

Hector and the Search for Happiness Study Guide

**Hector and the Search for Happiness by Francois
Lelord**

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Plot Summary

"Hector and the Search for Happiness" starts with the main character, Hector, lamenting about his current state of life. He is a successful psychiatrist in a wealthy European city. He has many clients and does not want for anything, really, except to make his clients more permanently happy. Hector is considerably conflicted about the fact that with all of his psychotherapy, regular psychiatrist tricks, medication prescriptions, and appropriately-decorated psychiatrist office, his patients - who are also wealthy and materially want for nothing - remain so unhappy. Hector decides to go on holiday (vacation) around the world to different countries so he can see what contributes to people's happiness and their unhappiness.

Hector invites his long-time girlfriend Clara to join him on his trip, but she declines. Clara is an independent woman who has a high position with her pharmaceutical company coming up with names for new medications. Hector's interaction with Clara when he asks her to join him is an emotionally-charged one because Clara thinks when Hector asks her if she's happy, he's alluding to the fact that he's going to break up with her. That's not the case, but she still declines the offer to join him on his trip.

Hector starts his journey in China where he has an old friend who works very hard and has a lot of money. On the plane-ride to China Hector meets Charles, the first of many people he meets on his journey. The two are sitting in business class; Hector is happy with this, but Charles is not because he has previously sat in first class. Hector learns his first happiness lesson with Charles, as Hector notices that making comparisons can ruin someone's happiness. Once he arrives in China, Hector enjoys dinner with his old friend Edouard, a successful businessman who is in the banking industry. The two drink some wine at dinner, then Edouard takes Hector to a dark, quiet bar, where Hector meets Ying Li. Though he is in love with, and in a relationship with, Clara back home, Hector becomes enamored with Ying Li. He is enthralled by their conversation and doesn't think twice about it when she comes up to his hotel room and they engage in intercourse. The next morning, however, Hector finds out that she's an escort, and his joy from the experience is dampened.

Hector spends that day walking by himself and traveling by train up a nearby mountain. At the top of the mountain he sees a sign for the Tsu Lin Monastery, at which he meets the old monk. Hector and the old monk share a deep conversation about religion and happiness. Hector wants the old monk to share the secret to happiness, since the old monk is obviously well settled and contented with himself. However, the old monk instead asks Hector to come back at the end of his journey. Feeling lighter, Hector goes back down the mountain and has dinner with Edouard in a cafe outside of Edouard's office building. Here, Hector observes many happy and unhappy people and decides that if he wanted to open a psychiatry office in Hector's office building, he would probably do very well because of all the people who leave the building looking miserable. Still while in China, Hector has a second encounter with Ying Li. It's less joyful than the first time, but far more intense.



After his time in China, Hector goes to Africa. On the airplane ride to Africa Hector meets Marie-Louise, a woman who lives in America but is traveling back to her home country. The two talk about psychiatry, since she is a psychiatrist also. Marie-Louise invites Hector to her family's home while he's staying Africa. Once off the plane, Hector meets up with his host for this country: Jean-Michel, a friend from long ago. Jean-Michel teaches Hector about some general living in Africa, including the fact that they need a bodyguard just for everyday protection. At the bar at his hotel, Hector meets Isidore the barman and Eduardo the drug dealer, with whom he becomes regular friends. Hector learns a little bit about the drug-dealing industry from Eduardo, and Hector gives Eduardo the name of a medication for his depressed wife to try, since her current medication isn't working.

Hector enjoys a dinner at Marie-Louise's family's house. They discuss the country, happiness, Hector's investigation, and family matters. After drinking more alcohol than usual, Hector takes a car with chauffeur and bodyguard back to his hotel. However, Hector falls asleep and when he wakes up realizes he's been accidentally kidnapped by two criminals who thought they were just stealing the car. The two criminals bring Hector back to their boss, who stays in a nice house with fine things and beautiful women. They lock Hector in a storeroom while they debate what to do with Hector. After Hector slips them a note telling them they should talk, he tells the criminals that he knows Eduardo the powerful drug dealer (and hasn't gone to the police). After learning this and sharing his notebook filled with lessons in happiness with the criminal boss, Hector is let go scotch-free. Upon arriving back at Marie-Louise's family's house, they throw him a party for the mere fact that he survived a kidnapping.

Hector then travels to America, the country of More, as he calls it. (America is never specifically named, but the reader can assume it's America based on Hector's and the narrator's descriptions of the culture and environment). Hector is looking forward to meeting with a professor of Happiness Studies at a university. He travels first class so as to celebrate the fact that he's still alive. On the airplane ride to America Hector meets Djamila, an ill woman whom Hector helps to calm down when she panics because she has a very strong headache. He brings her back to first class with him where she can recline and be comfortable. He also requests from the pilot that the plane be flown about 1,000 feet lower in an effort to help Djamila feel less pressure on her head. The two enjoy their conversation and Hector is successful in helping to bring down Djamila's anxiety level while flying. Eventually, she falls peacefully asleep and Hector enjoys the rest of the plane ride to America.

Once in America, Djamila is exited from the aircraft and escorted away by two men in white coats. Hector is picked up from the airport by his former girlfriend, now good friend, Agnes, who scolds him for helping Djamila without the proper legal protection. Hector meets Agnes's husband Alan and her two children. They live in a wealthy part of town near the water. Context clues let the reader know that it's the West coast of America. Before going to the university with Agnes a couple days after arriving in America, Hector enjoys a solo walk through Agnes's town and also down the white sandy beach near her home.



Alan and Agnes help Hector the night before he meets with the professor to categorize his lessons in happiness. Hector feels prepared yet still nervous to meet the important professor, to which the professor is referred by Hector. Fortunately, upon meeting the professor, the two hit it off well and have a positive interaction. The professor is excited to talk to Hector and validates all of Hector's informal research into the topic of happiness. He explains his own research, that of his colleagues, and the way Happiness Studies has progressed over the last several years since it has begun being studied. When the professor goes through the process of explaining how to measure happiness and shows Hector his quantitative research involving brain scans, Hector is again elated at his own work and his own lessons being validated.

Hector goes back to China before heading back to his home country so that he can meet with the old monk at the Tsu Lin Monastery. Hector shows his notebook filled with the happiness lessons he's learned along the way, 23 in all, to the monk as they sit in the monk's office and admire the beautiful scenery outside the office window. The old monk validates Hector's work, just as the professor does, by congratulating him for the lessons he's learned. Hector is pleased with his work, his trip, and himself.

Upon returning to his home country, Hector is renewed and refreshed. He approaches his clients with a new perspective and even though he knows that for many of his clients the treatment will remain the same, for some he can introduce a new way of asking questions so as to cause them to think about their own happiness. Some of the other major character's end-story is explained, as well: Edouard quits his job before making \$6 million dollars so he can help poor people find money for education and basic needs; Jean-Michel, Agnes, Alan, and the professor continue their work; Djamila passes away; and Ying Li stops working for the escort service and begins working for Edouard, where she meets a young man her age with whom she falls in love, marries, and has a child. As part of his refreshed perspective on life, Hector decides that he is truly in love with Clara and decides that someday, he'd like to marry her, live happily, and raise children with her.



Chapters 1-3

Summary

The novel begins with the narrator describing Hector, a young psychiatrist who is dissatisfied with his life. He is a financially successful psychiatrist who never lacks of patients and is very good at going through the motions of his profession. Hector prides himself in saying the right things, making the right "mmmhmmm" noises during therapy sessions, prescribing the right kind of medicine, and even having the right kind of office. He works in a wealthy part of a wealthy city, and sees everything on the surface as being just as it should be. The only problem is that Hector is dissatisfied because no matter how hard he tries, he cannot make his patients happy.

He can make them feel a little better until their next appointment, but he sees no lasting impact on his patients' happiness, and he therefore grows tired of seemingly going through the same exact process week in and week out, yielding no results. Madame Irina comes to see him because as a psychic, she has lost the ability to see into the future. Adeline comes to see him complaining time and time again of men and how horrible they are and how she can't meet the right one. The other patient named is Roger, a man who hears voices and so spends a lot of his time in a psychiatric hospital. One of Hector's patients points out that he seems tired, which Hector feels guilty about since his patients aren't supposed to know how he's feeling, only the other way around. Madame Irina tells Hector he should go on a trip, to which Hector agrees.

Another aspect of Hector's life that he is dissatisfied with is his love life. Hector and Clara have been together for a long while, and yet have never been on the same romantic timeline as one another; when one wants to get married and have children, the other doesn't. They go back and forth, and so seem to be stuck in limbo. When he asks her to accompany him on a trip around the world in order to investigate what does and does not make people happy, Clara declines, partially because the way he opened the topic, by asking her if she was happy, upset her. She thought he was leading into a conversation where he'd break up with her, whereas Hector was really just trying to begin his conversation.

Hector and Clara end up laughing together and having a romantic night together, though Clara remains in Paris while Hector sets off to travel the world.

Analysis

The first set of chapters set the stage for the rest of the novel, since Hector's self-transformation starts right here. His dissatisfaction with not just his career, but also with his love life and seemingly his life in general is one of the strongest catalysts for jet-setting to three other countries in search of a secret to happiness. One of the biggest things to note here is the fact that Hector's inner struggle comes with seeing the



external world as one of beauty and abundance - beautiful homes, well-maintained streets, free healthcare, a plethora of recreational activities, material wealth beyond that of most other countries - and yet seeing his patients, who live among this beauty and abundance, as being unhappy. He can't reconcile the fact that everything on the outside says they should be happy, and yet they remain unhappy and dissatisfied with their lives. The author uses significant imagery and contrast in these first three chapters to illustrate to the reader how beautiful and abundant the aesthetic life in Hector's city is, and yet how desolate and unhappy his patients - and even himself - are on the inside.

Hector's expectations play a huge part in his dissatisfaction, since what he thinks should be, is not. He has a very black-and-white way of looking at the world, which is evident in the narrator's clear-cut descriptions of Hector's dress, his office, and his view of his city and the city's people. For a psychiatrist who expects himself to understand everything and everybody, the fact that he can't is wreaking havoc on his emotional well-being. He can't understand why, if people have so much, they remain unsettled and restless. And because he has a concrete way of seeing things, he himself feels unsettled and restless. Unfortunately, though it starts in his office with his patients, it bleeds over into his romantic relationship.

With Clara, Hector seems to want to either cut ties or go all-in. He wants a decision, since they've been in limbo for so long. He doesn't say as much, but the fact that he wants her to come on the trip says he wants her in his life, but the fact that he remains dissatisfied with their relationship says that cutting ties might be best. His expectations of himself are again not met when he asks Clara if she's happy and it upsets her; as a psychiatrist he probably should have known this, since psychiatrists are trained to understand fundamental differences between different types of people, including men and women. It's not necessarily that Hector can't do anything right, but more than he doesn't understand why, if he's trained to "fix" people, he either upsets them or can't help them feel a sustained happiness. Hector is feeling like a failure, which is a significantly unsettling feeling for a man like Hector who prides himself at being good at his job. Hence, his decision to travel. Hector sees that putting geographical distance between himself and his life-fatigue might help change his perspective and possibly even regain some of the energy he used to have for his profession. While it might be backwards that one of his patients helped him decide that - since he's supposed to be the one deciding it - Hector makes peace with that fact and he seems desperate for a change.

Discussion Question 1

Why is it important to Hector that he knows how to answer a question with a question, as on page 3 when he responds to "Am I going to get better Doctor?" with "What does 'getting better' mean to you?"?



Discussion Question 2

Why is it important to Hector to make his holiday so that he becomes a better psychiatrist because of it?

Discussion Question 3

Considering Hector's conversation with Clara, does her reaction encourage or discourage his pending happiness investigation?

Vocabulary

psychiatrist, intellectual, anti-depressants, tranquillisers, anti-psychotics, mood stabilisers, psychotherapy, cardiologist, dissatisfied, inhabitants, neighborhood, hospital, misfortune, medication, successful, colleagues, disorders, fortunate, holiday, investigation, matrix management, criticism



Chapters 4-6

Summary

Chapters 4-6 take place in China. Hector spends the most amount of time in China as compared to the other two countries he visits. On his plane-ride there, Hector meets his first new friend, Charles. Hector and Charles are sitting in business class, which Hector appreciates since he's always been in economy class, but Charles does not because he has sat in first class before. Hector enjoys learning a little about China from Charles since Charles owns factories there, though Hector is somewhat disappointed to hear that it might not be like "The Blue Lotus", a film on which Hector has based some of his expectations of China. Hector enjoys his conversations with Charles and it is with Charles he learns his first lesson: making comparisons can spoil one's happiness.

The Chinese city in which Hector lands and stays is described as bustling and modern, with tall glass towers and a lot of men in grey suits. There is a small mountain by the sea at the edge of the city, which Hector takes a moment to notice. His expectations are kind of shattered one at a time, as the buildings are taller and more modern than he expected, and he sees only one house that fits his image of a proper Chinese house on his taxi-ride to his hotel. Upon arriving at his hotel, Hector is dissatisfied again because his hotel resembles a tower he might go to for a business conference, therefore diminishing the feeling of being on holiday. Fortunately, though, Hector has a friend he can call to spend time with outside of the hotel.

Edouard is a friend of Hector's from back in secondary school. Though the two went separate paths in university - Howard to medical school and Edouard to business school - the two remained friends and Hector is glad to have an old friend in an unfamiliar city. The two meet at a fine restaurant in a tall tower that lets Hector admire the city lights and boats in the bay down below the building. Hector asks Edouard all sorts of questions about Edouard's work, his level of happiness, and his colleagues' levels of happiness. They have an enjoyable dinner then go to an equally nice bar, even though they've already drunk enough alcohol that Hector's brain feels fuzzy.

At the Chinese bar, Hector notices plenty of beautiful Chinese women. He even compares them to women in Chinese films. A woman who seems familiar with Edouard approaches Edouard and they begin talking and laughing, so Hector focuses on his notebook in which he's recording his lessons in happiness. He records lessons 3 and 4. While his head is down, a beautiful young Chinese woman named Ying Li approaches Hector and asks what he's doing. He explains, but he is so taken aback by Ying Li's beauty and her aesthetic perfection that he feels an immediate connection with her. When the cab drops off Hector in front of his hotel, Ying Li exits with him, and the two go up to Hector's hotel room and have an intimate encounter. When Hector finds out the next morning that Edouard arranged for Ying Li, as she is an escort, his mood quickly declines.



Analysis

Hector's first night in China is depicted in these three chapters. He had chosen China because he'd never before visited and he remembered the adventures of Tintin in a film titled "The Blue Lotus". Unfortunately, his first night is nothing like what he had anticipated. The narrator, who acts as Hector's inner thought process, makes it clear that Hector's expectations of his first country are not being met. As making comparisons is a major theme throughout the novel, it is appropriate that the issue starts right at the beginning of Hector's around-the-world journey. His first comparison on his travels is the fact that "The Blue Lotus" doesn't really compare to his actual observations of China. Right off the bat, Hector's expectations of his trip aren't being met. This lends to Hector's increasing sense of frustration and self-dissatisfaction. Though these intense feelings eventually work themselves out, Hector finds himself in an even greater state of conflict while in China than he did while at home. He seems to almost wonder if his trip was a good idea, though he never comes out and says that.

During his conversation with Edouard at the fancy restaurant, the author again uses contrast to show that even though someone can be surrounded by abundance and materialistic wealth, he can still be desolate and miserable on the inside. Though he learns things about happiness and unhappiness from Edouard, Hector's emotions still don't match his fine surroundings. One would expect that someone as well-off and successful as both Hector and Edouard to be happy, especially as they sit in a fine restaurant with a beautiful view, quality, expensive wine, and delicious food. But they're not. They're conflicted about their own lives. The reader finds out more about Hector later in the novel, but it is made clear in these three chapters that Edouard's sense of happiness is not based on a true inner happiness. Rather, it is a shallow sense of happiness dependent on the amount of money he makes and the women he meets. The author is working on getting across the point that outward happiness is not the same as inner happiness, and that despite the material belongings and/or wealth of a person, one's sense of true self-satisfaction cannot be determined by outside factors; it is a transformation that must take place from the inside out. Unfortunately, Hector is not yet there.

