prison.

Philip finished his story to Michiko, and some time after, she died too, a long time sufferer of radiation poisoning from the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Philip felt a sense of completion and joy in telling his story again, and by telling it, freed himself from much of the guilt and anguish that he had held onto for all these years.



Book 1, Chapters 1 - 2

Summary

The book opens with a memory from the narrator, Philip Hutton, of how a soothsayer had come to tell him that he “was born with the gift of rain” (1). Philip reveled in this memory and it brought him to another: the day that he met Michiko Murakami. She came to Philip’s house on Penang on a rainy evening, bearing a package. Philip invited her in for dinner, only barely remembering who she was. She was a friend of his friend, a Japanese man named Endo-san. Philip and Mchiko ate their dinner out on the terrace, as the rain had stopped. They made a toast to Endo-San. Michiko revealed that her husband had just died. Philip offered his condolences. The story continued with Michiko inheriting the priority shares of her husband’s company, but being so inconsolable, she had locked herself up in her house. No one from the board—or anyone from the outside—could contact her. The only thing that made it through was a letter from Endo-san and a package that contained a katana. It had been sent more than years ago, in the spring of 1945.

It was after this revelation that Michiko claimed she would tell Philip of how they met. Michiko had watched Endo-san teach aikijutsu classes, and after a while, had begun to see him regularly. Being part of the much higher class, her father did not approve of the friendship as Endo-san. Later, she was forbidden to see him. She only saw him once more before he left for Japan. She married another man and got on with her life, but in her own words “I have never stopped thinking of him” (9).

Michiko finished the story and asked if she may stay for the night. Philip begrudgingly agreed as he tried to force his old memories away from him. The next morning, after bringing up all the old memories of Endo-san, Philip, an old martial artist, decided to train again in his home dojo after many years of respite. Michiko joined him, and they trained together. Afterwards, Philip offered his home to her, to stay awhile, but he also wanted to know what Michiko really wanted of him. Michiko asked to see Endo-san’s house on the island across the channel from Philip’s place. Philip outright refused. Then she asked what happened to Endo-san. Philip said that he was dead and it should be left at that. Michiko then went and got the package she had brought with her, saying that this came with the letter also. In the package was Endo-san’s old katana, restored to its former glory. Philip held it for a brief moment, and the memories associated with it disturbed him immensely. The sword he owned was this katana’s twin. Philip claimed he was late for a meeting and rushed out of the room. He was willing to return her to her hotel.

Chapter 2 opens with Philip dropping Michiko off to her hotel for her to pick up her things so that she could stay with him. He then went into work at his company offices, Hutton & Sons. He reflected on the successes and varied history of his family’s company. He recounted memories of his life there, and he felt older than ever. In his office his secretary asked if he was okay, worried that he was “thinking of the war



again” (18). Philip was indeed thinking of the war again, and he continued to reflect. He was half-English but his loyalties did not lie in England, nor did he care much for that culture. He spent lunch at a nearby church, reflecting on all the damage the war had done to his island. He returned home to find Michiko already there. They ate and drank together, and Michiko apologized for her behavior earlier. Then she asked Philip to “tell me about the life you and Endo-san led . . . I would like to know everything” (23). And so here, Philip Hutton began his story.

Analysis

The text early on takes many moments to focus on the indelible marks left by World War II. Given that at this point in the story we are looking at a post-war landscape, there are some literal and figurative connotations to this. The war literally left its mark on the land, many of the scars having not yet healed. A clear example of a literal mark is the corner stone of Philip’s company building, Hutton & Sons. Philip explains that “during the war, a corner of the gray stone building had been torn away by a bomb and the shade of the restored stone could not be matched to the original” (17). This left a clear mark that anyone could discern. The list goes on, but many of these physical examples serve both figurative and metaphorical purposes. For example, the replaced cornerstone of Philip’s family business hints at ideas of the rebuilding of one’s identity and purpose.

These first two chapters serve primarily to set up the occasion of this story. As the story is being told in the first person, having a reason for the story’s telling makes the contents far more compelling. Not only are we seeing the story that the book is primarily comprised of, we are also seeing the protagonist after the fact, when he is already post denouement of the primary story. That being said, there is also conflict in the present, where these first two chapters exist. The conflict arises out of the story being told in later chapters. So these first two chapters sets up two narratives at once, one with Philip as an old man, one with him as an older man, and much of what we see when Philip is older also helps inform the story that begins in Chapter 3.

The author makes a clear choice of what to show us in this first two chapters to set up the story that Philip Hutton tells to Michiko. The marks of war and the effects of aging create a sense of unease and finality that tinges what is to come with a sense of tension and despair. Though the story is in the “I” voice, narrated by Philip himself, we the reader are privy to almost the same amount of information that Michiko is in these early chapters. Many of the revelations that kick start the story proper occur in dialogue. Though Philip is an introspective man, his thoughts are more focused towards the dealing with consequences of unnamed past mistakes. For example, when Michiko asks of Philip’s family he turns to vague introspection, “their faces float before my eyes like wavering images on the surface of a pool” (22), which adequately displays the sense of regret that permeates the first two chapters. It is here, early on, that we see the masterful hand of the author, tan Twan Eng, revealing only just the surface of what we should know about this story, informing the reader that there is more to come, but what is here is worth sticking around for. This manifests itself in narrative tension primarily.



Discussion Question 1

How is landscape important in the first two chapters? How does the exterior landscape that Tan Twan Eng writes about inform the interiority of our narrator Philip Hutton? How does his interiority inform the way in which he interprets the landscape?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance (if any) that the katana Michiko brings to Philip is one of a pair? How do the two swords function as narrative devices (thinking in metaphorical terms)? Is there any significance to Philip's immediate change of mood upon seeing the katana?

Discussion Question 3

Why, after all this time, does Philip open up and tell his story now? What, at the end of the second chapter, prompts Philip to tell this story to Michiko, a virtual stranger?

Vocabulary

soothsayer, Penang, valise, belied, gi, hakama, magistrate, bokken, nage, uke, aikido, maudlin



Book 1, Chapters 3 - 4

Summary

Philip, as the narrator, begins his story in Chapter 3 with his own birth, chronicling the traditions of his family all the way back to his great grandfather Graham Hutton and his desire to forge some legacy that would last beyond his own life. Thus, the reader is made aware of the history of the Hutton mansion, Istana's creation. The narration moves into talking about Noel Hutton, Philip's father. Noel had four children of two different marriages. Philip was the youngest of them and the only among them that was half-Chinese, as his father's second marriage was to a woman named Khoo Yo Lian. In both cases, Noel became a widower. Emma, his first wife, died while giving birth to Philip's sister, Isabel, and his second wife, Khoo Yo Lian, died when Philip was only seven years old.

Being half-Chinese, half-English, Philip felt a certain sense of isolation, saying "I was never completely accepted by either the Chinese or the English of Penang, each race believing itself to be superior" (28). The narrator discusses the little island across the sea from Istana. His family owned it, and eventually leased it out, which bothered Philip at the time because he had enjoyed his time alone there. While his father and siblings were away on a holiday in England, Philip met the man who now lived on the island, a Japanese man named Endo-san. On a stormy night, Endo-san came by Istana asking to borrow a boat to get to the island as his had been carried adrift in the sea. Endo-san offered Philip a meal for his trouble, and Philip ended up staying on the island for the night to wait out the storm. In the morning, Philip caught Endo-san training with a katana in the yard outside his cabin. From there, Philip became Endo-san's pupil, learning the ways of aikijutsu. Endo-san attempted to teach him other things, such as Zen-Buddhist meditation methods, calligraphy, and the Japanese language, but the world was on a precipice of a world war, and many of these joys were tinged with sadness on the part of the narrator.

Chapter four begins roughly two months after Philip first met Endo-san. They were walking through Georgetown while Philip reflected on the history behind its segregation. Endo-san took Philip to the Japanese quarter where he treated him to some Japanese food and tea at Madam Suzuki's restaurant. Philip did not even know that there were Japanese people residing in Penang. Endo-san told Philip a little bit more about himself and his family, and that he descended from samurai aristocracy but that his father had become a trader of rice and lacquer to the Americans and Chinese. He continued to say that his father angered the emperor of Japan for opposing the military occupation in China. After this event, Endo-san requested that Philip become his guide of Penang. Philip first showed Endo-san to the Temple of Azure Cloud. There, they met a fortune teller that gave Philip the titular prophecy that he was "born with the gift of rain" (50). The fortune teller also mentioned that Endo-san and Philip had met in their past lives and will continue to have intertwining paths. Philip asked what this meant on their journey home, and Endo-san explained the Buddhist concept of reincarnation to him.



Being raised in a Christian household, these ideas were too difficult to grasp for Philip. He said, “Endo-san’s explanations made no sense to me and so I did not dwell on them” (52). The chapter ends with Endo-san moving Philip forward in his training by incorporating the jo staff. Philip was another step closer to wielding a katana. He forged for himself a strict training regimen, one that, as Philip said, “would go on until I was old” (53).

Analysis

A lot of work is being done in these two chapters to set up the primary conflicts in Eng’s novel. First, Philip’s cultural isolation is set up. The reader comes to first really know him through the lens of his sordid British and Chinese heritage. Philip, as the narrator, even goes as far as saying that neither culture completely accepted him. The issue was that each culture believed itself “to be superior” (28) to each other. So two races, historically at odds, are at odds within Philip himself at this point in the novel. The young Philip is set up as immature and isolated in this way.

The introduction of Endo-san here is no accident as it coincides with Philip’s isolation and immaturity. Endo-san ushers Philip into both his culture and into the adult world through the fostering of their relationship. Endo-san would likely not have found a companion in Philip had he been of a single race of people because Philip’s multiculturalism exacerbated the loneliness he felt, and it ultimately pushed him into the folds of another culture.

The ideas of free will versus fate are brought up here, and these ideas are also linked to culture. The novel begins to ask the question, does our culture make us who we are? And by extension it asks if culture influences our decisions. By having his characters see a fortune teller, they get to interact directly with their own free will. Endo-san is convinced that he and Philip have met in another life, and that the choices of this one are laid out, only to be followed. Philip is not so sure. He believes that he is control of his own decisions. This will be a theme that the novel brings up again and again, and an idea that Philip continues to wrestle with.

Discussion Question 1

What do you make of the stormy circumstances of the first meeting between Endo-san and Philip after learning what “the gift of rain” means? What is the significance of this compared to Michiko and Philip’s first meeting in the rain?

Discussion Question 2

How is the concept of reincarnation supposed to be interpreted by the reader in these early chapters?



Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Endo-san decides to train Philip in aikido?

Vocabulary

coolies, aikijutsu, enlightenment, archipelago, shogun



Book 1, Chapters 5 - 6

Summary

Chapter 5 continues with Philip showing Endo-san around the island of Penang. Philip made an extra effort to avoid temples, stopping one day at St. George's church "drawn by the voices of the choir in practice" (54). They left the church, and the discussion turned to violence. Endo-san asked Philip to promise to only use violence as a last resort.

Days later Philip took Endo-san down through the quay and the godowns, exploring the waterfront. After that he showed Endo up to Penang Hill, the highest point on the island. They climbed the hill and made it to Philip's father's second mansion, Istana Kechil, which means the Small Palace. Endo-san took pictures from the view the garden offered, and they stayed the night there. At dinner Philip discussed his family with Endo-san. The next day they meditated on a cliff. After breakfast, they went to the lawn to train and Endo-san taught Philip a new throw so that he could "touch heaven" (62). After that, Philip showed Endo-san houses for the consulate, per Endo-san's request. After finding out he had been to Kuala Lumpur before, Endo-san asked Philip if he would like to join him on his trip to that island. Philip agreed. Philip returned home to find Uncle Lim, the family chauffeur, in the garage. Lim thought that Philip spent too much time with Endo-san. Lim, like the majority of the serving staff, was Chinese, and harbored prejudices against the Japanese. Philip thought the prejudice was misplaced, but reconsidered after Lim revealed that Japan had been bombing villages in southern China. Philip resolved in thinking that Endo-san could have nothing to do with that. Lim told Philip that his aunt, his mother's sister, was looking for him to celebrate Cheng Beng, a Chinese holiday celebrating dead loved ones.

Lim dropped Philip off at his aunt's. Together, Philip and his aunt went to the temple near her house to pay their respects to Philip's dead mother. Philip got lost in the few memories he had of her and her funeral. Here, again, he thought of his isolation. After they left the temple, his aunt asked if he could visit with his grandfather. Philip said he would consider it after he got back from Kuala Lumpur.

Later, after finishing a lesson, Endo-san gifted to Philip a katana. It was a Nagamitsu sword, a perfect double to the katana Endo-san possessed. Shocked by this act of generosity, Philip rushed back to Istana and took a book of poetry from his father's library. He gave this book to Endo-san, opening it to a Hebrew poem about a Japanese warrior requesting the creation of a katana to a smith. Endo-san believed it to be an equal gift, saying "I shall consider my gift of your katana to have been returned in full" (74).



Analysis

These two chapters see the continued growth of the two protagonists' friendship, but it is tinged with hints of unease and tension. As Philip shows Endo-san around the island their conversation often turns to violence. Philip wonders why he has been training at all if Endo-san believes violence is a last resort. Endo-san goes so far as to make Philip solemnly promise to never use violence unless necessary. Philip obliges him. The author is masterfully setting up the idyllic landscape of Penang in the context of violence. He is preparing the reader for the coming of the war. If someone had no idea about the history surrounding the Second World War and read this text in a vacuum, they still would be made uneasy as something as beautiful as the angelic voices of the choir is juxtaposed with these two men discussing violence. Those with the knowledge have yet another layer of value added onto these scenes.

It was here as well that Philip decides to give over all his trust in Endo-san, setting himself up for the ultimate tragedies and successes that this novel possesses. Meditating upon a cliff, a sheer drop off, Philip is practically given an ultimatum, to trust Endo-san and continue his training, or to stop everything now. It could not continue past this point without absolute trust. The environment matches the interior problem as Philip stares down a drop in which, once taken, there is no turning back. Had Philip's family been around, the decision may have come later or not at all, but in his cultural vacuum, Philip is susceptible to the charm of Endo-san. The isolation is further enhanced later when Philip meets with his Aunt Mei, his deceased mother's sister. Their paying of respects serves to remind Philip of the severed connection between him and his Chinese heritage. This further sets Philip up for trusting only Endo-san as after this moment Philip is gifted with a katana. The gift giving is vital to cementing these two men's relationship and put Philip down the path that comprises the primary conflict of the novel.

Discussion Question 1

How is the threat of violence treated in this novel? What effect does it have on the narrative?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Endo-san train Philip in martial arts despite believing violence is an absolute last resort? How, with evidence from the text, is martial arts reconcilable with non-violence.



Discussion Question 3

Philip meditating on the cliff is another example of the exterior landscape reflecting some aspect of interiority; why is the author using this in his narrative? What is he using this for? Is it effective here?

Vocabulary

quay, godowns, jetty, Malaya, katana



Book 1, Chapters 7 - 8

Summary

The narrative shifts back to Philip as an old man where he just finished showing Michiko the poem that he gave to Endo-san. Philip felt the need to show her the book to validate his own memories. Then Philip decided to show Michiko something else. He took her out to the beach and down to an old boathouse on the river inlet. They got on the boat and he steered them towards a spot swarming with beautiful fireflies. Philip caught one for her. This reminded her of Endo-san, and Philip admitted that Endo-san once told him that he liked to watch fireflies with an old friend. He now assumed the old friend was Michiko.

In recalling more memories, Michiko admitted that she was not entirely honest about her relationship with Endo-san. She disobeyed her father's order to never see Endo-san. Because of this, her father ordered an official investigation into Endo-san's father. Michiko claimed that she "played a part in the downfall of Endo-san's family" (79). The chapter ends the next day as Philip continually got lost in his own memories.

Back to Philip as a young man, he narrates the journey to Kuala Lumpur. It had been put off for more than a month because of Endo-san's "work commitments" (81). Philip and Endo-san began their journey by taking a Dutchman's ship along the coast. They stopped in Kampung Pangkor along the way to visit one of Endo-san's friends, Kanazawa-san, who owned a provision store. At the store, Endo-san revealed the cargo he had been carrying, a crate full of firearms.

Endo-san took Philip out in the jungle proper and taught him how to shoot with one of the guns he brought. He believed it to be a skill that Philip may need later, but he did add that he would prefer Philip never used a gun or a sword. Shooting bothered Philip, and he questioned Endo-san's methods. He asked why he had brought weapons in the first place. Endo-san explained that they were for Japanese rubber buyers to defend themselves against pirates. Philip asked why the Japanese, Kanazawa-san specifically, were in that part of the country anyway. To that, Endo-san did not answer. As they boarded their vessel to continue on with their journey, they took on another passenger, a prisoner. He was also Japanese, and Endo-san claimed that he had committed the crime of forgoing his duty. What this duty was, Philip did not fully know. Philip talked to him, and the prisoner felt sorry for Philip because "Nothing good will come from your association with us" (90). He went on to say that the Japanese ideal of "duty" was merely a tool of the powerful to manipulate the masses.

Analysis

These chapters work together to create nested sense of dramatic irony. Dramatic irony is a literary concept with origins in theatre that, in summary, occurs when the audience



knows more than the characters do at the moment. Most readers with a basic understanding of World War II and its major players can see plainly the mistakes Philip made in the moments on Kampung Pangkor and Kuala Lumpur. The Japanese are gathering their forces and setting up a network of spies to make the invasion of Malaya easier and swifter. Philip does not know this at the time, and as we are only in young Philip's head, this makes for quality tension. The readers will more than likely know the mistakes Philip made here, and these moments solidify it. Nevertheless, there is an interesting twist on this thanks to the nested narrator. An older, wiser Philip, one who now knows his follies, is the one telling the story. Thus, one could argue that the sense of dramatic irony is not lost on him, and he is, in fact, using it to tell his story, to make his eventual coming to terms even that much more difficult and life changing.

Once the mistakes on Kampung Pangkor and Kuala Lumpur are identified, the reader can then think back to the previous chapter in a new light. Fully aware of what is happening in the context of the Second World War, the readers are now even more keenly aware of how Philip functioned in the coming war. Though, it is not written explicitly yet, the author has firmly planted the seed and is winding up the tension. These two chapters are where that tension is perfectly palpable.

Another interesting concept brought up in the later of these two chapters is the Japanese concept of duty, and with it comes its own sense of irony. Duty is a reoccurring theme in this novel, and it functions similarly no matter what culture uses it. In this instance, the Japanese characters are using duty as a justification for the capture of one of their own. It is in failing to do his duty that a character will eventually lose his life. The irony comes in later when another character's sense of duty is, in fact, what will ultimately kill him.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Eng choose to jump back to Philip as an old man in Book 1, Chapter 7? What purpose does it serve in the narrative given what happens next? How does it affect the characterization of both Endo-san and Philip? How do these subsequent jumps serve the novel? Are their locations random or important?

Discussion Question 2

Given that Philip is the one telling the story, why does he not reference the fact that going to Kampung Pangkor was a mistake? How does this impact the story in terms of dramatic irony? How does it impact the rest of the story?

Discussion Question 3

Philip meets a prisoner in Book 1, Chapter 8 that has much to say about the Japanese concept of duty. Do you think the prisoner is right? Provide evidence of your answer with quotes from the novel.

Vocabulary

shirasu, Kuala Lumpur, Peranakan, mangrove, duty



Book 1, Chapters 9 - 10

Summary

In Book 1, Chapter 9 Philip and Endo-san arrived in Kuala Lumpur. There, they dropped off the prisoner at the Japanese embassy and met the ambassador, Saotome-san, over dinner. At this meeting Philip felt intimidated. The ambassador offered him a position as an interpreter, which Philip neither accepted nor declined. A Chinese woman was brought in and de-robed in front of the ambassador at his request, showing Philip a bit more about this man's character. They spent only a few days longer there, long enough for Philip to mull over his thoughts of kinship with the Japanese people.

They took a rail home, and on the way Philip called his Aunt Mei to tell her that he would indeed visit his grandfather at her request. Philip found out that Endo-san had met his grandfather before. The train stopped, Endo and Philip said their goodbyes, and Philip got off the train on his way to see the grandfather he had never met before. Chapter 10 begins with a car picking up Philip from the train station and taking him to his Grandfather's house in Ipoh. Philip had never been to Ipoh before. Much of it felt both new and familiar to him. Arriving at his grandfather's house, Philip found his Aunt Mei waiting for him. She introduced Philip to his grandfather. After the initial meeting, Grandfather offered Philip a room to nap the heat of the day away in. Afterwards he showed Philip around the gardens, and all together they ate a simple dinner. Near the end of dinner Grandfather dismissed Aunt Mei. He wished to talk to Philip alone. There he told a story of his own to Philip, one of men who have been "written out of history" (105). He told the story so that Philip could know more about him.

Philip's Grandfather told the story of his time in the Emperor's Forbidden City in China, serving as Wen Zu's tutor. Wen Zu was the last apparent heir to the sick Emperor's dragon throne. Grandfather relayed a story of court intrigue, subterfuge, racial violence, and political upheaval, all of which led him to fleeing from China to Malaya to protect his family. He used the story as an invitation to Philip to fully engage with his Chinese culture, saying to Philip "You do not have to chase after a tradition that is not yours" (124). The stories then turned back to Philip's mother and the wrong his Grandfather committed by casting her out of his house when she married an Englishman. He explained to Philip that it was all because of a prophecy from a fortune teller in a temple of snakes who predicted that "a child of mingled blood . . . would eventually betray them" (125). Philip protested that this could never happen, and his grandfather expressed concern over his closeness with one of Japan's highest ranking officials. Grandfather conceded that Philip must and will walk his own path. Philip ended up staying with his Grandfather for a week, being shown around Ipoh in the meantime and overall enjoying his time with his Chinese Grandfather. His stay ended with a visit to a temple his Grandfather had built on cave with Buddhist writings carved into the walls. They sparred, and though being advanced in age, his Grandfather was still very strong and bested Philip. He was proud of his grandson, though, and later, when they parted at



the train station, they did so on positive terms. It was not how Philip expected the visit to go.

Analysis

The novel adeptly sets up Philip as a multicultural character that feels he has no real place in the world as this is the first point in the novel when Philip comes face-to-face with his figurative and literal Chinese ancestry. Philip is subsequently brought before each of his cultures, and he asks himself who he identifies with. Here he meets his Grandfather, his mother's father, for the first time, who tells Philip a long story involving China. Philip is surprised by how interested he is in it, and how much affection he actually seems to have for his grandfather. In this way, Philip's grandfather can be seen as the physical embodiment of Philip's Chinese heritage. Having felt spurned by both Chinese and British cultures, Philip adopted the Japanese culture. Now, with a tangible connection to China, Philip allows himself to feel Chinese for the first time in his life. The novel will continue to do this with many other cultures until Philip can combine them all into a singular identity.

An interesting parallel is also drawn here between Philip and his grandfather. His grandfather is an elderly man, telling an almost forgotten story about a forgotten person of history for the first time to someone he comes to care deeply about. By telling this story, and ultimately connecting with another human being again, the grandfather finds a sort of redemption. The same can be said of Philip, whose story comprises the novel itself, and he too is an old man telling a story, eventually becoming redeemed by it.

The tale told by Grandfather also acts in a long literary tradition of nested narrators. The Gift of Rain is in the first person, and any chapter taking place while Philip is a young man is in fact part of the story Philip is telling to Michiko in the apparent present. Philip's Grandfather then, becomes a double-nested narrator. His story and dialogue is being relayed as part of Philip's overall story, ultimately filtered through him to Michiko. This act of nesting the narrators exists in a line of story telling that goes back before the written word, when stories were part of the oral tradition passed down through the generations. It is fitting then that the form match the content as Grandfather passes his story down to Philip who is now relaying it to Michiko. The whole novel functions as a man telling a story, rather than someone just reading a story. This enhances the emotional impact of climactic moments and gives the story a fable-like quality.

Discussion Question 1

Philip is set up as a multicultural character early on in the novel, and it negatively affects him. Looking at his interactions with his Chinese Grandfather in Chapters 9 and 10, how does Philip engage with his heritage? How does his acceptance or rejection of Chinese culture fit into what he has learned about Japanese culture and how he was raised?



Discussion Question 2

What parallels, if any, can be drawn between Philip and his Grandfather? How are they similar? How are they different?

Discussion Question 3

How do the political and historical machinations of Grandfather's story reflect and influence the events of the novel?