Hector's encounter with Ying Li is especially important to pay attention to. For a brief time, Hector wraps up his happiness in his relationship with Ying Li. The narrator terms the encounter as "doing what people in love do", which is presumably how Hector feels about the situation since the narrator acts as Hector's inner thought process. The fact that Hector takes Ying Li's affection for him as love so immediately is not only a sign of how desperate he is for companionship and a sense of belonging, but also how lost he is. The time between them meeting and going to bed together is so short, but Hector is sure of his feelings - until he finds out that Edouard arranged for her, at which point his emotions take another nose-dive. His sadness and frustration return, not just for the sense of affection he thought was true but now knows was contrived, but also for not being able to feel a sense of peace and contentment with anything in his life.



Discussion Question 1

Charles is the first new friend Hector makes and it's from their conversation that Hector records his first lesson. What is significant about the fact that the lesson is about making comparisons?

Discussion Question 2

Hector doesn't record a lesson after his dinner with Edouard, but what does Hector seem to glean from their conversation? Explain your answer.

Discussion Question 3

What is Hector's greatest disappointment with the fact that Ying Li is an escort that was arranged for him by Edouard?

Vocabulary

happiness, villains, champagne, globalisation, cities, countryside, pharmaceutical, mergers, acquisitions, charming, decisively



Chapters 7-9

Summary

Chapters 7-9 continue in China the morning after he and Ying Li have their first of two sexual encounters. Hector seems even more unhappy and unsettled than he was when he was back in his home country treating his patients. He takes a walk from his hotel and spends most of his day thinking about Ying Li. He tries to focus at a cafe but can't, and so he doesn't stay long. On his walk around the city he compares Edouard as a friend to a friend who is an excellent skier: the skier takes his friend to the top of a very tall slope because he thinks his friend will enjoy it, only to have the excellent skier enjoy the entire ride down and the person who doesn't know how to ski be miserable and scared and fail as they tumble down the entire slope.

Hector finds himself near a small train station with a single track, and he decides to take it. The train leads up a path that is beautiful with green mountains all around and a sea below dotted with boats. Yet, Hector remains unhappy. The train lets out at the top of a mountain. He sees a sign that reads "Tsu Lin Monastery" and decides to follow the steep path to the entrance. When a young monk answers his knock at the door, Hector convinces the young monk to retrieve the old monk who he is hoping can give him some wisdom. The old monk and Hector take a walk, which settles Hector's spirit quite a bit. They discuss religion, happiness, and the reason for Hector's trip.

At the end of his day, Hector calls on Edouard to have dinner. Hector waits outside Edouard's office at a nearby cafe. He watches Edouard's colleagues leave the building looking miserable and he decides that if he wanted to, he could open a psychiatry practice right there in Edouard's building and probably make a very good living. Hector also observes a group of women who are sitting on an oil cloth on the ground. Edouard explains that they don't have a lot of money. Hector works up the courage to ask them why they seem so happy, and he learns it's because of the company they keep.

Analysis

Hector's second day in China is where he takes a permanent turn for the better. Since his day starts with his intense disappointment and frustration at the reality of the situation with Ying Li, Hector's walk around the city is an important time for reflection. However, he is unable to turn around his thought process and remains stuck in his negative thought cycle regarding Ying Li. Though he is surrounded by beauty, both physical and environmental, Hector's unhappiness and frustration remain as he dwells in the fact that not only was Ying Li's affection not genuine, but that such a beautiful young woman is in such an unclean business. He is so entrenched in his frustration that he doesn't even see the Chinese women as being as beautiful as he thought they were the day before, which is an example of how focused Hector gets on what he thinks should be versus what is. Hector thinks that affection shouldn't be contrived, and he



expects that if he feels such a connection as he does with Ying Li that it should be true and it should be allowed to flourish. Upon learning that she is an escort, his disappointment is not only immediately apparent, but also takes a significant emotional toll on him.

Seemingly desperate, Hector sees a single track at a small train station as he's walking around the city. His decision to take it is a good one, since it offers solitude and true reflection as he distances himself from the crowded city. It also leads him to the monastery where he meets the monk, a character that is quite instrumental in helping Hector through his current slump. The old monk is a representation of aged wisdom, which Hector is craving. The narrator reveals that Hector is looking for one secret to happiness from the monk, since the monk's years of trained wisdom should be able to provide that. The old monk doesn't, but the fact that Hector leaves the old monk's presence in a better emotional state than he arrived is a good sign. The old monk also requests that Hector come visit him at the end of his journey, which foreshadows two things: one, to Hector's return to China and to the monastery; and two, to the eventual life satisfaction and happiness Hector is bound to feel. The old monk seems so sure that his investigation/journey will be so successful that he invites Hector to share with him his findings at the conclusion of Hector's trip.

Discussion Question 1

Does Hector stew in his unhappiness, or does he use his negative feelings for a positive end? Explain your answer.

Discussion Question 2

Before his visit to the country, Hector had compared China to the film "The Blue Lotus". Thus far, he has been disappointed. However, the monastery comes through and is deemed by Hector as looking appropriately Chinese. Why is it considered a win for Hector that the monastery looks 'appropriately Chinese'? Explain your answer.

Discussion Question 3

The title of Chapter 9 is "Hector makes a discovery". What is the discovery? Explain your answer.

Vocabulary

modern, conferences, earned, discovered, annoyed, carriage, irritated, monastery, persisted, statuettes, religion, contented, mocking, journey, quaysides, moored, oilcloth, westerners, preoccupied, downsizes, impoverished, archipelago



Chapters 10-12

Summary

So far, Hector has six lessons in happiness that he's learned from the people he's either observed or interacted with, as well as from his own experiences with himself. He rereads his lessons while sitting in an Italian restaurant waiting for Ying Li, as he takes her out on a proper date. While waiting for her, he writes two additional lessons in his notebook as he reflects on his time the day before with the old monk.

The narrator explains that Hector had told Edouard that he wanted to see Ying Li again, and in fact he could because he had her phone number. Edouard considers him a fool, but Hector stays firm in his decision to see Ying Li. It is in this conversation Hector also decides that Edouard must have had a previously unsuccessful experience with love while living in China.

When Ying Li walks into the door of the Italian restaurant, the waiters present trip over themselves and the furniture in order to greet her. She was wet from the rain outside, and Hector sees her as being just as beautiful as he thought she was the first time he saw her. On their date, Ying Li ends up sharing about her family history of being exiled to the countryside when her father's profession of Chinese history teacher was deemed unnecessary and unworthy.

In Chapter 11, Hector is on his first plane to Africa, yet he spends the entire plane-ride thinking about his date with Ying Li. She had confided that she wasn't used to men being so kind, especially since Ying Li and Hector run into Ying Li's boss before they make it back to Hector's hotel. Ying Li is shamed in front of Hector but Hector tries to rectify the situation and save Ying Li by making sure her bosses know he'll pay for her time. The two share a second intimate encounter, which the narrator describes as less joyful but far more intense than their first night together. After reflecting on his time with Ying Li, Hector notices a nanny holding a baby, who cries as soon as her (the baby's) mother comes into sight but quickly leaves.

Chapter 12 has Hector on his fourth plane between China and Africa; the second and third rides aren't described because nothing significant happened on them. On this plane ride, his last one before actually landing in Africa, Hector meets Marie-Louise, a young psychiatrist like himself. They talk about medications and psychotherapy, as well as why she moved from her home country. Marie-Louise invites Hector to her family's home while he's visiting Africa, which he eventually does go to. Upon disembarking the plane, Hector finds Jean-Michel, a friend from medical school who helps treat poor people in poor countries. Jean-Michel introduces Hector to Marcel, their bodyguard.



Analysis

In these three chapters, Hector seems to be testing what he thinks will make him happy versus the lessons he's recorded thus far. He knows he doesn't have a "proper" theory of happiness yet, but he also is willing to continue learning. He decides he'll show his lessons to a professor of Happiness Studies at the conclusion of his trip. Until then, though, he will continue on his path. He has learned six lessons so far either by his own experiences or by watching others, and yet he is holding on to the idea that Ying Li is what he wants. Though Chapter 10 is titled "Hector isn't in love", he acts as though he is. He can't stay away from Ying Li, whether it's her physical beauty, charming laugh, or the emotional connection he has felt from the moment she approached him his first night in China. Hector ignores the sense of not being able to make anything of his relationship with Ying Li, since she is an escort and he doesn't live in China, and takes his chances by seeing her again. The author foreshadows the fact that he's going to see her again when the narrator states that with lesson no. 8 (happiness is being with the people you love) Hector's heartbeat quickens. Since there is nobody in China that Hector has been said to love with the exception of Ying Li, the reader can know before the narrator states it that Hector is meeting Ying Li at the Italian restaurant where Hector is waiting.

Hector's sadness continues through these chapters, since he learns Ying Li's sad history and even sadder present. The reader can tell that he wants to help her, but he just can't. He helps her by making sure her bosses know he'll pay for her time/services, but that's not the way Hector wants to help her. Hector doesn't learn until much later that he only wishes to be Ying Li's superhero, though he's acting like it now. He's just so blinded by her beauty and the emotional connection he feels that he would place a bet on his affection for her. Fortunate for Hector's research and investigation, he sees that lesson no. 8 doesn't always have to apply to romantic love, as he witnesses a baby crying hysterically once the baby's mother walks away and leaves the baby with the nanny. While this confirms Hector's decision to include lesson no. 8 in his notebook, it also does nothing to alleviate his sadness.

It isn't until he meets Marie-Louise two airplane rides later that Hector's mood starts to look up. The fact that he can talk his expertise with Marie-Louise is likely a mood booster because after a period of time of feeling like a failure or emotionally and spiritually lost, he can grasp onto something he knows about and talk about it with confidence. Marie-Louise's kindness and openness is likely a factor, as well, as Hector seems to slide right into conversation with her even past psychiatry. Being invited to her family's house also likely gave Hector a sense of belonging, especially since he and Marie-Louise had many things to talk about while on the plane.

Hector's interaction at the end of Chapter 12 with Jean-Michel and Marcel show the reader that Hector will face some trouble in Africa, since he receives a bodyguard (Marcel) who is holding a pump-action shotgun, and there are beggars on the street. The author is foreshadowing Hector's upcoming encounter with criminals, since that won't be the first time he will have seen a weapon or the potential for violence while in



Africa. At the time, Hector only seems slightly confused. He is likely jet-lagged after coming from China, and also in quite a bit of culture shock, since neither his home country nor China look or feel anything like Africa.

Discussion Question 1

Why doesn't Hector consider his six happiness lessons that he's thus far recorded as a proper theory of happiness? Explain your answer.

Discussion Question 2

Judging from their interactions and the experience they share, what is Hector's strongest emotion in regards to Ying Li? Explain your answer.

Discussion Question 3

Judging by Hector's first observations of Africa as he stepped off the plane, what might he be thinking as he walks with Jean-Michel toward his vehicle? Explain your answer.

Vocabulary

theory, professor, doodling, reassured, undesirable, delicate, accompanying, random, bizarre, flustered, accelerator, consoling, nanny, bodyguard, dive-bombers, documentaries, juddering, sensation, porter, specialised, monsieur, beggars, pump-action shotgun



Chapters 13-15

Summary

Chapter 13 starts off with Hector's beginning his time in Africa. He's already off the plane and he's approaching the hotel, which is described as being very pretty and well-maintained. Hector notices a sign that requests visitors not bring weapons onto the hotel grounds, which he finds interesting. He also notices army-men drinking at the bar. It's at the bar where Hector meets Eduardo, a foreigner who happens to speak Hector's language very well and only drank sparkling water. Eduardo is a drug dealer who explains some bad politics that have been happening in his country. His children are grown and his wife is depressed, for which Hector suggests a different pill prescription than what she currently has. Eduardo explains to Hector all about the people who take drugs. Also at the bar, Hector meets Isidore, a barman with whom he finds kinship because of their tendency to love more than one woman at one time. When Jean-Michel returns to the hotel, he rips Hector away from the hotel bar because he recognizes Eduardo and doesn't want Hector getting mixed up with the likes of him.

During their drive through the city, Hector notices the poverty of the area with the beggars, the ill-maintained city, and potholed roads. They make their way to the countryside where Hector continues to notice and comment on the fact that there are so few trees in this country. Marcel explains it's because of the fact that the country had been run for a long time by bad people who had set up a trade embargo so that their country could no longer buy or sell with other countries, leaving them desperate to depend on their own resources for far too long.

Hector gets to go with Jean-Michel to four health centres as Jean-Michel treats his regular patients. He enjoys watching Jean-Michel do what he knows Jean-Michel enjoys doing. On their way back to the hotel at dusk, the narrator explains why Marcel's presence (with a shotgun) is necessary for Jean-Michel, a man who goes around to cure ill people. Hector learns it's because crime is increasing due to inefficient policing, which reminds Hector of Eduardo's career choice. Jean-Michel stays at the hotel bar with Hector this time to spend some more time with his friend, where he reveals that he is happy doing what he does and being who he is in a country that accepts him for exactly who he is.

After he leaves the bar, Hector lies down in his hotel room in an attempt to take a nap. But Clara's phone call interrupts his potential nap. The conversation is stalled and somewhere awkward, but they end it by sending each other a kiss. After their conversation, Hector returns his thoughts to Ying Li, and as he does, he realizes it was her emotions he fell in love with rather than her as a person.



Analysis

Hector's time in Africa is full of far fewer contrasts than his time in his home country and his time in China. The desolate landscape better matches his emotions, since he's still battling sadness and his conflict between his feelings for Ying Li and his feelings for Clara. While he has taken a significant step forward since his conversation with the old monk, as well as the fact that he's able to travel away from the distraction that is Ying Li, Hector is still not past his initial feelings of helplessness, uselessness, and isolation that propelled this around-the-world journey. The only contrasting element that greets Hector in Africa is the beautiful hotel. However, the romanticism of it ends when Hector sees a sign requesting that guests do not bring in with them any kind of weapon. The author is again foreshadowing trouble that Hector will face, and he is also foreshadowing the fact that Hector will take that trouble in stride, as he has the presence of or mention of weapons thus far.

Hector's conversation with Eduardo is an interesting one to note because Eduardo is a man who deals drugs, an unethical and unclean business like the escort business in China, and yet Eduardo seems completely content with his life. Plus, Hector, while knowing it adds to the corruption of the country, doesn't seem fazed by this unclean business as he was by the escort service, presumably because it doesn't directly impact him or his heart. Hector finds it fascinating that Eduardo can deal drugs - and have a justification for the people who buy the drugs - and yet seem at peace with himself. Hector's desire to help others isn't hindered, though, because he gives Eduardo a couple suggestions for Eduardo's wife who is depressed and is taking medications that aren't working for her. Hector's ability to distance himself from the unethical and unclean nature of Eduardo's business is likely due to the fact that he is a medical professional familiar with methods of research. Being able to properly research a topic requires an ability to distance one's self from the topic so as to get as much unbiased information as possible. Since Hector prides himself on being an excellent psychiatrist, the ability to properly research and investigate a topic is likely a part of that.

Hector enjoys his time with Jean-Michel, both at the health centres and at the hotel bar. At this point in his journey, he has written about half of the happiness lessons that he'll ultimately record. A few that he's already written down have been affirmed by what he sees in Africa, which is likely lending to his sense of purpose and accomplishment, lifting his mood a little at a time. Hector also seems to enjoy seeing his old friend, who seemed to never find a sense of belonging in their home country, act and feel loved for who he is. Unfortunately, Hector's mood is brought back down by his phone call with Clara; the reminder that their relationship is stalling and halted is upsetting to Hector, a feeling that is likely intensified by the fact that he and Ying Li shared two passion and emotion-filled nights together. Hector's sadness continues to overshadow any kind of progress in his happiness, though his realization that he loves Ying Li's emotions and not specifically Ying Li is a step in the right direction for Hector. Kind of like moving past a stage of grief, Hector can now work to move on from his brief but intense relationship with Ying Li.



Discussion Question 1

Why is it significant that Hector helps Eduardo find a new pill prescription for Eduardo's depressed wife? Explain your answer.

Discussion Question 2

Marcel explains that people in the country tend to be happier than people in the city because of the support they receive, and the fact that's easier to get by in the country. What previous lessons does Marcel's answer remind Hector of?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Hector's conversation with Clara remind him of Ying Li? Explain your answer.