Vocabulary

yukata, Ipoh, tycoon, jade, dynasty, monarchy, Confucius, calamity, eunuch

Book 1, Chapters 11 - 12

Summary

Philip returned home. As he did, he realized that it was Uncle Lim, his driver, who had been his grandfather's source of inside information. Back home, Philip met Lim's daughter who had just gotten in from China. She relayed all the events of the Japanese invasion there. Later, Philip went to Endo-san's island only to find that he had disappeared entirely. There were photos left on the floor and hung up. There was also a note saying that Endo-san had gone to the east-coast and for Philip to keep training.

The new school term began and Philip's family was still off on holiday in England. So, Philip was in charge of maintaining the correspondences and invitations. He denied many of them, but an invitation from the Cross family came in and Philip could not refuse an invitation from them. On a Friday evening, he went to the Cross party. There he met with many different dignitaries including the Japanese consul. He also met a man named Yeap Chee Kon, known as Kon to most, a son of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce president. After Philip left the party, he met Kon again on the beach and the two of them engaged in hand-to-hand combat. This, as Philip revealed, would be the start of a long friendship.

The morning after, Kon and Philip traveled to meet Kon's sensei, Kideki Tanaka. Over tea, Tanaka told Philip that he and Endo-san studied under the same teacher, Ueshiba-sensei, and that he too came to Penang to try and find peace, which Philip found odd as that was one of the reasons that Endo-san claimed he had come to Penang. Tanaka pointed out that while it would be wrong for Philip to have two sensei, he could offer Kon as a sparring partner for Philip to learn from. Later, Philip found out that Endo-san had returned, and Philip rushed to meet him. He relayed all that he had learned with Tanaka, which agitated Endo-san who reiterated the idea that one cannot have two sensei at once. Philip reaffirmed that he indeed only wished to study under Endo-san.

Analysis

Philip meeting Kon is pivotal in his development because he has yet to meet another person he can wholly relate to. Kon is someone that is going through much of what Philip is, both in his family life and his personal life. Philip reflects that this would be the start of an important friendship. Philip may be able to connect with Endo-san, and he cares for him, he is still bound by the barriers of power that separate master from teacher. Kon is an equal. While they may learn from each other, as Tanaka suggest they do anyway, one does not lord power over the other. Their learning is reciprocal. This is important because much of Philip's actions occur because of his feeling of isolation. The plot of the novel could not function properly without Philip feeling isolated. That being said, the lessening of that isolation is what propels Philip forward in terms of character development. Now, with Kon, Philip does not need Endo-san to avoid feeling lonely.



An interesting point that these chapters make is that Philip can only really develop as a character when Endo-san is not around. In these sections Endo has left for long stretches of time. It is during this time that Philip makes another friend and meets another martial arts master. Though he reaffirms his willingness to be taught by Endo-san later, Philip finds himself wondering and probing into a world in which there is no Endo-san. Only when Philip is free to explore himself by himself can he develop any sort of identity on his own. This trend continues throughout the novel.

Discussion Question 1

How does Kon influence Philip, and how does Philip influence Kon? What does this say about their budding friendship?

Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast Kon and Philip. How do they reflect each other? Why are they a perfect fit for friendship?

Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast the relationship between Kon and Philip with the relationship between Endo-san and Tanaka-san.

Vocabulary

face (as an eastern concept), sensei, hearth



Book 1, Chapters 13 - 14

Summary

Book 1, Chapter 13 begins with where Philip was when Hitler invaded Poland and the condition of Europe worsened. He was listening to evening radio with Endo-san. Philip worried about his family during this time, as they were returning from England, somewhere in the middle of their journey. After that, Philip spent more time training despite school starting up again. He grew frustrated with Endo-san, who seemed distant to him as well. Philip's only solace became Kon, who was the only person he could really talk to that understood him. When Endo-san was busy, Philip would visit Kon's home. He met Kon's father who revealed all his connections to Philip's father. In another moment on the same day that he met Kon's father, Kon talked about how he came to be Tanaka-san's pupil, making Philip wonder why Endo-san made him his pupil in the first place.

The chapter ends with a watershed moment for both Endo-san and Philip. They were training as normal, but it was quite frustrating for Philip as he could not focus and both their tempers were boiling just beneath the surface. Because of his lack of focus, Philip could not avoid all of Endo-san's attacks effectively. Endo-san flipped him by the wrist and injured Philip's wrist and hand. Endo-san applied first aid then started dinner for the both of them. When they sat down to eat, Philip found that he could not use his hand to work the chopsticks. Endo-san fed Philip himself, and in that moment, according to Philip, they "had passed beyond the boundaries that encircled the pupil and the master" (155). They became equals. Not long after this, Philip's family arrived back to Penang sooner than he had expected. They had been away for more than six months including all the travel time. On their trip back from the port to Istana, Philip, now with his two brothers, sister and father, discussed the news of the war in Europe.

In the rest of the months of that year life returned to some sense of normalcy at Istana. Philip finished his schooling and did well in all of his final examinations. Then, when his father found the time, he and Philip went to their library to unpack all of the book purchases he had made in his time in England. In the afternoon of that day, Philip decided to tell his father of his training with Endo-san. This was met with anger, but Philip managed to redirect that anger and get his father to talk more about Philip's mother. This led to Noel Hutton, teary eyes and choked up, talking about the night that Philip was conceived. Philip felt some sense of connection for the first time and desired to think of ways to make up for his past callousness.

Analysis

In these chapters Philip begins to connect to his British family for the first time; the absence in the context of the war helped accomplish this. Philip's lack of interaction with Endo-san could too be responsible for Philip's sudden unity with a family that he had



previously admitted as feeling separate from. By no means does he feel like a perfect fit in the family, however. Regardless, Endo-san is cold and distant with Philip through much of these chapters. Perhaps there is a sense of jealousy around as Philip does, indeed, want to spend time with his family. Also perhaps, as tensions mount in the coming war, Endo-san is up to what may be considered nefarious deeds around the island. All of this inner turmoil between these two characters comes bursting out of the page as they train and physically interact with each other.

When, during training, Endo-san injures Philip, they pass a line between master and pupil, one in which they cannot retreat from and mirrors something beyond just platonic love. Philip injures his wrist and cannot use chopsticks to eat dinner that night. Without a word, Endo-san feeds him himself. Despite the distance and cold attitude, these actions reveal a deeper sense of commitment on that of Endo-san's part, and it is at this point that Philip learns of his deep abiding affection for Endo-san. The novel plays with homoerotic undertones, but the love they show each other is almost devoid of gender and sex. This affection, played out through the violence of training and the tenderness of being fed, will have lasting ripple effects through the novel. If the reincarnation ideologies present in the text are to be believed, then this action also has effects backwards and forwards in time.

Discussion Question 1

How is Noel Hutton "every inch the quintessential Englishman" (157)?

Discussion Question 2

In what way did Endo-san and Philip pass "beyond the boundaries that encircled the pupil and the master" (155)? How does this impact their relationship, and why is this moment significant?

Discussion Question 3

How do the chapters with Philip and his British family interact with the chapters with Philip and his Chinese Grandfather and with Philip and Endo-san? Where do all these cultures intersect, or do they? How does Philip manage all of these cultures at once?

Vocabulary

pupil, quell, quintessential, bomoh, keris, Nagamitsu, dignity



Book 1, Chapters 15 - 16

Summary

Chapter 15 returns to Philip as an old man, pausing in his story to Michiko. Michiko had been with him for a week now. At this pause, Michiko reflected how wonderful it was to share in the moment with the fireflies and how it gave them a connection to those lost to the past. Philip had never thought of it that way before. They agreed to continue with the story the next evening. At his work the next day, Philip met with an architect from his heritage foundation and a journalist. He and this architect had been working on restoring Towkay Yeap's derelict home, left abandoned by the war and Japanese occupation. This had been a long running project of Philip's, to restore many of the old houses in Penang to their pre-war glory. The journalist came in later and Philip asked that his architect stay in on the meeting as he had granted the interview with the journalist hoping to have the article focus on his heritage foundation. The journalist asked him what Philip thought of the part he played in the Japanese Occupation. Philip then asked him to leave.

Back in Istana later that day, Philip found Michiko coughing blood into his sink. He asked if she was there when they dropped the bomb. Michiko said yes. Philip hoped that by continuing to tell his story to her that he may distract her from her pain by showing her his own.

Chapter 16 delves into the further past again. Philip, as a young man, started working at his father's company at the beginning of 1940. He had begun to feel like he was starting to really know his father for the first time, engaging in a long tradition. His work often brought him down to the docks to oversee shipments in and out, as the company had money everywhere. One day Philip went down to the docks with his father to investigate and stop a gathering of the Malay Communist Party. They were incensing the dock workers. Philip and his father got into a fight and ran the rabble-rousers away, bonding over a sense of shared accomplishment and duty.

1940 passed quickly for Philip, and he found it hard to balance everything in his life, from work to his classes with Endo-san. Philip found a connection with William, however, bonding over photography in the garden one day and sharing work lunches which William always paid for. One day, William told Philip that he had joined the Navy to aid in the war effort, and together they collude to tell their father. When they told him later that day, he accepted it—though it saddened him—and said that they should throw a party as they “may never see such days again” (184). Philip began training with the Japanese bodyguards at the Consulate to save time for Endo-san, and the chapter ends with an evening meal with Endo-san. Philip thought about asking him about his true purpose on Penang, but decided that he would not be able to handle the answers.



Analysis

In these two chapters we get two pictures of Philip as a multicultural character, one being far more naïve than the other. Like the chapter where Philip met his grandfather, Chapter 16 finds Philip coming to terms with his British heritage as his family returns from their holiday. Their apparent peril might have made Philip a bit more appreciative of the things he could have lost. His interest in his Chinese heritage after meeting his grandfather likely had an impact as well, as Philip came to want to know everything about himself. As such, he started working for his father's company and he bonded with his siblings. An important event is when he bonds with William over photography in the garden. It is fitting that in coming to terms with his British culture, Philip learns to accept his family's business and his family itself.

One could argue that at the beginning of the tale, Philip is virtually cultureless, not accepting anything into his being, but now he is both Chinese and British, not to mention that he also trying to accept Japanese culture by training with Endo-san. This is the point, however, that Philip begins to feel overwhelmed by everything. Philip is attempting to balance everything, and it causes him a lot of stress. He has not yet committed to a full cultural integration, which means that he is attempting to be 100% British when he is with his family, 100% Japanese when he trains with Endo-san, and 100% Chinese when he is with his grandfather. The cultures have yet to totally integrate or fully interact. Despite all this, when Philip's brother William confides in him that he is going to join the navy, Philip thinks that they "may never see such days again" (184) revealing that Philip, though stretched thin, is indeed happy.

Discussion Question 1

Based on what you know about Philip Hutton, why is he rebuilding Towkay Yeap's home? Is this symbolic for anything, if so, what?

Discussion Question 2

How much of Philip's feelings of isolation are self-inflicted? Could he have been more part of his family if he had tried? How does Philip's interactions with William in the garden and Noel at the docks play into this sense of isolation and connection?

Discussion Question 3

Why does William join the war effort and what does that say about the British culture?

Vocabulary

solace, Singapore, shoji



Book 1, Chapters 17 - 18

Summary

Chapter 17 sees Philip spending most of his time with Kon, the two of them growing in friendship. One day, Kon showed Philip his new car and they went for a drive around the island. They ended up on some distant beach where Kon confirmed the rumors about his father to Philip. Kon's father was the dragon head of the Red Banner Society, a society of triad gangsters. Kon showed Philip one of their signs if he ever needed help from them. The two of them left the beach to go have dinner in Georgetown. After dinner they helped a drunk Englishman named Martin Edgumbe back to his hotel. The Englishman, after learning that they speak many different languages including Japanese, offered them a position in Force 136, an organized resistance force designed to combat the Japanese should they invade. Edgumbe sobered up at the mention of a Japanese invasion, saying that "there isn't much time" (196) for Kon and Philip to choose if they want to help or not.

Kon took Philip home. Philip invited him to the going away party for William. Philip did not have the opportunity to talk about Edgumbe with Kon again before the party. He was kept busy by the party preparations and his time with Isabel. While preparing for the party, Philip and Isabel decide to go to the Easter & Oriental Hotel for drinks and lunch. During this time Isabel seemed happy that Philip wanted to be more a part of the family. The conversation ended with Isabel asking Philip about Endo-san. She was concerned about the rumors that the Japanese were planning to invade Malaya. One rumor in particular worried her, that "they've already had spies here for years . . . disguised as traders and shopkeepers, rubber buyers, and fishermen" (201). The chapter moves on to Philip at work. His father informed him that he planned to invite the Japanese consul to the party, which Philip thought was a bad idea. He also reminded Philip to invite his grandfather and Aunt Mei as well. The chapter ends with William returning home from basic training, all gussied up in his new uniform, two days before the party which was to be held on the last Saturday of October 1941.