Vocabulary

bungalows, reception, uniform, foreigner, stimulant, reputation, harmful, barman, whiskey, tumbledown, corrugated, villas, mouldering, congested, potholes, boulders, scorched, countryside, embargo, resign, finance, reforestation, support, temptations, criminals, inefficiency, chateau, deceiving, physique, intimidated



Chapters 16-18

Summary

Chapter 16 starts with Hector at Marie-Louise's family's house enjoying a delicious and fun meal. He enjoys his time with her and her family. He also has a good conversation with Nestor about how political corruption has ruined their country. Hector drinks a lot at the party and has help getting a driver and a chauffeur to take him back to his hotel. He falls asleep in the back of the car, and in Chapter 17 wakes up to find that he's been accidentally kidnapped.

When Hector wakes up, he surprises the criminals in the front seat of the car as much as they surprise him. It is clear that the criminals didn't mean to kidnap anyone, only to steal a car, but Hector had been so quiet in the backseat that they hadn't known he was there. They take him back to their boss, who is located at a big house with a lot of nice things and pretty women on the inside. The criminals' boss puts Hector in a storeroom to wait out his fate.

In Chapter 18, Hector spends time in the storeroom thinking about life and death, specifically his own. He thinks of his experiences with death as a resident in medical school, and how mostly they were older people who died peacefully. He remembers some people, though, who died a young and suffering death. Hector appreciates that he chose psychiatry as a profession because a psychiatrist rarely sees people die. Locked in the storeroom, the narrator explains that Hector isn't afraid of death. He'd thought about it enough in his lifetime to the point where it didn't intimidate him. Hector decides he has had a good life and so he's not afraid to die. He writes letters to Clara and to his parents and puts them under his clothes, just in case he does die and someone finds him; he figures the letters would be found when a coroner performed an autopsy. The last note he writes is to the criminals. He slips it under the door and waits for them to respond.

Analysis

This entire scenario holds great significance for Hector and his global search for happiness. The foreshadow from Chapter 12 comes to fruition as Hector finds himself unintentionally in some trouble. Before that, though, it's important to note Hector's sense of belonging as he spends time with Marie-Louise's family. Not only does Hector already feel a professional kinship with Marie-Louise since she's a psychiatrist just like him, but her family welcomes him with open arms. This is welcome sentiment after the loneliness and isolation he felt in China. Even though in China Hector had Ying Li for two nights, and then his friend Edouard, he certainly left China just as - if not more - confused than when he arrived. Coming to Africa and meeting a new friend was already a welcomed surprise, but then getting to meet her family and have them treat Hector as kindly and welcoming as they do is like icing on the cake. He needs friends, he needs



companionship, and he needs to see other examples of happiness that are uplifting, not only for himself but for those around him. Watching Marie-Louise's family interact with one another offers that opportunity.

Hector's trend of drinking too much has only been when he's having a great time, and that is the case here at Marie-Louise's house. When he's surprised by the criminals, Hector responds quite well. He is afraid at first, but then quickly moves to the logical side of the equation and decides that most criminals really don't want to kill people. His seemingly gut-reaction to go toward the calm and logical response might very well be what saves his life. It's par for the course, since Hector isn't one to go on grand emotion. However, he's never before been in this situation. The fact that the criminals are just as surprised - and scared - to see him as he is to see them is another foreshadowing for the reader, letting the reader know that Hector probably isn't in any huge amount of danger. The criminals have to face their boss with an unexpected - and potentially detrimental - surprise.

The author uses irony, as Hector is placed in a room that smells like death, yet is there where Hector thinks about how much he likes his life and wants to live. Hector's chance in the storeroom to reflect thus far on his life likely plays a great part in his self-transformation. In a life or death situation, one is forced to prioritize such grand decisions, such as whether or not one has had a worthwhile and satisfying life. The distractions Hector had while in his home country, and even in China, are non-existent right now, since it's just him, a lot of beer crates, and a light bulb. He has the chance to really think about what has been great about his life, and in the face of death appreciate the good things and realize that the good things really made his life worth living. This is a significant realization for Hector since he previously was so incredibly dissatisfied with his life. He had been asking himself the questions of Is what I do worth it?; Have I loved enough?; Have I loved well? When forced to answer those questions, he chose yes to every major life question. And since this has removed the fear of death, he can slip that note under the door and hope the criminals receive it well. At this point, he's got nothing to lose.

Discussion Question 1

Aside from the obvious reason of having a good time, why is Hector so enjoying his time with Marie-Louise's family?

Discussion Question 2

The author had previously foreshadowed that Hector would face trouble while in Africa, which he does in Chapter 17. What are some clues as to why Hector is in some danger, but probably not grave danger?



Discussion Question 3

The narrator explains that knowing and feeling are two different things, but it's the feeling that counts. How does Hector manifest that sentiment?

Vocabulary

fable, mournful, sideboard, psychotherapy, exported, imported, investment, engineer, mischief, surname, revolver, roadblocks, posing, parcel, splendid, ruins, gang, squabbling, impression, willingly, occasionally, autopsy, fear, realist



Chapters 19-21

Summary

Chapter 19 opens with the reveal of what Hector's note to the criminals read: "You have a real problem there. We should talk." After the criminals open the door for him, Hector lets them know that if they let him go he won't tell the police anything. The criminals don't believe Hector, but then Hector tells them that he knows Eduardo, the powerful drug dealer. The criminals figure that if Hector knows Eduardo and Eduardo's wife, and has yet to go to the police, that he must really be telling the truth. The boss asks to see Hector's notebook, and after reading Hector's so-far recorded lessons in happiness, plus one observation, he lets Hector go scotch-free.

In Chapter 20 Hector is on a plane to America. He paid for a first-class seat this time, even though he knows he can't really afford it. While sitting in a reclining chair, Hector reflects on the night he almost died. After being let go from the criminals, Hector had arrived back to Marie-Louise's family where they celebrated the fact that he was still alive, even though it was the middle of the night when he arrived. Hector enjoys the party and feels very happy to be alive and to feel alive. He goes upstairs with Marie-Louise's pretty cousin and they have a sexual encounter. Afterwards, Hector is tired but Marie-Louise's cousin is not, so they re-join the party. Marie-Louise's brother-in-law Nestor and Hector talk about the party and the reason for celebrating. Nestor tells Hector that there in Africa, there are plenty of reasons to be unhappy and that one never knows what the next day will bring; that's why it's important to celebrate when there's an occasion to do so. From this party experience, Hector writes down two more lessons. However, thinking about celebrating leads Hector to think about Edouard, who loves to celebrate, as they did Hector's first night in China, which led Hector to think about Ying Li.

The champagne in first class is free, so Hector continues drinking it as he wishes. He thought about people who drank too much and did stupid things, then he thought about how alcohol makes some people happier for a time and decided this was a question he'd bring up to the professor of Happiness Studies. While drinking glass after glass of champagne (the exact number is not specified, only that he continues drinking), he thinks about Ying Li and Marie-Louise's cousin, and wonders why he isn't as in love with Marie-Louise's cousin as he is with Ying Li. He wanted to talk about it with somebody but the seats around him were empty because that part of the plane is so expensive. At that point, Hector heard an air hostess ask passengers if there was a doctor on board. He pondered not answering because of the fact that there might be a woman having a baby, but he felt uncomfortable not answering so he raised his hand for the air hostess to know he was a doctor.

Hector was led over to a woman traveling to America who was very ill. She showed Hector her medical documents so Hector could understand that she had had a brain tumor and was still suffering from the effects of that. He asked her questions and talked



to her about her illness and about how she was feeling so as to try and get both of their minds off the fact that she might die. The air hostess handed Hector the woman's passport where Hector finds out that she used to be very pretty. Hector decides to smile at her because he figures men's smiles are something she misses.

Analysis

By the time Hector passes the note to the criminals, he has thought through his possible death enough to not be afraid of it. At this point, he is just hoping for the best. He is appealing to the logical side of the criminals, especially of the boss, all of whom want no trouble, so as to stay under the radar. By name-dropping Eduardo, a powerful drug dealer in that country, the criminals immediately know that Hector is telling the truth; why would he go to the police for some petty criminals when he has information that the police have likely been seeking for a long while? It's important to note that it's this information, plus Hector's notebook with all of his lessons in happiness, that ultimately get him released. Hector's surface goal on his global venture was to figure out the secret to happiness, but one other hope on his trip was to set himself free from feeling so stuck in the life he had back in his home country. Here, the lessons in happiness that he's been gathering set him free, just in a different way.

While on the airplane en route to his next destination, Hector is in a great mood. He is so happy to be alive and he is in a place where he thinks life is wonderful, presumably because he was faced with the alternative: death. When Hector returns to Marie-Louise's family's house, he places no blame on the chauffeur and the bodyguard. He had been told about (and the author had foreshadowed) criminals putting up fake police barriers in order to steal vehicles, and he knew from the criminals' actions that they had no idea they'd accidentally kidnapped, too. The party thrown for him in the middle of the night by Marie-Louise's family means a lot to Hector because he learns two lessons: that happiness comes when you feel truly alive, and when you know how to celebrate. Since a part of Hector seemed to feel lifeless back before he started his journey, the fact that a near-death experience brought him to a place of feeling truly alive is significant. Hector has shown great personal growth at this point, being able to rise above his circumstances and see the positive in a potentially negative situation.

Unfortunately, he still gets caught in his own head when it comes to beautiful women, as the reader sees when he has a sexual encounter with Marie-Louise's cousin. He still calls going to bed together "the thing people do when they're in love" but he gives no inclination that that's how he feels about her. Instead, reflecting on the encounter and on the big celebration only leads Hector to thinking about Ying Li. Even though he's already previously determined that he's in love with her emotions and not with her, the emotional connection they share is something that he cannot get out of his mind. The good thing here, though, is that Hector does not mention getting sad upon thinking of Ying Li. So it appears that his good fortune of being spared from the criminals is enough - for now anyway - to stave off any kind of depression.



He's brought out of his reflection when the air hostess asks if there is a doctor on board the aircraft. His ethical commitment to the profession overrides his discomfort, so he is brought to a woman who will later become known as Djamilia. Hector doesn't seem to learn any new lessons here, rather he puts into practice a happiness lesson he's already learned, but only after he does his doctor duties. Hector has no doubts about himself as a skilled doctor of psychiatry, and because he expects of himself a certain level of knowledge, he asks the woman all the right questions in order to garner information and try and make her feel better. After that is settled, he sees her passport picture and sees that she used to be very beautiful before her illness took over. Here is where he remembers a lesson he's already recorded (Happiness is to be loved for exactly who you are) and decides to smile at her. Here, he is putting into practice a lesson he's learned and doing exactly what he hopes to do for his patients back home: make them happier. Though he doesn't seem to have high hopes for her to live much longer, he thinks he might be able to make a difference in her current level of happiness.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of Hector's courage toward the criminals in Chapter 19? Explain your answer.

Discussion Question 2

Hector thoroughly enjoys the celebration given in his honor by Marie-Louise's family. How do you think this contributes to Hector's overall sense of feeling truly alive?

Discussion Question 3

Even though Hector is a doctor of psychiatry, why do you think he easily slipped into the role of a medical doctor? How can you tell?

Vocabulary

storeroom, depression, suffering, gang, , haunted, feted, ransom, awkwardly, relatively, fortunate, slippery slope, pharmaceutical, gestured, signaled, precautions, ordinary, paradise, reassuring, throbbing, anxious



Chapters 22-24

Summary

In Chapter 22 Hector learns that the woman's name is Djamila. She is from a beautiful country that used to be a place where people would have gone on holiday because you could smoke pot amidst "magnificent mountains" (page 106). However, her country had been at war for a long time and now was corrupt and dangerous. Djamila and Hector talked a little bit more, trying for Djamila to have some hope about her condition and to remain calm through the rest of the flight. Hector tells the air hostess that Djamila needs to stretch out, so they bring her to first class where Hector had been sitting. It is here in the comfortable seat that Djamila smiles for the first time. The two continue talking about their travels to the country where there are more psychiatrists than anywhere in the world. Djamila is visiting her sister who had married a citizen of that country. Hector tells her of his plan to meet with a professor of Happiness Studies, and without any prompting this gets Djamila to talking about happiness, and specifically what makes her happy. Hector learns that she has lost most of her family, and now she holds hope that her country will be beautiful and stable again some day. Djamila's head begins to hurt again so Hector asks if the pilot can fly a little lower, which he does. Hector and Djamila drink champagne together before she fell asleep.

Chapter 23 brings Hector off the airplane. He watches as Djamila is taken away by big men in white coats, who take her away in a wheelchair. Hector tells his friend Agnes of his experience on the airplane, and she scolds him for not being more careful. She tells Hector about how in this country, more people sue doctors than in his country and he really needs to be careful. Agnes is his friend who used to be his girlfriend. She lives in a beautiful home in a wealthy city and is married to a man named Alan. The morning after Hector arrives, he stays in bed while Alan and Agnes get the kids ready for school. He has a dream about Ying Li, but it wasn't a straightforward dream: Ying Li had the headache instead of Djamila, Clara was pushing Hector down an aisle in a wheelchair, the old monk was the pilot, and all four woman (Ying Li, Clara, Marie-Louise's cousin, and Djamila) were sitting next to him touching his arm. It is after this dream where he writes lesson no. 18: happiness could be the freedom to love more than one woman at the same time. He promptly crosses it out in case Clara ever sees it.

In Chapter 24 Hector spends some time with Alan, Agnes, and their children, and he also gets to go on a long walk down to the beach. Alan and Agnes live near a white sandy beach, so Hector walks past some pretty wooden houses and steps down a cliff so he can put his feet in the water. The beach is fairly empty, and Hector thinks that the waves lapping over his ankles might have come from the city where Ying Li lives. Hector thought about how the rich people probably went to the nicer beaches more North of where he was, and how that meant that poor people could enjoy this beach all to themselves. He decides that if he's ever poor and homeless he'll move to a warm city with a beach. Later that night Hector has dinner with Agnes's family and witnesses an argument between Alan and Agnes over a child-rearing decision. He feels



uncomfortable, but the conversation ends with Alan touching Agnes's heart with saying that being married brings happiness. Alan, Agnes, and Hector discuss Hector's investigation, the possibility of calculating happiness, and they came up with a list of overarching happiness topics that Hector could present to the professor: being loved, money, feeling useful, friendship, health, social status, work you enjoy, celebration of happiness of those you love, and peace of mind.

Analysis

Hector's time with Djamila is significant because he has just come off of his own near-death experience where he had to calm himself down. Now he has to take his career expertise and mix it with what he's learned so far on his journey in order to calm down a panicked and ill passenger. He seems confident that he can do it, especially since he's not once doubted his ability as a psychiatrist outside of not making people happy. However, Hector continues to learn from other people because he knows that Djamila can't have much hope for living much longer, yet she smiles and talks about what makes her happy. He's sad for her that her country is in such a state of corruption, but again, Djamila has hope that someday it will be better. They don't touch on the fact that she might pass away before that happens, but what impacts Hector is her hope.

Hector seems happy about being able to get Djamila moved to first class to sit alongside him, as well as getting the pilot's approval to fly a little lower to see if Djamila's headache can be relieved. Similarly to Ying Li, Hector very much enjoys helping people who seem powerless over their situation. It seems to satisfy him a great deal when he can be a superhero in some way, swooping in and saving someone. Even though Hector at this point does not explicitly state that (as he does later), it is obvious in his actions. Also, the fact that Hector seems to not have lost any of his medical doctor know-how since he's been out of medical school and currently is on a break from his psychiatry practice likely gives Hector a sense of self-empowerment, since before he left for his trip he was discouraged about his chosen profession.

Even though Hector has made significant personal growth on his trip, the reader sees when he gets to Agnes that Hector still struggles with regrets as he thinks about the fact that maybe he shouldn't have left Agnes way back when. Ultimately, he seems to have made his peace with his decision, as he goes about his visit without dwelling on what might have been. Part of that is likely because he already feels overwhelmed with the women he continually has on his mind. It already makes him sad to think about Ying Li and trying to figure out exactly how he feels about her and Clara; he doesn't need another pretty lady to think about possibly loving.

Hector's morning alone when he goes for a long walk down to the beach seems to do him good. Hector sees poor people enjoying themselves and this makes Hector think about how the sun and the sea make everyone happy. Thinking about the fact that the sun and sea are equalizers for people of varying social statuses is a good observation for Hector to make, since at the beginning Hector wondered why the rich people with everything they could possibly want - materially - at their fingertips were still unhappy.



Seeing poor people being able to enjoy life simply with the sun and the sea before them is a significant lesson in happiness for Hector. At this point he knows that there is no one secret to happiness.