Analysis

Philip's friends and his family represent a sense of normalcy that he clings on to as changes start to occur. These two chapters are chiefly concerned with the relationship between Philip and Kon, and it continues to grow as tensions mount all around them. The introduction of the British force 136 certainly being chief among these. While war had loomed for a while, it had continued to have some distance to Philip. Seeing a contingency plan in place in case of an Occupation makes Philip cling even harder to the 'normal' things of his life like Kon and his family. Philip seemingly still wishes to reject the idea that war could ever come to his own doorstep and focuses all of his attention on the going away party he is planning for his brother.



Conflict occurs when Edgecumbe, the British officer in Force 136, asks them join the Force. Kon is clearly more interested in this than Philip. Philip chooses to focus instead on throwing the party for his brother and spending time with his sister. He does not get a chance to talk to Kon about Force 136 again before the party. Likely both of them will make up their mind about it independently. Like most other defining character moments in this novel, they happen in isolation. So as war looms, so does Philip's party. This party will bring together all the cultures in Penang, many of which are at war with each other or about to be. The party is shaping up to be a calm before the storm. At this point most readers will have identified the inevitability of war, even if the protagonist has not quite yet recognized it himself. The planning of the party, and the happy times surrounding it, become quite upsetting and the dramatic irony functions more for horror than for comedy as it is traditionally known. Here Philip and Kon also begin to go separate ways. Kon appears much more ready to join the Force to fight for Malaya than Philip.

Discussion Question 1

In the end, Philip chooses not to join the Force 136 with Kon. Should he have? Speculate on what may have happened, had he joined with Kon. If Philip were to do the same speculation, what might he think?

Discussion Question 2

How does the knowledge of the coming war impact readers? Would this novel be better or worse if the events did not happen in the context of a well known, historical war?

Discussion Question 3

What about Kon makes him more inclined to join Force 136 than Philip? List specific examples.

Vocabulary

municipal, Georgetown, triads, diluted



Book 1 Chapters 19 - 20

Summary

The party began as members of different cultures and groups gathered in Istana. Philip claimed that “it was truly a gathering of friend and foe” (203). Philip greeted incoming guests with his father, introducing him to Endo-san and the consul when they arrived. Philip’s father asked Endo-san if the Japanese plan to invade Malaya, but Philip’s grandfather arrived and this broke the tension for the time being. Philip showed his grandfather around, introducing him to his siblings and to Endo-san, who had, as it turned out, already met Philip’s grandfather before. They spoke about fate and past lives, and Philip left his grandfather at a fountain that resembled the one at his mother’s childhood home. Kon and Towkay Yeap arrived bearing bad news. From the underground they had heard that the communists had planted a bomb in their house in retaliation for the Hutton’s actions at the docks.

They found the man who was planting the bomb thanks to Philip’s memory of that day at the docks. This man, though a member of the communist movement in Malaya, revealed that it was the Japanese who ordered the bomb be planted. William met Philip and their father as they came out of the library. He took them to meet Isabel’s friend, and possible suitor, and older gentleman named Peter MacAllister. Philip escaped and found Endo-san on the beach. He chose not to ask him about the bomb. After Tanaka-san found them and talked to them, Philip gathered the courage to ask a different question. He asked if Japan will invade Malaya, to which Endo-san replied with a simple yes. He went on again about fate, and how the two of them were always destined to become enemies despite Endo-san’s love for him. Philip showed Endo-san around his house, ending up in his room. There Endo-san found his paintings and Philip experienced satori, or brief enlightenment. He did not see Endo-san off as he left. He met with Kon again who had decided to take up Edgecumbe’s offer. Philip said he would think about it, but he had already made up his mind. He knew somehow that his family would need to him around. Noel Hutton gave his speech, fireworks were lit, and grandfather offered an invitation for Philip to visit the next day. With that, the party ended.

Analysis

This chapter sees the full integration of Philip’s multiculturalism. Like many other moments in this novel, the author brilliantly lets the interior lives of the characters be played out in the exterior circumstances. Philip’s finally acceptance of all of his cultures comes when he is literally showing those different cultures to one another. When his British family meets his Chinese grandfather they are all wary of each other, but that soon fades as they seem to meld into a more integrated family unit. They all accept one another. Philip’s father forgives his grandfather in his own way, and Philip’s siblings call him “Ah Kong” at his own request, which is the Hokkien term for Grandfather



representing a true, physical integration of the culture. Philip will only realize later that his cultures are forming into one when it is spelled out to him in literal letters.

The scene with the party also serves vitally as the calm before the storm. Under one roof are many of the cultures that would be pitted against each other during the coming conflict, but here they are partying and drinking as friends and acquaintances. Even the Japanese are on the surface a part of these revelries. Nevertheless, it is only a calm because violence does not break out. It is on the brink, though, ready to come at any second. Nothing is more evident of this than the bomb threat that is made. When it is discovered that the Japanese are the ones who orchestrated the plot, it seems that the calm is only as such by chance alone. This chapter prepares the reader for the next section of the book, which is far more violent than the first section, and while that is still quite a shock, chapters like this one aim to prepare the reader for that shock.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast the state of the world in 1940 and William's going-away party. Are physical actions being placed on the page symbolically? Is the party just a literal party? What is the significance of all the cultures attending this event?

Discussion Question 2

What amount of culpability does Endo-san have in the plot to blow up Istana? Does his culpability matter? Be sure to think about Japanese ideals of honor and duty.

Discussion Question 3

What happens in Philip's room after the party? How much is literal; how much is figurative, and what happens that goes unsaid?

Vocabulary

Ah Kong, Satori



Book 1, Chapters 21 - 22

Summary

Philip woke up in the late morning. A car came not soon after to pick him up and take him to his grandfather's. Walking along the streets, his grandfather took Philip to the Leong San Thong Dragon Mountain Hall Temple, deep into "the Chinese heart of the island" (224). There, Grandfather showed him a wall of his past lineage through the Khoo line. Philip's name had been added as well with a hyphenated "-hutton." After this moment, his grandfather spent more time at Istana, walking with Philip on the beach and talking about a great many things, most times talking of Philip's mother and father. Then William left for Singapore. He had Uncle Lim take a picture of him with his family in front of the house before he left. Then he was gone.

Philip continued to visit his grandfather who now resided in his other house on Armenian street in attempt to be closer to Philip and his family. During their time together, Grandfather told stories to Philip and relayed ideas of predestination and fate. He told Philip that likely the reason for his middle name, Arminius, came from a Dutch priest Jacobus Arminius, and that it meant "free-will." That was something that Philip's mother believed in fiercely, raging against the fatalism of certain Buddhist ideologies. Three weeks after William's departure, Philip found himself on the beachhead at Istana, avoiding a family squabble over Isabel's suitor. He saw a light on at Endo-san's and took a boat out there. He found Endo-san signaling with a lantern out to sea, and receiving a distant response back.

In a rush, Philip cancelled his classes with the bodyguards at the consulate the next day. He decided to visit Tanaka the day before Uncle Lim's daughter's (Ming) wedding as he could confide in no one else. Tanaka-san's bags were packed when Philip arrived. He was getting ready to leave the country. Philip questioned him. Tanaka revealed that he had come to Penang to watch after Endo-san, a wish from his lover Michiko whom Tanaka was also in love with. Tanaka offered only the advice that Philip is who Endo-san needed right now, the only one who could help him.

The rest of the chapter is devoted to Ming's wedding ceremony. Philip and his family drove out there to the other side of the island to attend. There was an opera, a feast, and much merry making. It was conducted in traditional Chinese custom. Philip spoke again with Kon at the wedding, telling him about his decision to stay with his family and not join force 136. The chapter ends with Philip sending a prayer of protection for everyone he knew, including Endo-san and his own family. Philip prayed as hard as he could. He knew war was close upon them.



Analysis

Just before war breaks out, Philip manages to totally realize his identity. This formation is important if he is to survive what comes in Book 2. When viewing his full name hyphenated, Philip comments “I felt a shifting feeling of being brought apart and then placed back together again . . . The hyphen was also similar to the ideogram for “one” in Japanese and . . . Chinese as well” (227). Here Philip finally understands himself as “one” and not as many. What we saw reflected physically earlier in the party is also matched in Philip’s own name. Identity is something that many characters in this novel take for granted, but it determines much of one’s loyalty and duty, themes that are brought up again and again in this text. This moment underlines the difficulty that multicultural people face in a world divided by cultural identities at war with each other.

Philip’s multicultural heritage, though a bringer of rain and suffering to many in this novel, also presents progressive ideas that could put a stop to war. Philip does not fight in the war directly. Even at the end, he is only acting out of the interests of his own friends and family. Those fighting are those that have a sense of duty to their countries like Endo-san and William. War only happens, at least in the context of this novel, because of the differences in cultural identities and how that is used to force people to hate one another. People are multicultural, are less susceptible to following their culture blindly. They can see all sides, and eventually become more healthy humans because of it, not attached to ideas of culture but also not culture-less. Philip can fully engage with his family’s culture and call it his own. He can do the same for his Grandfather’s. Three generations of Philip’s and the world is full of people that would not choose one side or the other. The novel is importantly pointing out the necessity in multiculturalism, and in the preservation of each culture, something not easily accomplished.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of the hyphen in Philip Khoo-Hutton’s complete name? What does Philip think about it? Why does he include the meaning of it in the Japanese language along with the Chinese?

Discussion Question 2

Since he did not know what Endo-san was doing, can Philip be blamed for the ease of the Japanese invasion? Does he accept any of this blame? Why is this important?

Discussion Question 3

How culpable is Endo-san for the coming war? Was he acting only out of necessity for his father? Does duty give him a moral-out in a sense? Can any future war-crimes be attributed to his actions?

Vocabulary

portico, Arminianism, courtier, cheongsam



Book 2, Chapters 1 - 2

Summary

On the morning of December 8th, 1941, Philip and his family learned of the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor and Malaya that occurred the day before. Later he learned that the British naval commander had sent two ships from Singapore to meet with the Japanese navy, one of which William was on. Philip's father received the call while they were at work that indeed William had been one of the recorded deaths on that ship. Philip prepared the funeral, a small memorial service.

After dinner, later that evening, Philip's father suggested that all his children leave for the safety of Singapore. A consensus could not be met, so they all agreed to stay instead. Philip believed, and said as much, that the only way to assure their safety was to work with the Japanese. No one liked this idea. At nightfall, Philip went down to the beach and found Endo-san there. He confronted him on all his lies and the way he used him to gather intelligence. Endo-san had no answer.

Over the next week, Japanese propaganda pamphlets peppered the island as Japanese planes made frequent fly overs. One such flyover happened when Philip was on his way to Towkay Yeap's home to see Kon. Kon was not there. He had already left for the Force. Philip talked with Towkay about the violence to come. It still seemed like a distant thing to Philip. Much of that distance was eroded when a member of the Japanese secret police showed up at Istana uninvited with guards from the consulate. They left only when Isabel threatened to shoot them (firing off a warning shot in the process). Philip knew retaliation would come from this, in an effort to save face on the Japanese's part. To save his family, and do what he thought was right, Philip went over to the consulate and offered his services to the Japanese, swearing fealty before a picture of the Emperor.

Analysis

Despite having almost fully formed his identity now, Philip still struggles with his loyalty. He tells himself that he is helping the Japanese to save his family, but is fairly clear that he also feels a sense of duty to not necessarily the Japanese but to Endo-san in particular. He feels like he owes much to him and could never side against him. Thus he puts himself again in the position that we find him at the beginning of Book 1. By bowing before the picture of the Japanese emperor, Philip denies his British and Chinese cultures who are fighting against the Japanese. Philip finds this easier to reconcile, at first, than the betrayal of Endo-san.

The two books, which divide this novel in half, mirror each other, and the removal of Philip's culture again puts him in a place where he has to build himself back up again. Things are a bit different, though. Philip loves Endo-san, and has committed himself to



the Japanese to save his family, but there is a sense that his loyalty is not as strong to the Japanese as it is to his own family. If Endo-san leaves the frame, or something along those lines, Philip may not be totally culture-less and adrift. He has rocks to anchor him beyond Endo-san and the Japanese. This is what ultimately provides the most tension at the close of chapter two and provides the most set up for the rest of Book 2.

Discussion Question 1

Philip gives many reasons for helping the Japanese. Despite what he says, what is the ultimate reason he decides to help them?

Discussion Question 2

Malaya, at the start of the novel, is a British colony, which means that the British had to conquer it at some point like the Japanese do in the back half of the book. Compare and contrast Japanese imperialism and British colonialism. Why are these parallels significant?

Discussion Question 3

Propaganda is all about the control of information to achieve an effect. How does the narrator, and by extension the author, control the information in this novel, and what is the effect?

Vocabulary

listless, squadron



Book 2, Chapters 3 - 4

Summary

Chapter 3 of Book 2 opens with Isabel's hair being cut. She was made to look like a man, the family being fearful of the coming Japanese occupation and the possibilities therein. Philip's father insisted that Isabel go with all the female staff up to their house on Penang Hill. As they all arrived, Philip went with them to see them off, they witnessed the bombing of Gerogetown and the port below them. Philip stayed the night up at Penang hill. He had told his sister that he would be working with the Japanese. He returned home the next day. He and his father waited a few days more before going to the office buildings in town. Despite the bombing, the office had not been damaged yet. They destroyed the documents that might help the Japanese. Then Philip's father took him down to the Weld Quay to show him the last ship departing Penang, as secret passage for only the British occupants who were fleeing. Days later he discovered that the British Army, too, had left for Singapore. Just before the troops landed on Penang, Philip told his father of his future work with the Japanese.

When the Japanese troops did arrive, they were met with no resistance at all. At the request of Endo-san, Philip was present when the Japanese government officially took over the resident councilor's staff. His own people started seeing him as a traitor with his association with the Japanese, calling him a "running-dog." The newly installed Japanese government executed the looters and put up a strict curfew. Later they called a business meeting for all the Penang business owners. Philip went to attend with his father, but he was used as a piece of propaganda during the transition. He informed the business owners that they would retain their companies and Japanese advisers with absolute authority would be placed with them to ensure that Japan's needs are met by their business practices. The Japanese army continued to move through the island, and on February 15, 1942 Singapore surrendered and the Japanese Occupation began in full. Chapter 4 ends with Philip attempting to visit his Aunt Mei. She asked him to leave because of the associations he had with the Japanese. Philip still vowed to protect his family at all costs.

Analysis

It is in these chapters that Philip makes his final decision to work for the Japanese Occupation force, and it is made entirely in the absence of his family and friends, further reestablishing both his physical and cultural isolation that we saw in the beginning of Book 1. He does not consult with them, and chooses instead to ask forgiveness rather than permission. He had hinted at working with the Japanese before, but he never consulted with his family on how a decision like that could help or hurt them. He may have been better off doing this, but Philip correctly identified the fact that had he not helped the Japanese, his family would have been sent to POW camps. The same can be said for all the big business owners on the island. Only because of Philip's



intervention did they get to remain in their businesses and not shipped away. Still, Philip's reasoning behind joining the Japanese is tainted with his fondness for Endo-san.

It could be argued that Philip worked for the Japanese purely out of the interest of his family, and he always planned on spying for the other side. That claim is dubious, however, given his relationship to Endo-san. Even when Philip confronts him for all his lies, he still does not want to believe them. Beyond that, Philip openly admits that he still admires and cares deeply for Endo-san, unable to take back the ultimate trust he gave him on the day back on the cliffs. This makes Philip's decisions complicated and his character motivations complex to the degree that Philip is both the willing and unwilling "running dog" of the Japanese.

Discussion Question 1

How does Philip's cultural isolation affect his decision making?

Discussion Question 2

How can a person be used as a piece of propaganda?

Discussion Question 3

Does Philip fulfill the prophecy that he will betray his own kind by working for the Japanese? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

running dog, reprisal, propaganda



Book 2, Chapters 5 - 7

Summary

In Book 2, Chapter 5, Philip attempted and succeeded in finding his brother Edward and Isabel's suitor Peter MacAllister. They had left for Kuala Lumpur, and did not return since its fall to the Japanese. By going to Saotome in K.L. and visiting Pudu Prison, Philip found out that both his brother and sister's suitor had been sent as prisoners of war to work on the railway in Burma. Everyone he talked to intoned that this was a death sentence. Things settled down more or less and Philip eked out a kind of living with the Japanese. He felt very isolated during this time. After a business meeting, Fujihara-san, an official in the Japanese secret police (the same man who accosted Philip and his family at Istana) asked Philip to find him a particular piano and to take it from one of the locals. Philip knew this to be just an exhibition to the people to show them that a son of a prominent family had gone over to their side. Regardless, Philip joined the cruel guard Goro to find this piano. After many houses they found one and had it sent to Fujihara. At an event at the recently refurbished councilor's home, Philip learned from Colonel Takuma Nishida how crucial Endo-san was to the invasion of Malaya. Philip realized that this, of course, implicated him in the Japanese occupation.

In Book 2, Chapter 7 Philip and his family had begun to receive death threats that culminated in a half-hearted firebombing of their house. Philip attempted to resign from the consulate, but they coerced him to stay, with threats to his family. Later Philip, using a triad sign Kon had taught him for emergencies, met with Towkay Yeap. He offered himself as an informant to the triads while he remained working for the Japanese. The triads accept his offer. Then, on his way to see Endo-san, Philip had a vision of his past life, one where Endo-san executed Philip for betraying the Shogun's government and providing information to a rebel faction. This occurred in the seventeenth century according to the narrator. Endo-san said the reason he had been training Philip so hard was so that he could be made into an adequate match for him and attain balance in their repeated lives.

Analysis

Only when his isolation escalates does Philip decide to perform subterfuge for the other side; like many of his other character defining moments, this occurs when Philip is at his loneliest. His family has for the most part forsaken him for working with the Japanese. He can only tell them that he is trying to help them, but they see it as a betrayal. It is also obvious that he does harbor admiration for the Japanese by proxy through Endo-san. He also cannot communicate with Kon who might be the one person who knows what he is going through. Kon has disappeared with Force 136. This loneliness escalates until death threats are made against Philip's family.



At the point where his work with the Japanese begins to become dangerous for his family is when Philip finally decides to take action. He knows that his only moral justification is that he is protecting his family. When they are in danger then Philip's purpose becomes less clear. He goes to Towkay Yeap in an attempt to keep his family safe. Interestingly enough it is not his loyalty to his family that makes him commit subterfuge and spy on the Japanese but love. Loyalty would dictate that he side with his family on all things, but in the end this path puts him above this loyalty by doing only what will protect the family despite outward appearances.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Fukihara want a piano so desperately? How do the interactions with the people during this search impact Philip moving forward?

Discussion Question 2

Are Philip's actions in these chapters selfless or selfish? How much is he doing in his own interest and how much does he do for the interests of others?

Discussion Question 3

By working with the triads, is Philip betraying his love to Endo-san? How are these things reconciled, or are they?

Vocabulary

clerical, Kimigayo, Nationalists, Kempeitai, sampan



Book 2, Chapters 8 - 9

Summary

Three years of Japanese occupation went by. Philip continued with his work with the Japanese. Things started to change again when the Sook Ching orders were given out. These stated that any Chinese offering assistance to Anti-Japanese groups were to be arrested. Philip witnessed these 'arrests' first hand, as the Japanese army brutalized, raped, and murdered the local Chinese. One such group included Ming and her village. Ming and her new husband did not survive the Sook Ching exercises. Philip drew further and further away from his own family as everyone saw him as a traitor.

A month after the death of Ming, through Towkay Yeap, Philip met with Kon for the first time in years at his master Tanaka's old house. It was not a particular touching reunion, as Kon needed information about a Japanese communications relay. Philip hesitantly gave the information up, worried about the repercussions on the folk of Penang. His suspicions were correct, as after Kon's guerrilla group destroyed the relay, the Japanese immediately set to punish the locals. Philip went to Endo-san, feeling isolated and alone despite many of these feelings coming from Endo himself. Endo attempted to comfort him, but that comfort soon faded as he gave Philip a letter from his brother Edward. Philip passed this letter on to his father and sister who subsequently kicked him out of the house to reassess his loyalties. Philip ended up back at Endo-san's to live for a while. The letter from Edward stated that Peter had died and that he (Edward) was extremely ill.

Analysis

Because the main character is also the narrator, one could argue that this decision to not show the war also reflects the character Philip's decision to focus solely on what the war did rather than what the war was. Throughout Book 2, the author makes the clear decision not to show much of the actual War at all, choosing instead to focus on its effects and consequences. Obviously, since Philip did not actually fight in the war as a soldier, we are limited to only his point of view. It is still important, however, that the author chose to make Philip the sole point of view in the story. In this way, the focus remains on Penang and Malaya. These two chapters make clear that the author, the story, and the protagonist are all chiefly concerned with the War's consequences. Philip hesitates in his help to Kon, and the destruction of the communications relay happens off the page. What does happen on page is the Japanese violent response against the people. In a specific sense, this happens with Philip's family as well. They only learn of Peter's death and Edward's illness through a letter. What is primarily in focus here is this letter's effects on Philip and his family. This effect, of course, being Philip's continued exile.



The novel deliberately takes the time to show the day to day effects of the war in an effort to show the overall effect of the war on its characters. Though many years are glossed over at the start, the reader still comes to learn of the Sook Ching exercises, and by context, it can be extrapolated that these are in response to not only the local retaliation but to the general state of the War overall. The Japanese have likely lost key battles at this point, and this directly affects how they treat the countries they are occupying. In this instance, they feel the need to crack down on all local resistances as a way to compensate for losses abroad. As seen in the next few chapters, this only serves to embolden the resistance groups and inform the populace that their new rulers are afraid.

Discussion Question 1

Many of the war-crimes, including the death of Peter and Edward, occur off the page. What is the impact of not showing many of the atrocities that occurred during the Japanese occupation and focusing instead on only the effects?

Discussion Question 2

Working with Endo-san first made Philip feel less isolated, then more. Why does he still return to Endo-san after he has been kicked out of his father's house despite everything Endo-san has done to him?

Discussion Question 3

What are the symbolic ramifications of Philip being exiled from Istana?

Vocabulary

Sook Ching exercises



Book 2, Chapters 10 -12

Summary

Attacks on Japanese by resistance movements increased as word of an American victory in the Pacific reached Penang through muted whispers. This did more than agitate the Japanese occupational force who carried out more atrocities. This affected Philip personally when Uncle Lim, in retaliation for what he believed led to Ming's death, informed on Isabel to the Japanese secret police, claiming she conspired with the rebellion movements. With Philip and Endo-san in tow, they went to Istana and found Isabel, illegal documents, and a transmitter in the boathouse. She ran, and Endo-san shot her, relieving her of the possibility of torture under the secret police and Saotome. Philip's father was grateful. The Japanese received nothing of value from Isabel's documents. Uncle Lim gave them two more names, one of which was Aunt Mei, who did not receive such a swift end as Isabel. They tortured her in front of Philip.

Philip met Akasaki Saotome in Butterworth. He had arrived primarily to deal with Force 136 and the group calling themselves "The White Tiger." Philip knew this to be Kon's group. Though being shut out of the meeting, Philip learned that they were planning an ambush on Kon's group. He informed Towkay Yeap, but the triads were nearly out of resources. He told Philip that only he can save his friend. Over much agony, Philip decided that he had to do what was right for once, and so he decided to ditch the Japanese and meet up with his Grandfather to find a way to warn Kon of the coming ambush. Much of this decision was made when he found his father throwing his collection of butterflies to the sea wind.

The narrative shifts back to the Philip as an old man again as he still continued to relay this story to Michiko. Together they sat on the same bench that Philip and Endo-san had sat on so many years ago and discussed Philip's connection to the island and why he had chosen to stay. They left and took a car into town. They visited the newly refurbished Towkay Yeap's house. This brought back extremely vivid memories for Philip. Then they went to a well-known Nyonya restaurant for dinner. Philip seemed contented that Michiko now knew what became of his father's butterflies. Though, Philip admitted, he did not know what became of his father's sword collection. In a moment of clarity, Michiko claimed that she knew and that she would show Philip, but first he had to continue his story.