Hector's time with Agnes and Alan also seems to do him good. As he contemplates whether he and Clara should really start a family - not mentioned since early in the novel but the reader can assume that this is always under the surface of Hector's thoughts - seeing a former girlfriend of his enjoy her family life gives Hector an example of what life with Clara could eventually look like. Even though he sees an argument between Alan and Agnes and is uncomfortable with it, seeing them quickly work it out is another positive example for Hector. During the argument Hector remains an uncomfortable spectator, which is indicative of his desire to avoid conflict.

What Hector does appreciate during the dinner with Alan and Agnes is that they help him refine his lessons in happiness into categories for him to present the next to the professor of Happiness Studies. Hector's ultimate destination for his investigation - the professor of Happiness Studies - is about to be realized, and because this is so incredibly important to him, being prepared is essential. He is anticipating his meeting with the professor with a lot of hope. The author is likely foreshadowing Hector's upcoming interaction with the professor of Happiness Studies: since Agnes knows the professor and works with him, some similarities can be assumed. Therefore, the reader (and Hector) can hope that if Agnes agrees with them and believes in them, the professor will, too.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of Djamilia to Hector's personal transformation?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the fact that Hector crosses out lesson no. 18 just in case Clara sees it?

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of the categories Alan, Agnes, and Hector come up with for his lessons in happiness?

Vocabulary

pot, magnificent, invaded, inhabitants, festering, countless, wary, invariably, doctorly air, Nobel prizewinners, strategic bombers, forest rangers, pressurised, descend, insurance, gemstones, motorways, blackboard, tiresome, fearsome, jogging, muddled, lapping, cliff, refuge, gradually, moron, misbehaving, quotient



Chapters 25-27

Summary

In Chapter 25, Agnes brings Hector to the university where she works as a psychologist so that Hector can meet the professor of Happiness Studies. In the car on the way there, they discuss Agnes's level of happiness. She teaches Hector that sometimes, to determine your level of happiness, you have to compare your current self or your current life circumstances to your former self or your former life circumstances. They discuss family life and whether or not having children really makes a person happier. Agnes talks for a long while about family and how children should be brought up, and Hector can see that she's quite passionate about it. He again acknowledges that he gave up a very good woman in Agnes when he gave her up as a girlfriend. When they arrive at the university Hector appreciates the old-style architecture of the buildings on campus. He sees pretty Chinese women who make him think of Ying Li, but he concentrates on the task at hand. Hector is nervous to meet the professor because this is what he's been building up to in the previous weeks.

Hector meets the professor in Chapter 26. The man is less intimidating than Hector anticipated, partly because of his physical appearance: tiny with a long nose and a small cluster of hair sticking up from his head. The professor is very passionate about his work and paces quite a bit as he talks. He looks over Hector's lessons and is quite impressed with the list. The professor affirms Hector's work and lets Hector know that almost everything he, the professor, has been studying, is listed somewhere in Hector's list of lessons in happiness. The professor gives Hector three different questions about happiness, all of which make Hector think about Clara, Ying Li, his childhood, his trip thus far, and the people he's met on his trip thus far. Hector asks the professor how to measure happiness, and the professor again gets quite excited, making Hector happy once again that he decided to check his lessons with the professor of Happiness Studies.

In Chapter 27 Hector learns how to measure happiness. The professor asks Hector to compare a few different scenarios: one, the professor asks Hector to pretend the professor is a Martian and Hector has to explain to the Martian that he's happy; two, the professor asks Hector how he knows a foal in a field is happy. The two discuss what the answers to those questions mean for measuring happiness. The professor goes into detail about the happiness studies he's done in the past, as well as the one he's currently working on. He also goes into detail on the calculations he and his team use for measuring happiness. The chapter ends with the professor bringing Hector to a basement where there was a machine described as imitating a space-time machine.



Analysis

Hector's lessons in family life aren't hugely explored, even though that's the title of Chapter 25 ("Hector learns about family life"). However, based on the fact that Hector laments never being on the same romance/life schedule as Clara, the reader can assume that Hector takes it all in and simply processes it inwardly, possibly so deep down that he can't intellectualize it just yet. Ying Li keeps coming back to the forefront of his mind, but the way she is presented is more of a mind nuisance than an actual threat to Hector's love for Clara. It's pretty women and Chinese-related things that remind him of Ying Li, and it's family-oriented and relationships with a true foundation that remind him of Clara. Maybe Hector hasn't been able to articulate it yet, but spending time with Agnes's family seems to cause him to hope for a future similar to hers.

The nervousness Hector feels before meeting the professor is to be expected. This meeting is the crux of his trip; it is here he will either be shut down or validated for the biggest self-transformation journey he's supposedly ever gone through. It is natural that he would worry he lessons are trite or silly when approaching a man who studies happiness for a living, whereas Hector has only spent the last few weeks informally studying the topic. It's a good thing Hector is put at ease so quickly, as he was with the old monk at the monastery, when the professor validates all of Hector's work. Not only is Hector's work validated, but Hector's presence and even expertise as a psychiatrist seems to be validated as the professor is excited about discussing happiness studies with Hector, including his research, other people's research, measurements and calculations of happiness, and the future of the field. The point when the reader can know that Hector's journey has done him a world of good in regards to his impression of himself is when he thinks to himself, "Happiness is not attaching too much importance to what other people think," as the professor is looking over Hector's lessons. The fact that Hector can now think in terms of lessons in happiness in a way that seems second-nature to him lets the reader know that he has truly grown on his trip, and that he has not taken for granted nor forgotten the lessons he's learned along the way.

Hector's level of satisfaction with his meeting with the professor takes another leap forward when the professor begins talking about measuring happiness. It's interesting that the professor chooses to compare two different situations - a Martian to a human, and a foal and a human - in order to explain how to measure happiness, as well as how to explain happiness to other people. Hector's first lesson that he recorded had to do with making comparisons and how they lend to one's unhappiness. Here, Hector has to learn that it's all relative; the context of the comparison is what matters. The professor continues to affirm Hector's work, which Hector considers a win for himself as a person and as a psychiatrist. He needed to know that he was on the right track and that his time, money, and energy weren't for nothing. In fact, he's so encouraged, he doesn't even seem nervous when the professor leads him to the basement.



Discussion Question 1

The idea of comparisons comes up a couple times in this section. How does Hector seem to react to the difference between the comparisons discussed by Agnes and the professor, versus his first lesson of comparisons causing unhappiness?

Discussion Question 2

As the professor talks about Hector's work, what might Hector consider his greatest success from his trip?

Discussion Question 3

What are some of the contributing factors to Hector trusting everything the professor tells him related to his own happiness studies and how Hector's line up well?

Vocabulary

avenues, chalet, architects, polluting, psychologist, incidentally, splendid, concentrate, laboratory, tuft, fleeting, countrymen, quivering, expertise, Martian, peculiar, complementary, arguments, eternal, contraption



Chapters 28-30

Summary

The reader meets Rosalyn in Chapter 28. She is the professor's colleague who seems to work the laboratory side of their research. Rosalyn has Hector sit in the device that looks like a space-time machine and then asks him to envision three separate situations: one that makes him very happy, one that makes him very sad, and one that makes him scared. After he's completed the task, Rosalyn and the professor, whose name is John, show him a color-coded image of Hector's brain that is coded based on Hector's responses to the three questions. They go through the difference between men and women, and also a study of Japanese men. Hector gets to see images of their brains and what the different colors in the different areas of the brain mean. Hector noticed out of the corner of his eye as he was looking at the images that Rosalyn and the professor shared a kiss.

In Chapter 29 the professor takes Hector to an outdoor cafe on campus for lunch. The professor asks if Hector's gained anything from his trip and from their discussions. They talk about the biggest debate in happiness studies: are people happy because their lives are full of positive things, or are people happy because of their general outlook on life? The professor doesn't choose one or camp or the other; rather, he believes there is validity to both sentiments. Suddenly, however, in the middle of their conversation, the professor stops talking. Hector finds out that he is upset with and jealous of a colleague named Rupert, who not only flirts with Rosalyn but has also been able to secure a lot of money from the university because he's been on television with his findings. Agnes joins them for the last little bit of lunch, and Hector is grateful for the distraction.

In Chapter 30, Hector is back in China with the old monk. Hector is showing the old monk his entire list, and he even shares lesson no. 18, though it is crossed out. The monk finds great amusement in lesson no. 18 and even tells Hector that he thought the same thing when he was a young man. The old monk validates Hector's work, just as the professor did. The two enjoy the scenery outside of the monk's office window. After a period of silence, Hector confesses that he still doesn't understand what the monk meant when he said during their initial visit that it's a mistake to think happiness is the goal. The old monk explains that happiness should not be a goal, but rather a state of mind, because if it's set as a goal, it's easy to fail. At their parting, the old monk gives Hector two beautiful old Chinese bowls as a parting gift.

Analysis

The brain images Hector is privy to from Rosalyn and the professor's research is a significant point in validating Hector's work. He is a psychiatrist, after all, which means that scientific evidence for his theories can do nothing but encourage him that he's doing the right thing and that he's on the right track. For Hector to see that what he's



been recording throughout his trip and what he's been learning are not only correct, but also valuable to a scientific field, is empowering to Hector as he concludes his journey with what he had pre-determined would be the crux of his entire trip. The fact that the professor is excited to see him and talk about what Hector's been learning about for the last several weeks is also an encouraging moment for Hector; he is someone who needs to be validated and actively engaged in order to feel like he's moving forward. Fortunately, Rosalyn and the professor provide that experience for Hector. He had so built up the importance of this professor throughout his trip that he considers it a significant success when the professor and the professor's knowledge/information live up to his expectations.

However, Hector also gets to see the human side of the professor when the professor expresses anger and jealousy toward a colleague. Though it could put a damper on Hector's view of the professor, it doesn't. He understands that there are many complications to life and specifically to one's love life, and he's not about to judge someone when he can't figure out his own love life. The ending of his time in America is not laid out in the novel, but based on the fact that his overall experience at the university and with the professor has been positive, the reader can assume that Hector is completely satisfied with his decision to bring his lessons to the professor of Happiness Studies.

Hector's trip for his initial lessons has come to a conclusion, but he ends up back in China to meet with the old monk. The author had foreshadowed this back in Chapter 5 when the old monk said to come visit him at the end of Hector's journey. Hector made no mention of his intention to do so all throughout his trip, so perhaps it was the validation from the professor that encouraged him to visit the old monk; once Hector received praise and encouragement on his lessons in happiness, he undoubtedly wanted to experience that again, so as to further validate the fact that his trip was worthwhile. The old monk has always represented to Hector the epitome of wisdom, so to be told that he's done a good job by a person whom he considers exceptionally more wise than himself is a success for Hector. At this point, Hector has become comfortable with himself and seems closer to being ready to go back home and face his life - his clients, his profession on the whole, and his relationship with Clara. The old monk's calm and genuine encouragement lets Hector know that he's done a good job and that if he goes back home, he can take what he's learned and live a new and improved life with it.

Discussion Question 1

How do Hector's expectations of his meeting with the professor play into what the professor ultimately shows him about his own research?



Discussion Question 2

Based on Hector's recorded lessons, what camp might he fall into between the two sides the professor explains: those who think happiness depends on positive things that happen in a person's life, or those who think happiness is about a person's outlook. Explain your answer.

Discussion Question 3

Why is Hector sad to be leaving the monastery?

Vocabulary

schoolmistress, queue, oxygen, consumption, sake, trouser, close-knit, dissatisfied, determinant, maths, subsequent, nonsensical, squiggles, venerable, dazzling, magnificent



Chapters 31-32

Summary

Before Hector leaves China he has dinner with Edouard. They go to the same fine restaurant where they can see the city lights and boats in the sea below. Hector attempts to explain his research to Edouard using an explanation of the possibility of five families of Happiness: two families of exciting happiness, two families of calm happiness, and one family of happiness that comes from others. Edouard is really only able to relate to the two families of exciting happiness. Hector tries to introduce Edouard to the fifth family of happiness. At the end of Chapter 31, Hector asks Edouard if he can use Edouard's cell phone, which the narrator explains in Chapter 32 is because he calls Eduardo, who sometimes makes business trips to China, and has him scare Ying Li's bosses out of owning her any longer. She then goes to work for Edouard.

Chapter 32 wraps up each character's story: Djamila passes away, which Hector finds out when he receives from Djamila's sister a photograph of her from before her illness; Ying Li meets a young man her age and they fall in love and get married; Edouard quits his job just before making \$6 million dollars and uses his business and financial expertise for good, working for poor people; Eduardo's wife is feeling much better from the pills Hector suggested for her; Hector's patients make little or no progress, with the exception of Madame Irina, who can see into the future again; Jean-Michel, the professor, Alan, and Agnes continue their work, since they were relatively happy before their time with Hector during Hector's investigation; and Hector decides that he doesn't love Ying Li, that he only wanted to be her superhero, and he really loves Clara and wants to marry her, live happily, and have children with only her.

Analysis

The last two chapters bring together the entire story of Hector's search for happiness. He has traveled to three countries other than his own in order to study different cultures and different lifestyles to determine what does and does not make people happy. Based on his excited explanation to Edouard, as well as his reflection of all the people he encountered along the way, Hector sees his trip as a success. He's a happier person and a more well-rounded psychiatrist because of this trip and the lessons he learned on it. Though he reflects that many of his patients will stay the same, he seems to have taken the impetus off of himself to fix that fact. Watching other people from outside of his psychiatrist role make their own choices as he traveled the globe, then seeing the ramifications - good or bad - of such decisions seems to have helped Hector determine that he cannot control whether or not other people are happy with their lives. He does add a few tricks to his psychiatrist bag, but he seems to come to the ultimate conclusion that he cannot fix everyone as he once pressured himself to do.



The fact that the author included the end-stories for the other characters makes it clear that his book is not just about Hector's own search for happiness. It's about the impact one person has on another and how one story cannot stand alone; they are all intertwined and effected by each other one. Hector's knowledge of the people along his journey and their stories gave him great insight into the reasons for people's happiness and unhappiness. He came to learn that the same thing doesn't make everyone happy, but that some things are truly universal. The conclusion of the novel shows that Hector's journey of the search for happiness was truly a journey of self-discovery, and one that can be considered wildly successful.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of the fact that Hector is back in China but does not attempt to contact or interact with Ying Li?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the fact that Hector teaches Edouard how to care for others as a means toward being happy?

Discussion Question 3

The narrator goes through each character and how they've ended up after Hector's journey. Based on the language, is there any one character that seems to have had the greatest impact on Hector's journey? How can you tell?

Vocabulary

learnt, contented, serenity, mutual, realised, mobile, incorporated, client, godfather, frail



Characters

Hector

As indicated in the title, Hector is the main character. Though the story is told from a narrator's perspective, the reader still gets to know all of Hector's feelings, thoughts, and actions. Hector is a psychiatrist who lives and works in an affluent neighborhood, presumably in a European country based on the language of the novel and the use of 's' instead of 'z' in words like 'realising'. Hector begins his journey around the world in search of happiness, more specifically, in search of what makes people happy. Hector is currently dissatisfied with his work life, which has transferred over into his personal life; it bothers him immensely that he see patients all day long but cannot make them happier. It also bothers him that he knows how to do his job and do it well, but people who should be happy based on all known factors - social status, marital status, material wealth - remain unhappy. Hector wants to know why. He wants some answers, and he thinks he can find those answers by traveling to various countries around the world.

Hector has a teachable spirit. He is open to learning what makes people happy in different places and he allows himself to be surprised by his findings. However, he is easily conflicted if a lesson or a situation doesn't line up with what his own presupposition as to how it should be. Hector very much relies on stereotypes when it comes to his profession, as he expects a certain disposition and a certain level of awareness of himself based on how he believes psychiatrists should be. The narrator is constantly describing how Hector's actions are what they are because of the fact that he's a psychiatrist and that's the way psychiatrists are supposed to be.

Hector treasures friendships, especially when he's in a foreign land. Hector travels to three different countries, and in each one has a friend to spend time with, bounce ideas off of, and help him learn his lessons. He spends time on each friendship, takes their words and their situations seriously, and he acts grateful for their presence in his life. Hector seems extra grateful for his friends at this time in his life, since he is dissatisfied with himself and the current state of his career. Hector tries having a positive outlook throughout this entire story, and most of the time he succeeds. However, he does let his expectations of being a psychiatrist get in his way once in a while.

Hector also treasures beauty, both in people and in places. The narrator regularly points out the beauty Hector is observing and appreciating, sometimes in passing women and sometimes in his surroundings. Hector's appreciation for beauty does get him into trouble a couple times, as he participates in physical encounters with two women in two different countries, even though he has a girlfriend at home. Also, one of the quotes listed is when the narrator describes that Hector has always chosen beautiful girlfriends because he is dissatisfied with his own physique. Thus, it is clear to the reader that Hector appreciates beauty, whether it's because he wants to make up for what he feels like he lacks or because it is just part of his personality.



Clara

Clara is the woman Hector has been dating for a long while. She is described by the narrator as being a 'friend', but when Hector's thoughts are laid out for the reader, he is in love with her and wants to marry her. She is only in a handful of scenes in the novel, but she is on Hector's mind all throughout the novel.

Clara is a young executive for a pharmaceutical company, so she works a lot and is quite independent, which Hector likes. Hector attempts to begin his happiness by asking Clara, "Are you happy?", but it upsets her. She thinks Hector is going to breakup with her and that he's leading into it with that question. She is upset by this, as she has tears in her eyes when she thinks that's the case. He does not want to break up with Clara, however he is frustrated that they have never been able to be on the same relationship schedule, as in one wants to get married and have babies when the other isn't ready. He also feels as though there is fatigue and boredom in their relationship.

Clara doesn't go with Hector on his trip, though she supports him in his investigation. They share at least one phone conversation on Hector's trip, though it is short and tense. Hector thinks of her all throughout his travels, especially after meeting and sleeping with Ying Li. Meeting Ying Li, having a short affair with Ying Li, having another one-night affair with Marie-Louise's cousin, and learning about happiness all lead Hector to the conclusion that Clara is the love of his life. Hector is always on his best behavior with Clara, probably because she is a serious executive and would likely not tolerate fooling mischief.

One important piece to note is that even though beauty is important to Hector, Clara's physical features are not described anywhere in the novel. The narrator states that she is very pretty, but specifics on her physical beauty are not given.

Ying Li

Ying Li is a very pretty, very young Chinese girl. She is an escort whom Edouard chooses for Hector during Hector's first visit to China. Ying Li and Hector meet twice, the first time as arranged by Edouard (though Hector doesn't learn that until later) and the second as arranged by Hector. It is important to note that even though Hector notices beautiful women all around him in China, since beauty is something Hector always notices, it is Ying Li that he thinks he falls in love. The narrator states that Ying Li is the prettiest girl Hector has ever seen in his entire life.

Ying Li begins her conversation with Hector by asking what he's doing, as he's reading over his notebook. Hector finds Ying Li's laugh charming, her singing voice beautiful (she sings in the shower the morning after they sleep together in his hotel room), and also finds her sadness beautiful (which she displays after she realizes that Hector knows she's an escort). Ying Li is so beautiful that even soaking wet from the rain, Hector knocks over his chair from standing too quickly to greet her upon her entrance to the Italian restaurant where they have their second meeting.



Part of Ying Li's family history is explained, which might also explain her current profession: her dad was a Chinese history teacher, but was exiled to the country when his profession was deemed useless. There, no one read books or went to school because they were working in the fields. Later, Ying Li caught up a little bit at school, but by then her father had died and she was unable to continue at school. Ying Li's sense of self and sense of worth must have been quite low, since she and her family were deemed useless and unworthy according to the Chinese government. That kind of despair and lowly treatment can weave its way into one's psyche, causing overflow into other areas of life, such as one's chosen profession. Her sisters had gotten jobs in Charles' factories, but she, obviously, had chosen a different route.

Later, Hector phones Eduardo, who scares the men who owned Ying Li. Ying Li is freed from escort service and begins working with Edouard. She progresses well, meets a young man her age, got married, and had a baby together. Hector hears through the grapevine that she is very happy.

Edouard

Edouard is Hector's friend from long ago who lives in China. The two attended secondary (high) school together. After university, Edouard became a banker. He is a wealthy businessman whose goal is to make \$6 million dollars in his career. He wears silk ties, many with pictures of little animals on them, plays golf regularly, and every day reads the stock pages in newspapers written in English.

Edouard prefers the finer things in life, meeting Hector for dinner more than once in a fine restaurant high above the city, though he doesn't pay attention to the view of city lights. He orders expensive wine for him and his friend, expecting that's the way things should be. When Hector asks Edouard if he is happy, Edouard laughs and doesn't really answer the question. He is so caught up in his business world that he admits he doesn't even have time to ask himself that question; he chooses to remain focused on making the \$6 million dollars. However, Edouard admits that even though such a goal is common among workers in his industry, they aren't really sure if they're happy after they reach their goals because of their health problems and their fatigue from working so hard for so long. Edouard isn't clear on whether or not he'll be one of those people, or one of those ones who copes well with aging. He already looks older than Hector remembers him looking the last time the two saw each other. Later, when Hector is waiting for Edouard outside of Edouard's office building, Hector notices that Edouard doesn't look nearly as serious, worn out, or grumpy as Edouard's colleagues that have walked out before Edouard. Edouard says that is just today and because he's pleased to see Hector; other days he looks just like his colleagues.

Edouard is the one who arranges for Ying Li to approach and pleasure Hector, for which Hector ends up getting irritated with Edouard. A different Chinese lady approaches Edouard in the bar where he and Hector go after the fine restaurant. Edouard phones Hector later and tells him that he chose Ying Li and that he's taken care of the cost. Based on this, the reader can assume that Edouard regularly engages in escort



services. In Chapter 10, Edouard reveals that he hasn't really ever had a Chinese girlfriend because of the fact that one can never be sure if the woman loves the Western man for himself or for his passport. However, Hector concludes that Edouard has likely been in love before, but that it ended poorly.

Though Edouard spends most of the time lamenting how life is one long day after another, mostly thanks to his job, by the time Hector returns to his home country Edouard has quit his job. He begins visiting the old monk from time to time, and has left his big corporate job for a pro-bono job doing roughly the same, although instead of merging two companies' monies, he now helps good, poor people from other countries find money for their children to go to school and for their families to receive proper medical care. Hector can tell Edouard is so much happier, and so can the reader. Hector is a man who seems to have been caught in the web of growing wealth, not wanting to get rid of any of it since that is what he has learned really matters. However, after watching his good friend go through an around-the-world journey that has taught him about how one can truly be happy, Edouard seems to realize that everything he thought mattered, doesn't really. Edouard makes the choice to radically change his life in an attempt to live a longer, more satisfying and fulfilling life.

Charles

Hector meets Charles on the plane to China while sitting in business class. A conversation begins between the two men simply because they're sitting next to each other. Hector believes Charles to be a businessman who is traveling on business because when Hector observes Charles, Charles is reading the stock pages of a newspaper written in English with a serious expression on his face. Charles appears to be a bit older and fatter than Hector, and he is wearing a suit with a kangaroo tie. Charles also refused the glass of champagne offered by the air hostess to business class passengers.

During conversation, Hector finds out he is right: Charles is a businessman who owns factories in China which make things for children, such as furniture, toys, and electronic games. Charles is also married with three children who always had an abundance of toys because of Charles' job. While discussing business, Charles explains to Hector what he calls "globalisation", which is the reason Charles says he employs Chinese workers instead of workers from his own country in order to maximize profit.

Since Hector is determined in his investigation of happiness, he finds a way to ask Charles if Charles is happy by commenting on how comfortable the seats are. However, Charles commented that the seats in first class recline a lot further. Charles' statement leads Hector to his first lesson in happiness (making comparisons can spoil your happiness), as Hector determines that Charles must have previously sat in first class and therefore is less happy in business class than Hector, since this is Hector's first time outside of economy class.



Eduardo

Eduardo is a powerful man whom Hector meets in the hotel bar in Africa, though unfortunately Eduardo is powerful in a bad way: Eduardo is a drug dealer. Hector seems to take to him first because his name is so similar to Edouard. Then, Hector simply continues to listen to Eduardo because Eduardo is explaining political workings of the country. Eduardo speaks Hector's language very well, so the two carry on a lengthy conversation at the hotel bar. Eduardo tells Hector that his profession is farming, however as per a previous explanation of why his home country is not doing so well, "farming" can be taken to mean that he is in the drug-dealing business. Jean-Michel and Marcel confirm this when they pull Hector out of the bar and tell Hector that Eduardo is "the kind of guy who drags this country into the shit." Eduardo makes no apologies for his profession. Also during their hotel bar conversation, Hector suggests different medication for Eduardo's wife, who has been unhappy for quite some time.

Eduardo is only mentioned two other times, but both carry significant meaning. First, when Hector is kidnapped by the criminals, he mentions that he knows Eduardo. His purpose for doing so is to let the criminals know that since he is friends with Eduardo - a known drug dealer - Hector has no interest in going to the police, since Eduardo is a much more valuable police commodity than the criminals. This, in part, saves Hector's life. Second, Eduardo, on one of his business trips to China, helped to free Ying Li from her escort service owners. He scared them using whatever tactics he knew of - the reader does not find out specifics - and Ying Li is freed to work for Edouard.

Eduardo is a powerful man who is involved in what some may consider an evil business, since drugs corrupt lives, governments, cities, and countries. However, from his own standpoint, Eduardo has a great life, especially once his wife is on the mend. Hector's pill suggestions work for her and he feels as though she returns to the woman he originally loved. Eduardo is a grateful and loyal man, who returns the favor to Hector by freeing Ying Li. He is kind, straight-forward, business-savvy, and unapologetic for doing what he needs to support his family.

Old Monk

The Old Monk is a character Hector meets when he's just about at his lowest point of despair while in China. The Old Monk lives in the Tsu Lin Monastery toward the top of a Chinese mountain. He is quiet and wise at all the right times, just as one would expect a monk to be. He laughs a lot - in a pleasant way, not in a mocking way, and is an attentive listener, but also provides stories that Hector appreciates. The Old Monk mentions that he had once lived in Hector's home country, and so the old monk asks Hector what has and has not changed since then; he is also pleased with Hector's answers.

Hector remains serene while visiting the old monk, both the first time and toward the end of the novel. Through the narrator's descriptions of the old monk and his surroundings, the old monk gives off a sense of peace and contentedness. Hector is



unsure of whether that's because the old monk lives in such a serene place, high up in the mountains in beautiful monastery grounds, or if it's because of the monk's lifelong religious training.

The old monk's biggest piece of advice to Hector is the fact that people cannot make happiness the goal. This implies that the old monk believes that happiness is found in the journey, and that happiness is not an end state but rather an experience to be had on the way to an end state. He invites Hector to revisit him at the end of Hector's journey, which Hector does. The old monk is pleased with Hector's 23 lessons in happiness, even no. 18 which is about possibly loving two women at one time. The old monk gifts Hector with two beautiful Chinese bowls, which Hector appreciates.

The old monk, for Hector, represents age-old wisdom, a place for Hector to bounce off his ideas and frustrations in a safe place, and in a place where they will be guided toward something more positive and something true. The old monk is the epitome of what Hector hopes for - attitude-wise - as he grows older: wise, content, and happy. The old monk exceeds Hector's expectations, especially since it was a happenstance meeting.

Marie-Louise

Marie-Louise is a young psychiatrist from Africa. Hector meets her on the last of four planes en route to Africa from China. She is holding her baby when they meet and Hector learns that Marie-Louise is only coming back to Africa for a short time; she has moved to America in order to provide a better life for her family. She wants her children to be able to attend school without a driver and bodyguard, which they would need in Africa because of how dangerous it can be to simply drive down the street. Marie-Louise presents as a generally happy person, since she lives in a safe place and can provide well for her family.

Marie-Louise is a kind, protective-natured woman who seems to feel a sort of kinship with Hector, since they are both psychiatrists and shared a meaningful conversation on the airplane ride. She gives Hector her phone number and address, and encourages Hector to come visit her and her family, which he does in Chapter 16. There, Hector enjoys a delicious meal and wonderful company, since Marie-Louise's entire family is kind and welcoming.

Marie-Louise comes from a strong background, which lends to her protectiveness of other people. Her father was a lawyer who had wanted to get into politics when the government in her African country were extremely corrupt. Her father was killed and dragged to their family's front door, and unfortunately the family saw her father's beaten, dead body. Marie-Louise has spent many years trying to help her mother move on from what happened to Marie-Louise's father, using all of her psychiatrist tricks of therapy, pills, and other interventions. Marie-Louise also strongly scolds the driver and bodyguard who had accidentally allowed for Hector to be kidnapped.



Jean-Michel

Jean-Michel is another friend of Hector's from long ago, though this time from university. The two attended medical school together, and Jean-Michel went on to provide medical care for people in very poor parts of the world. He is described as being tall and strong, much like a sailing or skiing instructor. Jean-Michel is also a homosexual. Though the narrator does not explicitly state it, the reader finds out two things that lead to this conclusion: one, girls were always interested in Jean-Michel, but Jean-Michel was never interested in them; and two, Jean-Michel states that where he lives now he can be appreciated and loved for exactly who he is.

Jean-Michel, similar to Marie-Louise, seems to be protective of his friends. When he sees that Hector is talking to Eduardo, a drug dealer, he immediately pulls Hector out of the situation. Jean-Michel is also well-verse in African culture, as he is able to ignore the pleas for money their car receives while Jean-Michel is driving Hector around the city and even into the country.

Jean-Michel tells Hector that he is happy, since he has a job that he loves, does well at, and from which gains a sense of purpose. Also because where he lives, he feels loved for who he is. Jean-Michel's words match his sentiments, since Hector comments that he's never seen Jean-Michel so happy. Later, at the party at Marie-Louise's house to celebrate Hector not dying at the hands of the criminals, Jean-Michel is there to celebrate. He is an exceptional dancer and has no problem celebrating the life of his friend with people whom he just met. Jean-Michel is clearly a kind soul who enjoys doing good for the world. Though no great personal details are given, his conversations with Hector reveal a man who just wants to make the world a better place.

Madame Irina

One of Hector's patients, Madame Irina is a psychic who came to see Hector when her ability to see into the future as a result of a broken heart. Hector gave her some medicine, and gradually she was able to see into the future once more. Madame Irina is also the one to point out to Hector that he is tired and he should go on holiday. Madame Irina is mentioned in Chapter 1, but also in Chapter 32 at the end of Hector's journey around the world. By then her heart has completely healed and she can see into the future just fine, according to her. She also notes to Hector that he was "naughty in China", indicating that even without Hector mentioning it, she knows he had an affair.

The criminals

When Hector leaves Marie-Louise's house, he is accidentally kidnapped when two criminals hi-jack the car in which Hector is sleeping in the backseat as a driver and bodyguard attempt to bring him back to his hotel. There were two criminals in the front seat when Hector woke up from an alcohol-induced nap, and they brought him to their



boss. All three men are African. The boss is the nicest dress out of all three, and the boss also perfectly speaks Hector's language.

Beyond the short descriptions of the men being African, their physical features are never described. They have revolvers as weapons, though no weapon is ever used on Hector. Though the criminals seem to play a small part in the novel, they are instrumental in Hector's change of direction in his thought process as it relates to death. He suddenly realizes that he is not afraid to die. It is also with the criminals that his heart seems to determine - even if he hasn't yet intellectualized - that Clara is the one he truly loves.

The criminals let Hector go based on two premises: one, that Hector knows Eduardo; they figure if he knows Eduardo and hasn't gone to the police yet, why would he go to the police for such criminals as these guys; and two, the boss reads Hector's lessons in happiness. The reader can assume after this scene that even criminals want to be happy. The fact that they consider Hector's request to let him go says that they don't want any real trouble, and the fact that the boss's heart softens after reading the lessons in happiness lets Hector - and the reader - know that even as criminals who make bad/illegal choices on a daily basis, they still have a desire to be content and satisfied with their lives.

Isidore

Isidore is another small character, but one who provides a poignant lesson for Hector. He is a bartender in Hector's hotel in Africa whom Hector speaks with while Eduardo is fetching the name of his wife's prescriptions. Isidore's answers to Hector's question of "What makes you happy?" are "My family not wanting for anything," and "Going to my second job from time to time." At the time Isidore answers, his responses seem insignificant. However, providing for one's family is a theme Hector sees throughout the people who help him with his investigation. Then, once Hector finds out that Isidore's "second job" means he has a mistress, he again ponders loving two women at one time. Isidore has a bright smile, and so Hector concludes that he is happy.