Analysis

The deaths of Philip's sister and aunt are pivotal in the decisions Philip makes here, and had they not happened he may not have decided to go try and save Kon himself. As previously indicated, much of the back half of this novel is concerned with cause and effect. This begins to deal with fate and free-will as well. When one traces the line of cause and effect, the beginning gets a bit muddled. Important, however, is that Philip



decides to save Kon himself only after final tragedy has struck his family. The novel is appropriately asking the question of whether or not Philip had any say in the matter of his choice. If his choice is merely an effect, then he did not make it but rather it was caused. The death of Isabel and Aunt Mei act as both cause and effect. Isabel only is caught because of Uncle Lim's betrayal, and Uncle Lim only betrays the family because he believes Philip to be responsible for his daughter's death. When the plot is viewed this way, actual choice, or the exercising of free-will, is only just part of this cause and effect chain. These chapters are the most compelling arguments for deterministic world view in a novel that would have us believe that both fate and free will interact in some meaningful way.

When the narrative breaks again, returning to him as an old man, Philip goes to view the newly refurbished Towkay Yeap house. With Michiko, he has been reconstructing his memories one final time in an act of preservation and, more importantly, revelation. He had literally been doing this with his work with the historical preservation society. Philip is also trying to reconstruct the island itself in the way it had been before the war. Towkay Yeap's house provides vivid memories for Philip. They are so vivid that he appears to talk to Kon again. Here memory and reality overlap briefly, and time itself seems to bend. Just like his story to Michiko, Philip's acts of preservation all across the island have just as much to do with Philip himself as it does with the island.

Discussion Question 1

Moments like cause and effect hardly ever exist in a vacuum. While giving the complete context, what key moment made Philip decide that he must be the one to save Kon? How much of this was fate, and how much of this was free will?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Noel Hutton throw his collection of butterflies to the wind? What are the symbolic ramifications?

Discussion Question 3

Can Philip's actions as an adult be attributed to guilt or to duty?

Vocabulary

monsoon, ikebana, opium



Book 2, Chapters 13 - 15

Summary

Philip traveled from Butterworth to Ipoh to see his grandfather. He found his house empty, so he searched for him in the temple he had shown him years ago. There he found his grandfather. Philip informed him of all the tragedy that had befallen the family, including Aunt Mei's death, and he handed the ashes over to him. They embraced one final time, as the narrative reveals at the end of the chapter, Philip did not see his grandfather again after the war nor was he able to find the temple again. Onto his main mission, Philip made his way to Kon through the use of the Triads. When he found Kon and his guerrillas, he warned them of the ambush. With the cruel leader above Kon, Yong Kwan, they set up a counter ambush. This led to the capture of Saotome-san and the retrieval of Tanaka who had been made prisoner. Without mercy, Yong Kwan questioned Tanaka in the same way he did Saotome - torture. In an attempt to save his old master, Kon lost his life. Philip wandered back into the jungle, headed for Ipoh defeated. When he arrived he was captured by Goro and brought back to Penang for trial.

On a boat coming into Penang harbor, Philip witnessed British bombers flying over, destroying key Japanese outposts, leaving things like the POW camps untouched. It seemed as though the war had finally turned. The Japanese were practically defeated. This did not stop them from continuing with Philip's trial. At the prison he found his father again, who had forgiven him because he had done "what had to be done" (389). The trial was swift and Philip was found guilty on Goro's testimony alone. He was charged with spying and the death of Saotome, and was to be executed. Philip awaited his apparent last days in the same prison as his father, though the only person he saw was Endo-san who came often for visits.

Analysis

The idea of free will is further complicated in these chapters when the final result of Philip's decision is made clear to the readers and to Philip himself. Having learned of a plot to kill his friend Kon, Philip had decided that it must be he himself that saves him. Much of this is out of necessity, but Philip does find a sense of relief in totally committing himself to one side. Just before he meets up with Kon, Philip visits his Grandfather and the two of them discuss the dichotomy between fate and free will before Philip departs. This is important and a moment that foreshadows what is to come. By getting to Kon first, Philip is able to help conduct a counter ambush, but by his absence, the Japanese anticipated this move. Despite this, Kon is saved from his immediate threat, only to be threatened by something new. Kon's troop leader is ruthless with Japanese prisoners, and because of this Kon attempts to help his old master Tanaka to freedom. This ends with Kon's untimely death. This is important because Kon only died in this way because of Philip's intervention. He may have died had he not come to help, but this only reveals



that maybe Kon was destined to die regardless of what anyone did. By getting into the mix of things, Philip only seems to make things worse. The “gift of rain” the fortune teller told him of years ago with Endo-san, may just be that death and suffering follow him wherever he goes.

Discussion Question 1

How has the war changed Kon? How has the war changed Philip? Were the changes similar, or did the two of them change in entirely different ways?

Discussion Question 2

How does Philip reaffirm his identity before setting off to find and help Kon? Think in terms of identity as culture.

Discussion Question 3

What does the eventual death of Kon reveal about the nature of free-will and fate?

Vocabulary

guerrilla, lorry



Book 2, Chapters 16 - 19

Summary

On the day of Philip's execution, a crowd gathered outside Fort Cornwallis. Despite Philip's requests, his father was there. Endo-san approached and informed him that Philip's father would be the one to die, not him. Noel Hutton had exchanged his life for his son's. Philip would be put under house arrest, and Endo-san performed the execution himself. After that moment the narrative returns to Philip as an old man again. After hearing that part of the story, Michiko apologized for having brought the sword that executed Philip's father. Michiko, as promised, then showed Philip to the spot where his father had hidden his keris blades. They were buried in a metal trunk underneath the frangipani tree Philip's mother had planted. They were nearly untouched aside from a light coating of rust.

The narrative quickly returns to wartime around 1945. The war was coming to its conclusion. Haliffaxes continued their fly-overs, and the people in town began spending all the "banana notes" or the transitional currency, fearing its loss of value. Philip, still under house arrest, ordered his cook to buy him some paints. With them, Philip painted a Union Jack on his rooftops that he would later learn saved his house from being bombed. The bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Japanese surrendered three days later. The British troops returned to Georgetown to cheers and smiles. Endo-san officially surrendered to them, since there was no one left higher than him at the consulate. Hiroshi had killed himself. Then Goro appeared and shot at Endo-san, injuring him in the leg. Philip defeated him in hand-to-hand combat. Endo-san went to the hospital under British guard, awaiting the war tribunal. Philip opened Hutton & Sons again, hiring much of the old staff back. He visited Endo regularly at the hospital. At the tribunal Endo-san was found guilty of the massacre of civilians and soldiers. He was sentenced to life in prison. Later, the British general Erskine, who conducted the Tribunal, informed Philip that Endo-san had escaped. He had thought Philip might be harboring him.

Analysis

The events in these chapters, when viewed from the perspective of Endo-san, can be read as harmonizing and not contradictory. Endo-san spoke many times about attempting to balance out all his past lives, achieving harmony in himself and in the universe. First, there is the end result of Philip's trial. It is a corrupt affair that leads to a sentence of death. Being one of the last acting commanders on the island, Endo-san, in act of free-will that breaks from past timelines, executes another in Philip's place. This changes what originally happened in these two men's past lives. It could be said that a new timeline is being forged here. Regardless, Philip being saved from death allows him the opportunity to fulfill this harmony.



The war tribunals that occur after the Japanese lose the war and the British return to the island mirror the earlier trial of Philip. Endo-san is found guilty despite the fact that an argument could be made that Endo-san was doing all he could to not commit acts of violence. He is sentenced to life imprisonment. The harmony begins to come in when Endo-san escapes. The British think Philip is harboring him, but he is not, not yet. The mirrored structure of the novel highlights the harmony and balance that Endo-san is concerned with. The trial scenes mirror each other in the same way that Endo-san and Philip do. The novel, in its two Books, mirrors this as well. Another example is the twin swords, named "Cloud" and "Illumination." Through all these things, dark and light are put up to one another. The novel, especially in this section during the trials, does not posit that all these things are opposites, but rather all these things are simply mirror images of one another: backwards but identical.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Endo-san save Philip from execution in the end? Is it only because Noel requested it?

Discussion Question 2

By executing his father and not him, has Endo-san broken the chain of tragedy that he claims he and Philip have been enacting throughout their past lives? How do you know?

Discussion Question 3

The novel often treats Philip and Endo-san as mirror images, different but the same. How are their trials different but the same?

Vocabulary

desiccated, immaculate, pandang, frangipani tree, kamikaze, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, tribunal, veracity



Book 2, Chapters 20 - 23

Summary

Michiko's condition continued to worsen. She had not been far enough away from the atomic blasts in Japan to have been left totally unaffected. She was dying. Philip decided it was time, once and for all, to take her to Endo-san's island. He took her there and revealed the final part of his story, the one that had to do with Endo-san's fate. Roughly a week after Endo-san's escape from British officials, he came back to Istana to meet Philip. Together they rowed out to the island and donned the traditional Japanese garb. With his Nagamitsu sword, twin to Endo-san's own, Philip ended his master's life. With the story finished Michiko asked Philip if he would do the same honor for her as he did for Endo-san. He refused. He would not kill anyone for any reason ever again. She understood, and together they shared their grief. For the first time since the war, Philip gave himself over to the grief, letting the tears fall in full. The two of them put the two Nagamitsu swords together, where they should always remain. Philip then showed Michiko Endo-san's final resting place, an unmarked grave on the island.

Philip Arminius Khoo-Hutton sold his company off to Empire Trading, owned by Ronald Cross, an old friend of the Hutton's. He donated both his father's keris and the two Nagamitsu swords to the Penang Historical Society. After the party at the Society, where he had met many old faces from before the war, Philip retired to Istana. He stood under the "lonely casuarina tree" (430) and reflected on his complete name and full integration of every culture that swirled within him. He thought about free will and fate. He came to the conclusion there that "the inscriptions that dictate our lives merely write out what is already in our hearts; they can do nothing more" (432). With that, Philip Hutton felt a lasting sense of peace.

Analysis

What began with friendship and love, ends with a harmonizing act that brings everything back into balance. Endo-san had saved Philip's life, and in return Philip saves Endo-san a lifetime of torture as he ends his master's life. Though there is no joy in this act, Philip attains a sense of retribution for all the wrongs the Japanese had enacted upon him and his family. Endo-san is the very embodiment of the Japanese concept of duty, and this concept may have caused the war itself or least the occupation of Malaya. Endo-san betrayed their friendship for this duty, and he used Philip's knowledge of the island to prepare for the invasion and occupation. Two acts harmonize everything, though. Endo-san saves Philip's life, and Philip ends Endo-san's. He gets justice for the death of his father and sister, and he gets justice for every betrayal. The novel does not end on this moment, however. Instead Eng chooses to bring the two brother katanas together one last time. In the present Michiko and Philip reunite the two swords. This is the culminating moment of the story, the emotional climax that everything was leading up to. These two swords were forged from the same piece of steel, destined for eternity to be



with each other. At points in their lives they were enemies, and the two swords can never truly be made one again. They opposed each other and balanced each other. In this final act, they rest together. Everything after this is denouement and reflection, as Philip Hutton gains a sense of peace, resting again with Endo-san.

Discussion Question 1

Michiko asks for the same honor as Endo-san. Why does Philip not give it to her?

Discussion Question 2

Based on evidence from the text alone, and not including Philip's final thoughts at the end of the novel, what is a bigger force, free-will or fate? How does the intersection of western and eastern ideals in Philip himself impact this.

Discussion Question 3

What influencing factors make Philip come to the conclusion he does at the end of the novel? Based on evidence in the text, is he right or wrong?

Vocabulary

Shirasu, facilitate, ukemi



Characters

Philip Hutton

Philip Hutton is the main character of this story, and it is also through Philip that this story is told. An older Philip is the narrator of this story. Born to a Chinese mother and a British father, Philip grew up without a connection to any particular cultural group. His mother died when he was a very young child, which left him disconnected from his Chinese culture. In attempting to connect to his British heritage, Philip found himself lacking, as he looked so different from everyone around him. This left young Philip in a place of isolation. It is in this isolation that the primary portion of this novel starts from.

The audience is also introduced to Philip as in old man, given the way the narrative functions. Philip is an old man with regrets, and he is hiding much of past from not only everyone around him but to himself as well. He has worked tirelessly on his home island of Penang to restore it to its pre-World War II glory, concerned with the restoration and preservation of local history. He only brings up his past when the woman Michiko comes to his door step. She knew his old friend Endo-san, and so he decided to tell her everything that happened between him and Endo-san.