Marie-Louise's family

Marie-Louise's family allows for a time of relaxation and celebration for Hector. There is Nestor, Marie-Louise's brother-in-law, who is an amusing guy who explains part of his country's corruption to Hector. Marie-Louise's mother is a quiet woman whom Hector learns is still broken-hearted and traumatized from the way her husband died. Marie-Louise's cousin, whom Hector finds very pretty, and Hector have a sexual encounter after consuming much alcohol. All in all, Marie-Louise's family treat Hector like family and help him celebrate being alive, since they celebrated him after he returned from being kidnapped.



Djamila

Djamila is a young woman Hector meets on his flight to America. She is originally from a beautiful, though unnamed and war-torn, country. Djamila and Hector meet when Hector is called upon as a doctor to help her; she is having a strong headache and Hector learns that she has a serious illness. Though Djamila's current physical features are never explicitly stated, it is inferred from Hector's observation of her current state vs. her passport photo that she used to be beautiful - by the world's standards - but is now only a shell of her former physical beauty, as the illness has taken that away from her.

Djamila is a kind woman who continues to laugh and smile once she is brought out of her panic. She is also grateful and humble, as she tells Hector that he's going through too much trouble to help her. Her attitude likely stems from the fact that she has spent much of her life taking care of herself and her family, especially since she comes from a war-torn country where they likely have strong familial bonds in order to keep one another live and well. Hector brings Djamila to his section of the plane, which she appreciates. She also enjoys the free champagne offered. Once the plane lands and Djamila is escorted off by people who will bring her to the doctor, Hector doesn't hear from her again. He only received a letter from Djamila's sister once Djamila has passed. The letter explains that Djamila never forgot Hector's kindness, and it also includes a photograph of Djamila before the illness.

Agnes

Agnes is a woman whom Hector dated long ago. She lives in America, in a wealthy city on the Pacific Coast. She is married to Alan. Hector stays with Agnes and Alan while visiting America, partly because both of them work at the university that houses the professor Hector will be seeing about his happiness investigation. Agnes is a beautiful woman and Hector comments a couple times - to himself - that maybe he shouldn't have let Agnes go. She is a strong, independent, smart woman who takes good care of her family while also working at a university. Alan and Agnes present themselves as a typical dual-income family with children: a large house they've worked for, located in a nice city, with children who enjoy video games and watching television.

Agnes is the one who introduces Hector to the idea of comparing one to one's self when determining one's level of happiness. She tells how she is happier than she's ever been - which hurts Hector's feelings a little bit since they used to date - and she knows this because she is comparing her current state in life to all previous states in life. Hector finds this interesting and ponders the idea quite a bit, given that his first lesson in happiness, learned on his flight to China, was that making comparisons can spoil one's happiness.



The professor

The professor presents himself as a character who is maybe meant to be the American, more eccentric version of the old monk. He is wise, as is the monk, but he backs his wisdom with science rather than spiritual enlightenment. His name is John, as mentioned by Rosalyn, though with Hector he is only referred to as 'the important professor'. He is a man who has become quite well known in his field, since he has been studying happiness for a long time and gives talks at conferences.

The professor is a small man with a long nose and a small bit of hair sticking up from his head. He has a loud voice and talks a lot about his work, about which he is very passionate. The professor affirms Hector's happiness journey as he reads over Hector's lessons in happiness, saying that he doesn't really have much to add. Every question Hector asks him is met with an enthusiastic reply. He also discusses study after study, all about happiness, and how Hector's real-world observations match up with the science. Eventually, the professor takes Hector to meet with Rosalyn in order to have Hector participate in their happiness research.

The professor shows his more laymen side when he and Hector go for lunch at one of the university's outdoor cafes when he displays jealousy over a man named Rupert who approaches and flirts with Rosalyn. The professor's jealousy is over the fact that Rupert is on the dean's good list because of his television exposure, and also that Rosalyn sits down to eat lunch with him, despite the fact that the professor and Rosalyn kissed back in Rosalyn's lab.

Hector's meeting with the professor meets, and even in some ways exceeds, Hector's expectations. His entire goal of this journey has been to figure out what does and does not make people happy. Since the professor is not only affirming what Hector has learned, but also helping him learn how to measure happiness and basically showing Hector that he has a chance to be happy, Hector is feeling as though his journey has been a successful one. The professor is a happy guy who only shows a foul mood when his love for another woman and his love for his profession are threatened.

Rosalyn

Rosalyn is not a big character, but her presence matters because she is the professor's helper. Rosalyn is part of showing Hector how to measure happiness, since she and the professor conduct experiments together. Rosalyn works in a basement lab. She seems to reciprocate the professor's feelings. She also seems to love what she does, just as the professor. She is a smart woman who explains to Hector brain scans of men and women from around the world who have participated in happiness studies, which is helpful to Hector as he learns the science behind his current topic of investigation.



Roger

One of Hector's patients, Roger is a man who was ill enough that he had to sometimes be admitted to a psychiatric hospital. Hector visited Roger while he was in the hospital, and he also worked with a local social worker to make sure Roger could stay in his studio flat. Roger believed in the Good Lord and often spoke of how the Good Lord tells him things. Roger would talk back, sometimes loudly and in public, which would draw ridicule from passers-by.

Adeline

One of Hector's patients, Adeline is a beautiful young woman who was obsessed with men, specifically complaining about them. No matter how much psychotherapy Hector provided, Adeline remained fairly stagnant emotionally. Even when she appears toward the end of the novel, she is in the same state as she is in the beginning of the novel.

Alan

Alan is married to Agnes. He is a minor character in the book, but his role as a happily married man and father is part of what encourages Hector to finally conclude he could one day be the same.

Agnes and Alan have one argument while Hector is present over the fact that Alan doesn't make the kids stay at the table to finish their dinner and converse with their guest, though it is squelched fairly quickly when Alan says that one factor of happiness is being married. Both of them help Hector come up with categories for the lessons he's learned so far, which Hector appreciates since he's presenting his work the next day to the professor.



Symbols and Symbolism

Artifacts in Hector's office

The statuettes in Hector's office represent the outlook and life that Hector believes he should have: they are the proper things for psychiatrists to have, and so he has them. He has complicated books, many of which he's never read but which give the impression that he is excessively well-read. There are cultural statuettes that are copies from around the world so that he can appear to be well-traveled and well-versed in cultural diversity. There is a long couch for his patients to either sit or lie down, and there is a sturdy, professional-looking desk, both of which give the impression that he is a proper professional who knows his job and does it well.

Business class

Hector is fortunate enough to fly in business class both on his flights to China and on his way to America. Since part of Hector's inner conflict comes from comparing outward perfection or abundance to inner contentedness, it is important to notice how Hector feels when he's placed in business class. He feels a sense of superiority, and not really to other people but rather to himself. He enjoys the physical comfort, even though he's still tore up on the inside.

Airplane rides

Hector goes on several airplane rides throughout his journey around the world. Not every one of them is described in detail, but each trip can be considered a representation of Hector needing to travel further and further away from where his inner conflict seem to stem from. Each airplane ride is also the setting for significant reflection on Hector's part, since he has time and space to think about what both he's just experienced in the country from which he just came, or what he's anticipating to experience in the country which he's going to.

The airplane rides also represent Hector's need to feel useful and as though he belongs, since he strikes up a conversation with each of his seatmates no matter their age, size, gender, or disposition.

Modern glass towers in China

The modern glass towers described in China are important to Hector's journey because not only did Hector not expect them, but because they remind him of a professional conference rather than a vacation. Even though Hector is doing a professional investigation and making his holiday about psychiatry, he still wants to feel as though he's away from home and away from the things that have been dragging him down. The



modern glass towers of China confuse Hector because they look so pristine, so perfect, and yet Hector's experience in China is far from perfect or pristine: he has an affair with a young lady whose profession is an escort, and his friend Edouard works hard and earns a lot of money but is miserable.

Hector's notebook

Hector's notebook is important because it's where he writes all of his observations and, most importantly, his lessons in happiness. His notebook is what he presents to the old monk, as well as to the professor of Happiness Studies once he's in the United States. Hector seems to always have his notebook handy and ready to record his lessons. Though he considers his lessons as not being a proper theory in happiness, Hector's notebook is a steady companion through his travels.

Relationship with Ying Li

Though brief, Hector's relationship with Ying Li is a significant symbol. At first, it symbolizes Hector's desire to change up everything in his life. Even though Hector doesn't state as much, his actions speak otherwise. Their relationship also symbolize Hector's desire for freedom from his sense of isolation and loneliness, which unfortunately deepens after he realizes Ying Li is an escort. As Hector and his journey evolve, the relationship becomes a symbol for Hector's growth, as the reader can see how far he's come from the beginning of his journey and through each experience. By the end, Hector realizes that he really didn't love Ying Li, he only wanted to be her superhero, again placing their relationship as a symbol for Hector's personal transformation.

Baby on the plane

The baby on Hector's first flight out of China toward Africa is a symbol of renewal for Hector. At this point in his journey, he is still feeling considerably downtrodden and discouraged. The baby smiles at him from her nanny's arms, and this makes Hector smile. Babies in general are a symbol of the cycle of life and life progression, since they are recently born with a clean slate. Though Hector doesn't look to the baby as a symbol of renewal or having a clean slate, the baby can still be considered a symbol for Hector's journey, since there is a point where Hector will feel renewed and revived in his profession as well as in his love life, the two biggest points of inner conflict before he left his home country for his around-the-world journey.

Marcel's pump-action shotgun

Marcel's pump-action shotgun is an important object. Africa is such a different experience for Hector as compared to China, as the contrast between external factors of happiness aren't so present as they are in his home country and in China. The need



for a bodyguard and for the bodyguard to carry a pump-action let Hector - and the reader - know that Africa will be a different place where he will learn very different lessons than he did in China. Though Marcel never uses the shotgun, just the fact that he carries it is enough for Hector to know that while in Africa, he'll likely learn lessons in unhappiness as well.

Storeroom

Hector's accidental kidnapping brings him to a storeroom that smells like a dead rat. In the storeroom that smells like death, Hector thinks of life and death. It is a symbol of his journey so far, of how he has been trapped inside his negative thought cycle but has been forced, due to outside circumstances, to come out of that and think life-giving thoughts. The storeroom ends up being a turning point for Hector and is a reminder through the rest of his journey of the moment he became unafraid to die and excited to live.

Hector's note to the criminals

Hector's note to the criminals is simple; it states "You have a real problem there. We should talk." It gets Hector out of the storeroom, but it is also a symbol of Hector's growing courage. At this point, he has thought through the likelihood of dying at these criminals' hands and has decided he's unafraid. The note is a result of that inner conversation and becomes an artifact of his personal growth and courage.

First class and champagne on the airplane

On Hector's way from Africa to America, he pays for first class and is brought unlimited champagne, which can be considered a symbol of Hector's new view on life: celebrate, for you never know what tomorrow will or will not bring. He knows he can't afford first class, but he goes for it anyway. The champagne provided for him in first class is itself a way to lose yourself, since the effects of too much alcohol compromise memory and judgement. The fact that Hector is partaking in as much as he wants lets the reader know that he's ready to celebrate more of life than he has been in the past.

The beach

The beach in Agnes and Alan's city becomes an equalizer for Hector. He had come from a place where rich people have everything materially that they could ever want for, and yet they yearn for a sense of peace and contentedness. In Hector's eyes, the sun and the sea, as he puts it, equalizes people's ability to be happy. Being able to equalize the ability to be happy is significant because one of Hector's biggest sources of conflict at the beginning of his journey was the contrast between abundant material wealth and a lack of emotional health and well-being.



Experience with the professor

Hector's positive experience with the professor becomes a symbol of Hector's journey being considered a success. He is obviously searching validation for his lessons and his journey, which he gets in conversation with the professor. The fact that it's such a positive encounter proves to Hector that his time, energy, and effort have not been for nothing. He can take his experience with the professor back to his regularly-scheduled life as a picture of validation for his work and his self-transformation.

Squirrel

During lunch with the professor, Hector is approached by a squirrel who wants some of Hector's lunch. Hector ponders that the squirrel might be either thankful for his position in life, or wondering if his life would be better if it was different. Hector places a lot of weight on the squirrel wanting his lunch, because it causes him to think about the professor's explanation of the two camps of people in regards to Happiness Studies: are people happy because they have good things happen to them (like the squirrel being fed by restaurant patrons), or are they happy because of their outlook (like the squirrel simply being thankful for his position in life). When the squirrel takes just a little bit of Hector's lunch and seems satisfied, Hector seems to see that as a representation of how maybe people just need to get what they want once in a while in order to remain happy.



Settings

Hector's office

Hector's office is only mentioned at the beginning of the novel. The narrator describes it as a typical psychiatrist's office, with scores of books - some unread - an old couch, statuettes of Hindu and Egyptian style, and his desk. Hector's practice is located in a wealthy city where people seem to have everything materialistically they could ever want for, which is probably why Hector has copies of Hindu and Egyptian statuettes, so his patients will know - or at least think - that he is well-off, like them. Though Hector's home country is never named, it is clearly a Westernized city in Europe based on the fact that the novel is originally French and the spelling of some words, i.e. realisation, have an 's' instead of a 'z'.

In his office, Hector sees patients such as Madame Irina, a psychic who sees Hector when she can't see into the future; and Adeline, a young woman who has difficulty being alone. Despite his seeing these patients, sometimes only providing verbal therapy, sometimes providing medicinal prescriptions, Hector's office is the beginning of his dissatisfaction, since that is where he treats people and yet he cannot make them happy. The significance of his office lies in the fact that he goes there day after day, hoping to change something about the people whom he treats. Yet, he leaves work everyday knowing he has not made people happy, he's only helped them get from one appointment to the next.

The novel ends with descriptions of how Hector continues to treat his same patients, though his approach with many is different now that his perspective on life and happiness has been significantly altered due to his trip. Madame Irina picks up on the fact that Hector had an affair while he was in China, though Hector doesn't go into detail on that situation since she is a patient. Hector finds that he is happier in his profession now that his outlook has changed.

Hospital

Hector visits the hospital every Wednesday to see patients who lived in less fortunate circumstances than his usual patients.

Hector's home city

Hector's home city is the setting of his office and his home. The city is described as clean, well-off, and "full of wide avenues lined with attractive old buildings," (p. 6). It is described as being different from other big cities around the world because of the fact that its people always had plenty to eat, there was free medical treatment, children went to school, most of the people held a job with plenty of time off offered by their employers, and journalists had freedom to write almost anything they wanted. There



was also plenty of recreational activities to do, such as going to the movie, parks, museums, and swimming.

The narrator describes the city as having a portion of the population not being able to partake in everything, since there were some people who made just enough money to survive. Those neighborhoods were not Hector's neighborhood, but they existed on the other side of the city. He treated those patients at the hospital when he visited every Wednesday. Still, even though Hector lived in a neighborhood where its inhabitants were mostly well-off with no real suffering in their backgrounds, there were more psychiatrist offices in his neighborhood and neighborhoods like his than in all the rest of the city.

Dinner with Clara

The restaurant where he has dinner with Clara is the setting of the very beginning of Hector's investigation into what makes people happy and unhappy. Hector goes to dinner with Clara, his 'good friend', to tell her that he's going on holiday around the world. He wants to break it to her gently, and also ask if she'll go with him, since he loves her and wants to spend more time together. At the restaurant, they are having a regular dinner with Clara telling Hector about her complicated life at her office. He listened until he knew he couldn't hold it in any longer. He asked her, "Are you happy?" Clara took this to mean Hector wanted to leave her, but he quickly explained that no, he was only beginning his investigation. At the restaurant, Hector explains why he wants to understand what makes people happy and unhappy. Clara was not completely satisfied with Hector's explanation, but Hector felt good about the beginning of his investigation, which started at the restaurant.

Airplane en route to China

Hector's first stop on his trip around the world in search for happiness is China. On the plane en route to China, Hector is bumped up to business class from the economy class he had been expecting. This is a great start to Hector's trip, since he receives an upgrade when he wasn't expecting it. Managing expectations is one of the themes strung throughout the novel, so the fact that Hector's trip starts out with his expectations not only being met but exceeded is significant. It is in the airplane, sitting in business class, that he is able to ponder why he's so happy to be in business class. He notices there are a couple other people like him, looking around and smiling, and then there is Charles, a man who had sat in first class before and so business class was no longer a luxury or a treat.

Sitting next to Charles, Hector learns about the factories Charles owns and the labor he can get for cheap. Hector also learns not to expect similarities between China and the film "The Blue Lotus", which is what Hector had compared China to prior to embarking on his journey. It is in the airplane, sitting in business class, that Hector records his first



happiness lesson (making comparisons can spoil your happiness), as well as his second (happiness often comes when least expected).

Chinese city

When Hector arrives in the Chinese city where he'll be visiting, he is surprised by the modern architecture of tall glass towers, and the houses and streets that looked identical to the ones in Hector's country. The biggest difference Hector notices between the Chinese city and his own, is that in the Chinese city there were a lot of Chinese men in grey suits walking quickly and talking on their cell phones. Hector notices there are a lot of very pretty women, as well, though they all seemed to be in a hurry as they walked down the street.

Hector takes a taxi to his hotel, from where he is observing the city. He sees only one house that looks like a proper Chinese house, according to his own expectations, and it was an antiques shop wedged between two buildings. When he arrives at his hotel, he is disappointed to find that it looks like a building where he would attend a professional conference. Since the hotel reminds him of work, he immediately feels like he's not on holiday anymore. His expectations of the city aren't being met, as he wanted it to look much different than his home country, and he doesn't want to think about work, since it was work that wore him down enough in the first place.

Fine Chinese restaurant

Hector meets his friend Edouard for dinner at a fancy restaurant at the top of one of the city's modern glass towers, likely a waterfront structure since from their table, they could see the city lights and boats in the water below. At dinner with Edouard, Hector learns how much his friend works and the physical toll it is taking on him. The contrast is not specifically noted, but there is a significance to the fact that the two old friends are dining at a fine restaurant, both having enough money to pay for it, although Edouard has more, and Edouard appears exhausted and unhappy.

At dinner with Edouard, Hector continues his investigation into what makes people happy or unhappy. He asks Edouard if Edouard is happy, and when Edouard responds by laughing, Hector's sympathy for Hector deepened. At dinner, Edouard explains that he will stop working once he has earned six million dollars.

Hector enjoys dinner with Edouard, as he learns a great deal about his friend and about happiness. He also enjoys it a great deal because he drinks a fair amount of alcohol, as he feels quite cheerful at the end of their meal.

On his journey back to his home country, Hector stops again in China to meet with the old monk and with Edouard. He and Edouard return to the fancy restaurant where patrons can see the city lights and the boats in the bay. Their conversation at the end of Hector's journey is quite different than it was at the beginning of Hector's journey, since



Hector now has concrete lessons in happiness from which to choose. He explains his findings and his theory to Edouard, who listens the same as he did before.

From the restaurant on his second stop to China, Hector phones Eduardo to ask him if he would employ Ying Li, that way she wouldn't have to be an escort any longer.

Chinese bar

After dining at the fine restaurant, Edouard took Hector to an upscale bar. There was calm, soothing music and soft lighting. The bar was filled with both European and Chinese men, and also some Chinese women whose beauty captivated Hector almost immediately, as he thought they looked so pretty they belongs in the movies.

In the bar, Edouard orders another bottle of wine. While Edouard indulges in the wine and in conversation with a beautiful, young Chinese girl, Hector takes out his notebook and records two more lessons that he's learned so far from Edouard and their conversation.

Also at the bar, Hector meets Ying Li, another beautiful, young Chinese girl with whom Hector shares not only two romantic physical encounters with, but also deep feelings.

Hector's hotel in China

Hector's hotel in China is a tall, modern glass tower that reminds Hector of somewhere he would go for a professional conference. It is at his hotel that he has two romantic physical encounters with Ying Li. The day after he and Ying Li shared their first encounter, Hector spent much of the day in bed. He records lesson no. 5 (sometimes happiness is not knowing the whole story) while reflecting on his time in his hotel room with Ying Li. Hector's hotel room is also the site of both of his romantic encounters with Ying Li.

Train in China

Hector boards a train that goes up a mountain. It's the morning after his first encounter with Ying Li, and his emotions are quite frail. After having breakfast in a cafe, he is walking along the city streets and sees a sign for the train. With his emotions frail and him continuing to feel unhappy and dissatisfied with his current state in life, Hector hopes to find beauty up in the mountains. The train is a small one - he boarded from a station with a single track - and as the train went up Hector noticed the blue skies and green mountains all around. The scenery descriptions make the trainride seem beautiful - magnificent green mountains, blue sky, and a sea dotted with boats down below. However, Hector remains unhappy while traveling on the train.



Chinese mountains

Hector takes a long walk in the mountains once he disembarks the train. He isn't happy at the beginning because where he disembarks from the train is even less like "The Blue Lotus" than the Chinese city, and since that is what he expected when he arrived, his disappointment and unmet expectations continue. Hector walks up the mountain until he is the only one on the road. Eventually, the narrator describes Hector's surroundings as they were from the train - beautiful, green mountains all around. At one point, Hector gets out of breath so he pauses from his walk and writes his sixth lesson: Happiness is a long walk in beautiful, unfamiliar mountains.

The Chinese mountains where Hector hikes is a significant setting. It is toward the top of the particular path Hector has climbed that he comes across the monastery, which is where Hector meets an important character: the old monk.

Tsu Lin Monastery

The Tsu Lin Monastery is located toward the top of the path which Hector hikes in the Chinese mountains. Before he arrived at the monastery, Hector was tired, discouraged, and irritated. His walk in the mountains helped some, but it when Hector arrives at the monastery that his energy level rises, as he is "eager to arrive," (p. 37).

The entrance to the monastery is down a long, steep path that once in a while offers small glimpses of the monastery, which Hector could see has a beautiful curled rooftop and very small square windows. The entrance to the monastery has a rope for people who wish to enter, which Hector pulls. A bell rings and a young monk opens the door. When the young monk goes to retrieve the old monk for Hector, Hector can see into the entranceway, which has monk-made items for sale, such as statuettes and saucers.

Once inside the monastery, the old monk leads Hector to his office, which Hector is surprised to find looks a lot like his own office, with a desk, chairs, a lot of books, a computer, two telephones, Chinese statuettes, and a beautiful view of the mountains.

In the monk's office, Hector is hoping to hear that the monk holds a secret to happiness. Instead, they talk about religion and the monk told Hector to visit him once Hector's journey was complete.

Hector returns to the monastery at the end of the novel to review with the old monk the lessons in happiness which he learned along his journey. The old monk tells him he did a great job. The two are talking in the old monk's office, but Hector appreciates the scenery outside of the window, which is a magnificent scene of mountains, sea, and sky. The old monk offers for them to take a walk where Hector asks the old monk to clarify a statement from their first visit when the monk said that it is wrong to believe that happiness is the goal. The old monk explains what he meant to Hector by comparing lessons in and experiences of happiness to the way Hector treats his patients.



The old monk says goodbye to Hector at the doorstep of the monastery after gifting to him two beautiful blue and white Chinese bowls, which he describes as wedding bowls that Hector may keep or give away.

Edouard's office building

The same day Hector visits the monastery, Hector ends his day by visiting Edouard at his work. It's Sunday, but Edouard is at work because he is always trying to earn more money. Hector waits for Edouard in a cafe just outside Edouard's office building, which is described as resembling a razor blade, tall and shiny.

Inside the glass-walled cafe, Hector makes some important observations: one, that the waitresses aren't very pretty, for which he is grateful because he feels as though he's been on beauty overload in China; two, a group of women who were sitting cross-legged in a circle on an oil cloth, talking and laughing with one another; and three, that Edouard's colleagues who are leaving the building appear to be miserable. The observations are significant because all of his focus is going to seeing what makes people happy and unhappy.

Once Hector sees Edouard, the two have a conversation about why his colleagues are unhappy, why Edouard looked more cheerful than his colleagues, and why the women on the oilcloth are happy. After a satisfying dinner and time spent with his friend, Hector stops to ask the women on the oilcloth why they're so happy. Their variety of cheerful answers appease him for now, but only because he gets an answer to why they were happy.

Italian restaurant in China

In Chapter 10, Hector waits for Ying Li inside of an Italian restaurant. As he's waiting for her at a table with red-and-white checkered tablecloths and candles, he records two happiness lessons, one he remembered from the old monk and one he had observed from the women on the oil cloth. At the small restaurant, Hector and Ying Li share a bottle of wine, dinner, and deeper conversation about Ying Li's childhood and family. The two later go to a bar, but the bar is only mentioned briefly and not described, as it is a pit-stop between the restaurant and Hector's hotel.

The Italian restaurant itself is not significant, but the fact that it's the backdrop for Hector's second - and last - date with Ying Li, an escort, is significant because she is one woman he can't seem to forget about, despite Edouard's warnings.

Airplanes en route to Africa

Hector takes a total of four planes from China to the next country he visits (Africa, although it's not specifically named but can be inferred from the text). However, only two airplane experiences are described. On the first airplane, Hector thinks mostly about



Ying Li. The reader can assume that he's back in the economy class, since he is sitting next to a nanny and a baby that is visited once by the mother, presumably coming from first or business class. Hector writes lesson 8b (unhappiness is being separated from those you love) while on the first plane after he sees the baby cry when the mom walks back to her seat. Hector does smile on this airplane in response to the baby smiling at him.

The second and third legs of Hector's aren't described as being anything but time he spent thinking about Ying Li and Clara.

The fourth leg of Hector's flight is the one that goes to the African country which he'll be visiting. He is just about the only white person on the plane; the rest are African men and women, most of whom are "smartly dressed," (p. 57). Hector sits next to Marie-Louise, a woman who becomes a great friend of his. On this leg of the flight there is some turbulence, but it doesn't last for long and the plane lands well in Africa.

Airport in Africa

When Hector steps out of the airplane in Africa, the narrator describes Hector as feeling like he's just opened a hot oven and all the heat has rushed to his face. Hector gets easily through customs, where he observes families waiting in the shade, little girls in white ankle socks and boys wearing long shorts.

After clearing customs at the airport, Hector makes his way toward a cab while he hops to see the friend who was supposed to pick him up. After both of his suitcases were taken by taxi drivers, Hector sees his doctor friend Jean-Michel and the two walk with Hector's suitcases toward Jean-Michel's car, which has been parked in a car park (parking lot). In the car park, Hector is surprised to see beggars, some of whom were quite ill. Hector gives away all the bills and coins on his person to the beggars on his way to the car where there is a bodyguard waiting for him and Jean-Michel.

From the airport car park, Hector observes all at once the scorched mountains, the beggars, the sun hitting the potholed road, and Marcel with a pump-action shotgun resting on his knees, just in case. Before they leave the airport, Hector knows he's about learn some good lessons in both happiness and unhappiness.

Hotel in Africa

Hector stays in a beautiful hotel while in Africa. The grounds are described as being large and full of "flowering trees and small bungalows," (p. 62). There is a large wiggly-shaped pool with a small wooden footbridge passing over it.

Despite its beauty, Hector again feels like it's not a holiday-type hotel. First, he sees a sign requesting guests do not bring any kind of weapon into the hotel. Then, Hector sees men in white uniforms sitting at the bar; they appear to be part of a small army.



Hector spends some time in the hotel bar, where he meets Eduardo and Isidore, both of whom teach Hector different lessons in happiness. Hector and Jean-Michel also get a drink together at the hotel bar after their day exploring the city, country, and treating Jean-Michel's patients.

Hector rests in his hotel room before going to Marie-Louise's house. His room has marble flooring and fancy furniture, including a red bathtub with gilt taps. Before he could get a nap, though, Clara called. She and Hector had a brief, flat conversation that ended with sending each other a kiss.

Exploring Africa

When Hector is exploring Africa, he goes with Jean-Michel to some of Jean-Michel's hospitals where he treats patients. Hector notices while they drive along that there are a lot of people walking along a dusty street, some of whom are not wearing shoes. Hector also noticed that when cars stopped on the road, children would come to the windows and beg for money or food.

The city where Hector is staying is not well-maintained: houses are boarded up with planks of wood or corrugated iron; villas were decomposing; people were selling things on the street that in Hector's country wouldn't be worth selling or purchasing. Along Hector's route there is also a brightly-colored vegetable stand, but Hector notices that the children are the only ones smiling; the grown-ups don't smile at all.

Hector sees a lot of cars on the streets, but he wonders how that's possible in such a poor country. The cars, he notices, must drive on ill-maintained roads with either large boulders or huge potholes in the middle of them. From time to time, as he and Jean-Michel drive along, Hector notices large trucks coming the opposite direction with people hanging on the sides of them. What he notices most about the trucks, aside from the fact that the people hanging off the sides must trust the driver, is that most of them are painted bright colors and have religious sayings painted on them in big letters, such as "The Good Lord watches over us" or "Long live Jesus who loves us always".

Hector also wonders why there are so few trees in the city. Marcel, the bodyguard, explains it was because of bad people who had run the country for a long time.

Hector's impression of this African country improves when the road begins to climb and they arrive at a prettier area out in the country with trees, small villages, and smiling people. The car slows down to pass a donkey or a cart, but the children don't beg.

Marie-Louise's house

Hector visits Marie-Louise's family's house while he's in Africa.

At the first dinner at her house, there are a lot of people at the dinner table, all of whom had different skin shades. Hector enjoys some goat and sweet potato stew. Hector and



Marie-Louise discuss psychiatrist things, like pills and psychotherapy. Hector also converses with Nestor, Marie-Louise's sister's husband. Nestor - and other members of the family - like to joke around, and they do so with Hector. Though, the family does discuss why the children smile more than the grown-ups, which leads Hector to recording an observation but not a lesson in happiness. Hector drinks a lot at Marie-Louise's and was fairly drowsy when a chauffeur and bodyguard took him back to his hotel.

Unfortunately, Hector is kidnapped that night. After the ordeal with the criminals, Hector makes his way back to Marie-Louise's house, where the entire family celebrates the fact that he's alive. Hector enjoys a surprisingly large party in his honor, as well as a sexual encounter with Marie-Louise's cousin. In the bedroom where they "did the things people do when they're in love," (p. 98), there is some old furniture and family photos from when the country wasn't in such a bad state. Until their romantic encounter began, Hector had the feeling of stowing away into his grandparents' room.

At the party for Hector, the music is blaring and everyone is dancing with each other. It is at this party that Hector learns two more happiness lessons about feeling truly alive and knowing how to celebrate (lessons no. 15 and 16).

Criminals' house

On his way back to the hotel from Marie-Louise's house, Hector falls asleep and so doesn't realize until he wakes up that the vehicle has been stolen by two African criminals. The criminals are just as surprised to see Hector as Hector is to see them. The criminals point a gun at Hector but don't shoot, for which Hector is grateful.

The criminals bring Hector to their boss, where Hector is put into a storage room with one light bulb, lots of beer crates, and the scent of a dead rat. Hector knew they were in a big house that used to be beautiful but was now in ruins. He also saw beautiful African women sitting in another room comfortably watching television on a big sofa. Before he enters the storage room, Hector sees that the women are wearing tight-fitting dresses and earrings, and their hair looks freshly styled.

While in the storeroom, Hector hears the criminals debating his future. Hector begins thinking that he's going to die while in that storeroom, or at least in the house. He thinks about the fact that he's actually thought about death quite a bit in his life, since he had seen a number of people die while he was studying to be a doctor. Eventually Hector comes to the conclusion that if he did die right then, it would be okay because he had lived a good life filled with good relationships, a good career, a good family, great holiday experiences, and deep love.

While sitting in the storeroom waiting for the criminals to decide his fate, and after he had come to terms with the fact that he might die, Hector writes letters to Clara and his parents. Eventually, Hector hears the criminals' dilemma of the fact that he could fetch



them a lot of money, but also a lot of trouble. In a last-ditch effort to save his own life, Hector slips a note under the door offering to talk with the criminals.

When the criminals let him out of the storeroom, Hector does two things that lead to them letting him go: he lets them know that he knows Eduardo - a man who sells drugs - and he lets the boss read his notebook filled with lessons in happiness. The criminals know that if Hector knows Eduardo, he has no interest in going to the police. The boss lets him go, and Hector is happy to be away from the smell of the dead rat.

Airplane to America

Hector's planeride from Africa to America is an eventful one. He begins the ride by drinking champagne and thinking about happiness, since he is committed to his investigation. He is likely in either business class or first class, since he is receiving complimentary champagne and the narrator states that Hector does not have a seat neighbor because he's in a very expensive part of the plane.

In the middle of Hector's thinking about rich people's happiness vs. poor people's happiness, one of the air hostesses comes to Hector's part of the plane and asks if there are any doctors board. He contemplates saying no, but being honest and ethical, he raises his hand. Hector is taken to another part of the plane where he meets Djamila, a woman who used to be beautiful but has been racked by a serious illness that is currently giving her a bad headache.