Philip Hutton is an interesting, complex protagonist that is thrown in sharp relief to almost every other character. His multiculturalism is much of what incites the conflict and character progression. The novel sets up his heritage against a backdrop of characters so assured of their own loyalties and histories. The Japanese do not need to question their decisions as long as they remain loyal to those that are like themselves. The same can be said for the British. What makes Philip so compelling is that he can see multiple sides to a conflict, no more or less loyal to any one side. Initially this is what causes him pain and conflict, but ultimately this is what redeems him as a person. His multiculturalism has put him above the others in a sense, allowing him to see value in every person around him. The evidence of this is in Philip's survival through the war, which was thanks in large part to the views his multiculturalism gave him.

Hayato Endo

Though the story is told through Philip's perspective, Endo-san could be considered another protagonist, as the story being told concerns the actions of Endo-san in Penang.

Endo-san's father was condemned by the emperor of Japan as a traitor after being critical of the violence of the government. Because of this, Endo-san is bound by duty to serve the government in some fashion. He did this to save his father's life and honor. His father was imprisoned and left without medicine.



He goes to Penang in this function. He meets Philip there and incites the conflict. He becomes Philip's aikido master and acts as a Japanese diplomat. What he really does, however, is use Philip's knowledge of the island to prepare the Japanese invasion.

Being more in tune with the concepts of reincarnation and karma, Endo-san does all this with the knowledge that he has done this before. In an attempt to break the cycles of his lives and free those he cares about, Philip specifically, he convinces Philip to help him commit suicide. In his previous lives, Endo-san had always executed Philip for the betrayal, but the story in this novel is the reverse of that. This, Endo-san hopes, will bring about a balance and a harmony.

Endo-san can very much be read as the ideal Japanese archetype. He comes from a long line of samurai, is a skilled martial artist, and never forgot his honor and duty. His samurai heritage gives him the height to fall from, as his father gets marked as a traitor and their family dishonored. His martial arts skill is virtually unparalleled, which allows him to act as their perfect spy and soldier, but interestingly enough he uses that training to train another, one that would help bring about previously mentioned balance. But of course it is his duty that makes him who he is. Endo-san is the embodiment of duty. He is still a good person, but his duty dictates that he help the Japanese government subjugate the people of Penang. He still manages to offer small solaces to people like Isabel and Noel Hutton whom he kills quickly. His love for Philip is also genuine, but all of these things are only secondary to duty.

Michiko Murakami

Michiko's entrance opens the novel by her coming to Philip with Endo-san's old sword and asking for him to tell her his story. She is an old Japanese widow but was once the love interest of Hayato Endo before he left Japan on his quest for honor. She is dying of radiation-induced cancer caused by the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. She is important because Philip telling her the story provides the framing device and structure to the whole novel.

Noel Hutton

Noel is Philip's father. He married twice. William, Edward, and Isabel are the product of that first marriage, but his wife died giving birth to Isabel. He married again, this time to a Chinese woman, and together they had Philip. Noel's second wife died of complications of Malaria when Philip was quite young. He always blamed himself for this, as she caught malaria when they were on a butterfly collecting trip. He is the head of the large trading company Hutton and Sons, and is later executed in Philip's place by Endo-san.



William Hutton

William is Philip's half-brother. In the back half of the novel he joins the navy to defend against the coming Japanese invasion. He dies when Japanese planes sink his ship.

Isabel Hutton

Isabel is Philip's half-sister. She is a champion competition shooter and originally the closest sibling Philip has. By colluding with resistance groups she is betrayed by Uncle Lim and shot by Endo-san to save her from eventual torture.

Edward Hutton

Edward is Philip's half-brother. He is the likely choice to succeed Noel as the head of the trading company. He is later captured by the Japanese and dies in one of the many work camps for prisoners of war.

Kon

Kon is the son of Towkay Yeap and fellow student of aikido. He and Philip after meeting quickly become best-friends. Kon joins Force 136, an anti-occupation resistance group, while Philip does not. He is later killed after an ambush plot goes awry. Philip tries to save him, but his meddling may have caused this death and so he blames himself for this.

Philip's Grandfather

Philip's grandfather is the father of Philip's Aunt Mei and Philip's mother. He is Philip's last connection to Chinese culture. His grandfather once tutored the young Emperor Wen Zu of China, and he imparts much of his lasting wisdom to Philip before he disappears into a Buddhist temple in the mountains.

Towkay Yeap

The father of Kon, he was a key figure in the resistance against the Japanese Occupation. He was the leader of a Triad gang and the owner of a large business on the island. He facilitated Philip in informing on the Japanese, passing this information along to the many militant resistance groups all across Malaya.



Hideki Tanaka

Hideki Tanaka was Kon's aikido master. He was sent to Japan to follow Endo-san and protect him. It is later revealed that it was Michiko herself that, upon finding out that Tanaka loved her, manipulated Tanaka into following Endo-san. He is eventually captured by the Japanese as a defector and used as bait to lure Kon's Force into an ambush. Kon later helps him commit suicide to save him from torture, which ultimately leads to Kon's own death.

Symbols and Symbolism

Water

Water serves to represent many things including tragedy, catharsis, isolation, and connection. The novel begins with this imagery when Philip is said to be "born with the gift of rain" (1). The novel takes place on an island, a land mass surrounded by water. Water separates Philip's home from Endo-sans.

Istana

Philip's family home often times can be read as a symbol for the artifice of family itself. It's subsequent degradation and rebuilding throughout the novel functions as a representation of the state of the family itself.

Buildings

Buildings, like that of Hutton and Son's office building and Towkay Yeap's home, can be read as the physical embodiment of memories. These memories encounter figurative and literal destruction and rebuilding. Philip's office has its foundation replaced from the damage incurred during the war. The restoration of Towkay Yeap's home is a fixation for Philip's heritage preservation as well.

Philip

Philip is a symbol for free-will in a world dominated by fate. His mother gave him a middle name to represent this fact, and Philip is often concerned with the choices he makes and has made. Through coming to know his identity, Philip comes to know, by the end of the novel, what place free will has in his world.

Endo-san

Endo-san can be read as a symbol for fate in the same way that Philip is free-will. Endo-san represents all the eventualities in Philip's life. Early in their training, Endo-san introduces Philip to the ideas of reincarnation, and he acts in a way as to balance out his many past lives.

Philip's Grandfather

Philip's Grandfather represents all of traditional Chinese culture. This is most evident during Grandfather's story about his time in the forbidden city. This is important as Philip



interacts with both of his inherited cultures he interacts with the physical embodiment of each of these cultures.

Noel Hutton

Noel Hutton represents all that is good about British Culture. Only by reconciling with his father does Philip reconcile with his British heritage. He is said to be "every inch the quintessential Englishman" (157).

Endo-san

Endo-san not also embodies fate but Japanese culture. Unlike the previous symbols, Endo-san most specifically represents the Japanese ideal of duty. The whole purpose of his time in Malaya is to fulfill his duty to his country and restore honor to his family.

Nagamitsu Swords

These twin katanas perfectly symbolize Philip and Endo-san's timeless lives together. Their final fate is the final fate of these two men. Katanas are rarely made in pairs of perfect twins further emphasizing the value and uniqueness of the two men wielding them. Katanas, being forged from steel, also have the ability to exist through multiple lifetimes.

Landscapes

Landscapes often serve as outer symbols of inner lives throughout the novel. One of the clearest examples is the use of the cliff in Book 1 to symbolize the ultimatum set before Philip. Here he must choose whether or not to fully commit his trust to Endo-san. Much like the sheer drop off of a cliff, after Philip makes his decision, he cannot turn back.



Settings

Istana

Istana is Philip's family mansion. His father had it built before he was born, and Philip lives in it now as an adult. Its artifice can be read as a physical manifestation of everything Philip comes to know about family and home.

Penang

Penang is a Malaysian state located by the Strait of Malacca. This could be sub-nested under Malaya as far as overarching setting is concerned. The author of *The Gift of Rain* was born and raised here, so it is fair to say there is significance in the choice to set the novel here.

Endo-san's Island

Endo-san's island is just off the coast from Istana, and the Hutton family owns it, eventually leasing it out to Endo-san. It is where Philip trains and spends the majority of Book 1. Here, the friendship and of Endo-san and Philip both begins and ends. The only house is a small cabin furnished in the traditional Japanese style by Endo-san. If Endo-san is the archetypical Japanese figure of a man, then the island, with its idyllic landscape and Japanese style cabin, can be seen as the Japanese ideal in environment.

The Jungle

Though not directly in the novel long, the jungle environments serve many important narrative functions. They allow the Japanese an easy invasion and they harbor the resistance groups fighting against the Japanese. The jungle also looms over and around everything, representing the primal nature of man and simplicity of subsistence.

Malaya

Also known as British Malaya, or presently Malaysia, this is the primary, overarching location in which all of the major events of this novel take place. Every other setting is nested within this setting. It is still important to point out Malaya as its own setting as the historical backdrop of this set of states informs much of the novel. The most important of these it was under British control from 1909 till 1946. The novel takes place primarily in '39 through World War II.



Themes and Motifs

Culture as Identity (or inherited identities)

The novel argues that identity is inextricably linked to a character's culture and that their culture influences almost all of their decisions. Every character in Eng's novel has clear loyalties and never needs to question who they are, what they believe, and what they fight for. Endo-san only comes to Penang on out of his sense of perfect Japanese duty. These cultural identities are very much rooted in long standing historical tradition, which can most clearly be seen in Endo-san. He comes from a family that was historically in the Samurai caste. This puts him in the position to follow duty endlessly and to try to retain any lost honor. His culture dictated the duty of his ancestors and it controls Endo-san as well. The concepts of reincarnation, or repeated lives, only serves to reinforce this idea.

Noel Hutton and his English children are another example of characters whose culture functions as their identities as well. Despite it likely being in their best interest, they refuse to work for the Japanese. Isabel goes so far as to actively resist them on the island through spying and subterfuge. William joins the navy without much of a thought as he joins his countrymen. Noel even disowns and exiles his son for working with the Japanese seeing it as an ultimate betrayal of the English culture so by proxy an ultimate betrayal of his identity.

Philip's Grandfather and business mogul Towkay Yeap are yet more examples. Philip's Grandfather is every inch a man from China as Noel is a man from England. Grandfather dresses in traditional Chinese garb, cloaking himself in his very culture. He comes to first interact with Philip through this culture, ultimately establishing a relationship with him. He uses the Chinese culture to lay bare his own identity to his Grandson. Towkay Yeap is slightly different and much more like Noel Hutton. His Chinese culture directly impacts his loyalties during the occupation. It was never a question of who Towkay Yeap would side with. Like Noel's daughter Isabel, he acts against the Japanese through subterfuge. His culture and identity are not as self-evident as Philip's Grandfather, but the Yeap home is built in the traditional Chinese fashion, acting as a similar shroud of culture like Grandfather's house and garb.

Identity as Culture (or chosen identities)

The novel posits that when not barred by cultural limits, one can be free to examine the full breadth of their identity. This is why Philip remains the most well-rounded character in the novel. Philip plays an interesting and contrary role to the idea that identities are formed from cultures. This is because Philip was born of a Chinese mother and a British father. He looked quite different from his family but was forced to appear "British" anyways. This left Philip feeling excluded by both groups. The British people on the island always looked at him differently than the rest of his family, and the Chinese



people on the island would never fully accept him. This left Philip feeling isolated, and in his isolation he had to form his identity virtually independent from the cultures that surrounded him. Later he approached each cultural identity separately but with equal interest. This leads to a full integration of all cultures and the complete formation of Philip's identity.

Philip, who is half Chinese half British, first comes to terms with his Chinese heritage when he goes to meet his maternal grandfather for the first time. He arrives at this man's house, built in traditional Chinese fashion, an almost antithesis to Philip's home Istana. His Grandfather appears in a traditional Chinese garb and offers him dinner and tea. During tea, Philip's Grandfather relates to him through story telling. The story is about Grandfather's time in the forbidden city in China when he worked with an apparent heir to the dragon throne. Philip eagerly asks questions and urges his Grandfather to continue. He comes to know his Grandfather's personal history which serves as an entry point for Philip's engagement to his Chinese heritage. It is important to note that he has this engagement free from any other cultures. Endo-san is not with him and his British family is not with him. this trend continues as he interacts with all of his cultures.

Thanks to his time with his Grandfather, Philip opens up more about accepting his cultural heritage. So when his family returns home he begins to engage with them one on one. Each of his siblings, and his father included, represent a certain facet of British life that Philip knows about but had never interacted with. He spends time in the garden with William practicing photography. He helps his father shelve away the books he had bought in England. His father takes the time to talk to him about his mother. All of these things culminate in Philip becoming more a part of his family, and by extension more a part of British culture as a whole.

By being multicultural and trying to form an identity, Philip Hutton still feels a disparate sense of disconnection. All the cultures come together and a sense of completeness comes over him when, at the end of Book 1, Philip encounters his name hyphenated. His Grandfather takes him to see the Khoo family tree. This is Philip's Chinese family tree. Grandfather has added his name, but instead of Hutton, his name was written as Philip Khoo-Hutton. This moment is pivotal for Philip and truly embodies the theme of Identity as culture. By seeing both his heritages joined, Philip moves forward with a clearer sense of self.

Free-Will versus Fate

The novel also examines how much control people have in their lives, and it asks, what causes our actions and can we escape them (or do we even want to)? Much of this is accomplished through how the novel uses cultural identities to approach ideas of fate. Philip Hutton, a multicultural character and embodiment of free-will, makes the most choices that cross cultural lines. He works for the Japanese during the war and ends up spying on them later to assist his family. He also dictates the final fates for many characters including Endo-san. But while he does make the most choices across



cultural lines, his choices are still dictated by the actions of those around him. One clear example of an exercise of free will is when Philip fully commits to the rescue of Kon. The complication, however, comes when Kon loses his life anyway. The novel does not claim that fate acts more than free will. It takes no sides. The balancing act between these two concepts is best summed by this interaction between Philip and Michiko:

‘There must be free will to choose. Do you know the poem about the two roads, and the one not taken?’

‘Yes. That has always amused me, because who created the two roads in the first place?’ (401)

This battle between free will and fate is also a battle between western and eastern cultures, British and Chinese. It is one that Philip, being of both cultures, ultimately has to work out on his own. Interior, ideological conflict reflects the exterior conflict as well. Traditionally Christian countries, those that are thought of as "Western", like Britain and the United States are in a physical conflict with Japan in the Pacific. They fight for physical territory, but as this novel points out through the use of this theme, their battle is an ideological one. The people of Britain and her colonies have more individualistic identities, founded on ideas of freedom to choose the path in one's life. The people of Japan, in contrast, act far more as a collective. Their individual suffering makes no difference when duty and honor are involved. Thus the two represent and battle as free will and fate. This battle occurs in the world and in the mind of the protagonist, and the ultimate resolution serves as the emotional climax during the final pages of the book.

Through Philip, the theme of free will and fate comes to a natural conclusion. On the very last pages of the novel, Philip says that "the inscriptions that dictate the directions of our lives merely write out what is already in our hearts" (431). What this ultimately says is that one makes their decisions with their hearts and that all those decisions were simply written down. It is an acceptance of both ideologies simultaneously. Much like his multiculturalism, Philip Hutton is not just one thing at a time. Therefore, he posits, neither is his destiny made up of one ideology at a time. This could not have been accomplished on the author's part if the theme of free will and fate had not already been woven throughout.

Water

Water comes up often as a narrative tool for both symbolic and literal purposes, often creating and symbolizing both isolation and tragedy. It consistently recurs as a motif in *The Gift of Rain*. It is in the title after all. Philip is raised on an island, a piece of land surrounded by water. When we first meet him as a young man he is at one of the most isolated periods of his life. His British family is off on holiday in England, another land mass surrounded completely by water. Then he meets Endo-san who comes to live on the island across from Philip's home. They too are separated by water on two islands, but in this instance, Philip can take a boat there, so water becomes the means of conveyance or connection rather than the tool for isolation. Philip is also said to bring



rain with him wherever he goes. Water here is functioning as a symbol for the tragedy a person's life will bring.

In a very literal sense, water is also what brings the Japanese to the shores of Penang and Malaya. The Japanese first launch their attack on ports and on islands in the water. William, Philip's brother, dies on the water during a naval battle. Mei, Uncle Lim's daughter, and her husband both die during a rain storm. Isabel's death, a result of Mei's death arguable, occurs on the beach just outside Istana and the tide of the ocean washes over her. It rains in the jungle while Kon executes his master and is subsequently executed himself. Water consistently throughout the novel is the set piece for tragedy.

Nevertheless, the novel also points out that rain and water, these bringers of tragedy, are absolutely necessary for the natural growth of the world. Things simply wither without it. Through the simple motif of water, the novel once again uses physical landscapes to reflect and impact interior lives. All of the characters, not just the protagonist Philip, grow and develop because of the tragedies in their lives. Many of these tragic figures become heroes in their own right. This motif mirrors many eastern beliefs about the balance between darkness and light, good and bad. The gift of rain is indeed a gift, and while it can be read simply as tragedy, in the full context of the novel, the rain Philip brings ultimately remains a gift for growth.

Imperialism

Imperialism is the backdrop with which the entire novel exists, and it could be considered a piece of post-colonial literature as it looks at the impact of colonial countries on indigenous peoples. The Malaysian islands are unique in that they harbor many peoples from many different cultures, but during Philip's youth they were still British colonies under British rule. That is the whole reason Philip is there in the first place. This is a remnant of imperialism where it was Britain conquering every land to the east and west. History experts will know that the Second World War represented the end of Britain as an empire, where after the war many colonies, like Malaysia, soon gained independence. Imperialism is the backdrop in which the author places the Japanese invasion. The Japanese are merely continuing in a long line of conquerors, and is fair to say that many of the atrocities of conquering the Japanese commit in this novel were committed years ago by the British when they first came to Malaysia.

Through Imperialism, the novel asks the question of how can different cultures successfully mix together. British Imperialism brought with it a whitewashing of people, religion, and culture. They often brutalized those that did not fall in line with their beliefs. At the time that the majority of this novel took place, the British no longer treat the Malaysians this way, and though the novel claims they feel superior, they do in fact feel more Malayan than anything else. Malaya is their home. Many of them, though pure British decent, were not born in Britain. All of these cultures mix around each other in the novel but never quite together. In the cities each cultural group tends to stick with their own. Despite this, they still all function well together as a society. The repeat



imperialism of the Japanese disrupts it all and turns many of the inhabitants against each other. The British flee, and the people of the island kill their own. The question then, is ultimately answered through the protagonist Philip.

Philip is a mixed, multicultural character. In him he contains both white imperialism and a minority culture. Because of this he ultimately must engage with different cultures and not just stick with his own people. He really has no "people." While this isolates him initially, it also makes him into a figure of optimism. If culture is what separates people, and ultimately leads to violence like we see in the back half of the novel, then multiculturalism is the remedy for that.

Styles

Point of View

The entirety of Tan Twan Eng's novel is written in the first person point of view. It begins with Philip as an old man, and after a sequence of events he becomes a story teller, relaying his past to another character. In turn, most of this book takes place in the past with the protagonist as a young man during the second world war. So, the first person point of view for most of the novel has an occasion. In other words, the author has given the novel a reason to be in first person. The story only exists because a character in the book has decided to tell it. One of the benefits of putting the novel in the first person is the direct line the readers have to the protagonist's thoughts. This is important because many of the decisions that the main character makes in the latter half of the novel could be considered questionable. He makes the decision to work with the Japanese Occupation force. In the third person, even in a close third, the reader may not be exactly clear of why the protagonist does what he does. The author expertly uses first person to clue the reader into ideas of the main character that would otherwise be hidden.

Language and Meaning

The Gift of Rain contains nested narrators which impacts both language and meaning in as much as it recalls the oral tradition and the origins storytelling. The primary narrator functions as a nested narrator every time the novel goes back to telling the story of the protagonist as a young man since he is telling this story to another character. There is further nesting occurring when characters, in the past narrative, tell stories to each other. For example, most of a chapter is dedicated to the protagonist's Grandfather telling a story. By doing this, nesting the narrators, the author engages in a long literary history of incorporating oral story telling into the written word. For thousands of years, stories were told orally, around a fire, from father to son. This is an effort on the part of the author to make this story much more like the traditional stories of old. It has the effect of seeming genuine to readers, which likely the author was also going for. It makes the story more human and more relatable.

Structure

The novel is separated into two sections called Book 1 and Book 2. Many times, the form in this novel reflects the content, and the use of two books accomplishes this as well. Arguably, the book has two protagonists in Philipp Hutton and Endo-san. These were two men connected by multiple lives throughout the years and both represent and embody certain dichotomous structures. Philip is free will while Endo-san fate. Philip is part of a group of apparent good people. Endo-san is part of a group of apparently evil oppressors. Their swords mirror their duality as their swords are perfect twins to each

other. The author set the novel up in two books to further emphasize this mirroring structure. Literally speaking, the two books function similarly as Philip starts out each of them from a place of cultural isolation, and he slowly must build his identity up again.



Quotes

I was never completely accepted by either the Chinese or the English of Penang, each race believing itself to be superior.

-- The Narrator (Book 1, Chapter 3 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote, by the narrator Philip himself, keenly points out the source of his isolation amidst multiculturalism. His isolation is an inciting factor in many cases throughout the novel.

You were born with the gift of rain. Your life will be abundant with wealth and success. But life will test you greatly. Remember—the rain also brings the flood.”

-- Soothsayer (Book 1, Chapter 4 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote, spoken by the soothsayer, highlights the future tragedies of the main character. It prepares much what happens in Book 2 and serves to build tension.

Some mistakes can be so great, so grievous, that we end up paying for them again and again until eventually all our lives forget why we began paying in the first place.”

-- Towkay Yeap (Book 1, Chapter 13 paragraph 1)

Importance: Spoken by Towkay Yeap, this quote provides a rational backdrop to the ideas of reincarnation and karma, key concepts that the novel deals with.

But the years of isolating myself had made me unable to breach the barricades I had erected”

-- Philip (Book 1, Chapter 16 paragraph 11)

Importance: This quote by Philip provides more context to his cultural isolation in as much as it shows how difficult it is for him to cross the chasms between himself and his siblings.

He had added a hyphenated Khoo to Hutton, so that my family name was now Khoo-Hutton. I felt a shifting feeling of being brought apart and then placed back together again, all by the single stroke of the hyphen. The hyphen was also similar to the ideogram “one” in Japanese and, as I discovered, Chinese as well.”

-- The Narrator (Book 1, Chapter 21 paragraph 6)

Importance: This quote by Philip is significant because it is the first time that he has a complete sense of identity. It is representative of his the completion of his identity’s maturation.

He had linked me to the war, to Japan’s ambitions, and this realizing weighed me down as though I had been burdened with another identity.”

-- The Narrator (Book 2, Chapter 1 paragraph 5)



Importance: Another quote by Philip on identity, this works to pinpoint his isolation and depth of Endo-san's betrayal.

This is my home too, my only home. I'm staying. But I'll do it on my terms.
-- Philip (Book 2, Chapter 2 paragraph 5)

Importance: Here, Philip is speaking directly to his family. This is important because it is, in spoken terms, Philip's rationalization for working with the Japanese. Throughout the connected sections, the readers are made aware of how thin this rationalization is to Philip.

I was witnessing the funerary rites of my country, of my home."
-- The Narrator (Book 2, Chapter 2 paragraph 6)

Importance: Funerary rites are often cornerstones of different cultures, and throughout the novel there are many different kinds of funerals. This quote serves to highlight that none of these cultures matter when the country itself is dying.

Once again I was caught between two opposing sides, with nowhere to turn. When would I find a sense of my self, integrated, whole, without this constant pulling from all sides, each wanting my complete devotion and loyalty?"
-- The Narrator (Book 2, Chapter 3 paragraph 6)

Importance: Despite the feeling of wholeness that came with moment with the hyphen (see quote 5) Philip is broken again here. His divided loyalties end up dividing parts of his identities and damaging him.

If it had not been for Endo-san, General Yamashita would not have conquered your country with such ease. His reputation as the Tiger of Malaya is in part owed to Endo-san.
-- Colonel Nishida (Book 2, Chapter 6 paragraph 4)

Importance: As a narrative element, this quote illuminates to the audience, and to young Philip, what role Philip played in the Japanese invasion. He showed Endo-san around, so the Colonel saying this is synonymous to him saying that Philip himself was critical in the invasion.

Who created the two roads in the first place?"
-- Michiko (Book 2, Chapter 17 paragraph 2)

Importance: A major theme of this novel is free will versus fate. Philip sees free will as a choice between two roads and that there is always a choice. Michiko wisely questions who made those two roads.

While I now accept that the course of our lives has been set down long before our births, I feel that the inscriptions that dictate the directions of our lives merely write out what is already in our hearts; they can do nothing more.



-- The Narrator (chapter 23 paragraph 7)

Importance: After learning much through Michiko, this is Philip's final revelation. It is his balance of fate and free will, where both are integrated into each other.