Hector, an air hostess, and a steward bring Djamila to Hector's part of the plane, where the seats recline back and the armrests are large. While talking to Djamila her headache doesn't go away, so Hector asks the pilot to fly a bit lower to release some of the pressure Djamila might be feeling in her head. The two also share a glass of champagne.

The plane lands smoothly and everyone claps, since the other passengers had gotten worried that the plane was flying lower. Djamila is taken right from the airplane by escorts who would take her to her family, who would take her to the doctor.

American city

Though America is never specifically named as the city Hector is visiting, it can be inferred as being the country of More, which could be a nickname for America since America is thought to be the more materially wealthy country in the world. There is also a scolding by Agnes to Hector about the fact that in this country, people sue doctors all the time, which is also a frequent occurrence in America.

When Hector arrives in America, it is to a big city by the sea where the weather is always pleasant and palm trees abound. From the plane, Hector had noticed that there were an abundance of swimming pools throughout the city, all of which - from the air - looked like "glittering blue gemstones," (p. 112).



Hector's friends Alan and Agnes lived in a home that was very nice with a large lawn, palm trees, and a kidney-shaped swimming pool in their backyard. They live in one of the nicest neighborhoods in the city, so Hector ventures out one morning to observe and explore. He enjoys a walk down a street lined with trees and pretty wooden houses, some of them quite old but still well-maintained. Hector walks down a cliff with stairs cut into it, underneath loud traffic, and ends up on a huge white-sanded beach. The water is quite cold, but he keeps his feet in the water so as to have the waves lapping over his ankles. At this point, Hector thinks of Ying Li, since the wave lapping over his feet might be from Ying Li's city (another indication that he is on the Pacific Coast in America, since the Pacific Ocean is what divides America and China).

The beach is fairly deserted, though Hector notices large, poor families up and down the beach. He used this as a lesson in happiness, since the poor people were enjoying having the beach all to themselves; Hector noticed their laughing, smiling, drinking beer, playing volleyball, and some of the men picking up girls.

Dinner with Agnes's family

At the end of his first day in the American city, likely a city in Southern California, Hector has dinner with Agnes and her family. He enjoyed having a proper sit-down dinner with a seemingly well-functioning family because "it seemed to him like a good place to find happiness," (p. 117). However, the children didn't stay at dinner long; they went out to play in the garden, then came back in to have cake and then upstairs to watch TV or to play computer games. Hector is witness at dinner to Agnes getting frustrated with Alan not putting his foot down with his children.

Hector watches the exchange and afterwards, though feeling uncomfortable, explains the purpose of his trip and the lessons he had already learned. This is where Hector first gets the idea that happiness could be calculated. He and Alan spent some time dividing Hector's recorded lessons into categories. The dinner ends with Alan saying to Agnes that he is happy being married.

American university

Agnes takes Hector to work with her, which is at an American university. Hector is looking forward to meeting the important professor of happiness studies so that he can run by his lessons and see if what he has come up with will be validated.

On their way to the university, Agnes tells Hector that she is happy. She is the one who opens Hector's eyes to the fact that each individual experiences happiness differently, and that in order to determine one's own current level of happiness, it is necessary to compare to oneself to oneself, so that previous circumstances of happiness can be measured against current circumstances of happiness.

The university is described as being filled with beautiful, old buildings with little bell towers, statues, pillars, and rolling lawns. Hector sees that it was made to look



medieval, even though it had been built within the last 100 years. Hector notices students of many colors walking across the campus. He especially notices the pretty Chinese girls in shorts, since they make him think of Ying Li.

Hector meets the important professor while at the university. They talk about happiness, though the professor talks more than Hector. The professor reads Hector's list and is impressed by its breadth. They continue talking about determinants of happiness, what makes a happy life, what makes a good or bad comparison. Then, when Hector asks how one can measure happiness, the professor gets very excited and tells Hector that measuring happiness is his area of expertise. He shows Hector a large cupboard filled with stacks of papers, all of which the professor says are his and his colleagues' findings as they've studied happiness.

The professor brings Hector down to the basement of the building they're in. In the middle of the basement is a "huge, rather-complicated-looking contraption" (p. 137) that Hector thinks might be a space-time machine. There is an armchair hooked up to some other humming machines. Hector sees a woman, whom the professor calls Rosalyn, in a white lab coat next to the devices. Hector sits in the armchair and lets Rosalyn and the professor use him as a subject for Rosalyn's experiment. He sits in the chair while Rosalyn and the professor, whom Rosalyn calls John, stand behind a window in front of a control panel that Hector believes is as complicated as one in a big airplane.

After Hector participates in the short experiment, he is shown a color monitor with an image of a brain on it. Hector appreciates the beautiful dark blue and orange hues, as they represent various levels of oxygen in the brain as the subject recalls various life events.

The professor brings Hector to an outdoor university cafe where they sat facing a huge lawn. While sitting down to eat, Hector was approached by a squirrel begging for some of his food. Here, Hector and the professor enjoy a conversation about happiness and happiness studies, but Hector also witnesses the professor get jealous when a man named Rupert persuades Rosalyn to eat lunch with him. Agnes arrives and she and Hector talk some about what happened between he and the professor.



Themes and Motifs

Happiness

Happiness is the most obvious theme in "Hector and the Search for Happiness", since it is right in the title and the entire tangible purpose of this novel's main character is to travel the world in search of what makes people happy. In reading through the novel, it would be easy for readers to pick out a surface-level theme in regards to happiness, since it seems all Hector is looking for is the secret to happiness. He doesn't find just one, he writes 23 lessons. It would seem that the theme of happiness only plays out as Hector tries to learn what makes people happy, in hopes of being able to finally "fix" his patients. However, it's important that the reader pay attention to the fact that the theme of happiness lies more in the contrast in what Hector believes should be, and what actually is, not only for his patients but for himself. Hector has difficulty grasping why his patients have everything materialistically that they could ever want, yet remain unhappy. Hector is also confused by the fact that one could be in such beautiful surroundings, as he is in China among the mountains and in Africa among a beautiful blue sky and a rolling countryside, and yet remain unhappy. Even though Hector is a psychiatrist, Hector has trouble making the connection between factors of external happiness, such as one's material belongings and environmental surroundings, and factors of internal happiness - which is what Hector is ultimately in search of - such as a sense of self, a sense of purpose, feeling loved and feeling a sense of belonging.

On Hector's journey, he is surprised at each happiness lesson he learns. Each character and circumstance that provide one or more lessons seems to invoke a strong moment of reflection for Hector as he contemplates why he never thought of such a happiness factor before that moment. Between three countries (outside of his own home country), Hector meets a host of characters who have completely different experiences of happiness, which seems to intrigue Hector when his friend Agnes points out the fact that happiness is experienced individually. It is difficult for Hector to accept that everyone may experience happiness in a unique way, because he so hopes there is just one secret to happiness that he can dispense to all of his patients. Hector's own sense of happiness comes to him when he reflects on his 23 learned lessons and begins applying them to his own life. The break from psychiatry clearly does him good, as well, as he returns to his girlfriend and his job with a renewed sense of purpose.

The characters which Hector comes into contact with are generally happy persons. They live imperfect lives, i.e., one has a mistress, one argues with her husband, and one is ill to the point of almost dying. However, each character teaches Hector something about happiness because they smile and laugh through their imperfect circumstances. The juxtaposition of happiness and frustration, as in Agnes' case, or happiness and illness, as in Djamila's case, confuses Hector but it also teaches him that happiness is not and cannot be a black-and-white scenario; it is a gray area that means many different things to many different people.



Managing emotions vs. expectations

One of Hector's most obvious character traits is the fact that he has certain expectations that he expects to be met at all times, whether of himself, his patients, his girlfriend, his friends, his surroundings, or his situations. This is likely because he is a trained medical professional, and as such has been taught that there are concrete answers for concrete situations and that's just the way it is. Hector presents himself as being quite a black-and-white thinker. Which is why he is thrown into such a state of dissatisfaction when his expectations are not being met. Hector must continually change his ideas about himself, his colleagues, his girlfriend, his friends, his surroundings, and his situations, because the expectations he holds of each just aren't being met, the evidence of which can be found in his constant frustration and sadness at various points throughout the novel.

In the beginning of the story, Hector is clear about what psychiatrists should and should not be like. He has an office expected of a psychiatrist: full of complicated books, a long, comfortable couch, copycats of cultural memorabilia, and his desk. He also behaves like a psychiatrist, dispensing medicine when appropriate, listening to people's problems, responding at all the right places with all the right terminology or noises, i.e. "mmhmm" or "okay". Hector has less of a problem with himself than he has with his patients, since everything external says they should be happy: abundant material possessions and wealth, a safe living environment, free healthcare, more than enough to eat, recreational options, etc. He expects that with their external lives being so wonderful, their internal lives - their senses of self and purpose - should be fully in tact, as well. Everything on the outside is as he expects it to be. It is when Hector feels dissatisfaction and frustration on the inside that he feels as though he cannot continue being an effective psychiatrist. He can't make people happy, despite the fact that externally they have everything they could possibly want. Hector just can't understand why he'd be so dissatisfied or frustrated when everything is as it should be. He is forced to match his emotions with his expectations, managing both and reframing one or the other in order to make any kind of personal progress.

Hector ultimately learns that psychiatry and happiness are gray areas that cannot be fully explained by only black-and-white answers, though it takes him almost his entire around-the-world journey. He learns to manage his expectations and rework the way he thinks about things in order to positively influence his emotions.

Making comparisons

The author uses contrasting elements all throughout "Hector and the Search for Happiness." Usually, it is an instance of unhappiness or dissatisfaction against the backdrop of abundance or beauty. The presence of such contrast all throughout the novel increases Hector's tendency to make comparisons while he's on his trip around the world. Comparisons are such a part of Hector's story that the concept of making comparisons is Hector's first recorded lesson: making comparisons can spoil one's



happiness. One of the most poignant lessons Hector learns is that it's all relative - one's happiness is determined by factors that that individual deems important enough to consider - and that comparing one person's happiness to another person's happiness isn't a true measure of happiness. When the professor of Happiness Studies compares himself to a Martian trying to communicate happiness, and then teaches Hector three methods of measuring a person's happiness, Hector seems to finally understand why comparing individuals' experience of happiness based solely on qualitative measures isn't a true measure. Hector learns that a person's happiness is based on how that person experiences happiness, sometimes as compared to their own past experiences, but also just in terms of what that person deems important.

When Hector records his first lesson, he notices that the man sitting with him in business class is unhappy because that man, Charles, has previously sat in first class, making business class seem undesirable. It's important to note that this is his first lesson, because as a psychiatrist who prides himself on understanding people, it's surprising he had never picked up on this lesson before this experience. The comparisons Hector makes on his journey are usually external vs. internal, which is a significant hindrance to his progress because the reader can see that by comparing external satisfaction with internal satisfaction yields no results in terms of happiness. For example, Hector compares the fact that Edouard's work building in a tall, beautiful, modern glass tower; it is beautiful and pristine. Yet, the people coming out of the business tower seem miserable and exhausted. While sitting at the cafe, Hector compares the fact that these people work in a beautiful building and they make a lot of money to do so (external factor), yet they seem so miserable that Hector thinks he could open a psychiatry practice right in the lobby and make a good living. Eventually Hector learns not to compare external factors with internal factors, making it easier for him to serve his clients and be more present and content in his relationship with Clara, but until then, the comparisons Hector makes are emotionally unhealthy and an apples-to-oranges type of comparison that gives no answers.

Romantic Love

Romantic love is strewn all throughout "Hector and the Search for Happiness", for Hector and some of his friends along the way. At first, the narrator describes Hector's love for Clara, how it's long-standing, if in a period of frustration, fatigue, and boredom (p. 102). Clara is the one Hector loves, as she is a strong, smart, independent woman who has stuck with him for a long while. However, his relationship with Clara seems to be part of Hector's dissatisfaction, since the two of them can't seem to get their "romantic schedules" to sync; when one wants children, the other doesn't, and when one wants to get married, the other doesn't. Hector knows he loves Clara; he wouldn't have asked her to come on his journey if he didn't. But the fact that they can't get on the same page at the same time indicates to Hector that it might be a good thing to take a short break from one another.

Hector's idea of romantic love is complicated by a few of his character traits, namely: the fact that he seems to mistake beauty for love upon first impression; that he isn't sure



what he's looking for so how can he be sure of what he wants; and also that he has concrete ideas of what people in love do (be physically intimate with one another). Hector so appreciates beauty that he is drawn to Ying Li immediately upon their meeting. He spends most of the rest of his trip trying to decide whether or not he's in love with Ying Li. While he ultimately decides that he's in love with her emotions, and that he wants to be her superhero and not her lover, Hector has a strong inner conflict for most of his journey because he has mistaken his appreciation of Ying Li's beauty for an intimate emotional connection. On his journey, Hector knows he's looking for lessons in happiness, but that's his only direction, and it's a vague one.

Hector wants the monk to reveal one secret in happiness, and then when he records his own lessons, there's no pattern. He refines his focus as time goes on, but without a concrete path on which to travel at the beginning, he can't possibly know where he's going. This aspect of Hector's character transfers to his feelings about romantic love, since he even writes as a lesson that maybe happiness is being able to love more than one woman at the same time. He is unsure of what he wants, because he's unsure of where exactly he's going. What's more, is Hector has concrete ideas of what people in love should do, especially in regards to a physical relationship. Each time he has a sexual encounter with a woman - a total of three times - the narrator's words, which read as Hector's thoughts, the encounter is described as being what people in love do. Hector has clear ideas of what should and should not be, and people having an intimate encounter seems to be reserved, in his mind, for people who are in love. However, his second romantic partner on his trip seems to break him of that sentiment, since they have their encounter, go right back to a party, and they never meet up again afterwards. Part of Hector's personal transformation is the fact that he realizes what romantic love is and is not, and what can and cannot sustain true romantic love. Hector manages to loosen some of his pre-conceived notions about the general order of things, and therefore can better understand himself and what he wants for himself. At the conclusion of his journey, he understands that being someone's superhero, which is what he wanted to be for Ying Li, does not make a good situation for true love. Rather, it is history, a mutual respect, and a mutual appreciate for one another, which is what he has with Clara.

Hector includes romantic love in only one lesson, when he writes that happiness could be the freedom to love more than one woman at the same time. However, Hector crosses it off so as to not upset Clara in case she sees it. As the story progresses, it could also be argued that Hector crosses it off as he learns that he really only loves one woman, because having two on his mind every day is exhausting.

Romantic love is touched on for a couple of the other characters Hector sees along his journey: the professor loves his colleague Rosalyn and is shown to be jealous when another man pursues her; and Agnes and Alan are described as being in love with one another. However, Hector does not use them as examples in romantic love, but rather as examples of happiness including spending time with and caring for those you love, which covers more than just romantic love.



Physical beauty

The theme of physical beauty shows itself mainly through Hector's eyes, as the narrator makes clear that Hector appreciates beautiful women. All throughout Hector's journey, his observations seem to always include beautiful women. In China, Hector notices that the waitresses are beautiful women. He thinks for most of his trip that he is in love with one beautiful woman he meets in China, Ying Li. Hector thinks about her beauty long after their physical encounter is over. Hector notes that his girlfriend at home is pretty, and the narrator states that Hector has always had girlfriends who are more attractive than he is, which is stated as Hector's attempt to make up for what he feels is a lacking physique. On his plane ride to America, Hector notices that Djamila, the sick woman who he helps to calm when she is feeling ill, used to be beautiful. Hector makes a point to smile at her because he figures she must miss being smiled at, since her illness has left her not as beautiful as before. At one point, Hector notices that the waitresses in the restaurant are not beautiful, and he's glad for it because sometimes he needs a break from the beauty, which is only something that could be said by or about someone who always notices beauty.

The importance in Hector's recognizing of physical beauty lies in the fact that no matter the beautiful women he observes, there is only one with whom he is ultimately in love. What's more, none of the physical beauty he sees changes the fact that he's dissatisfied with his current state in life. Even though Hector acts as if physical beauty is very important to him, none of the physical beauty Hector sees in other women does anything to change his outlook on life, nor is women's physical beauty one of the 23 lessons in happiness Hector records in his notebook. Appreciating physical beauty and needing to see beautiful women on a regular basis seem to be a part of Hector's make-up, however it seems it is more out of habit than actual necessity.

The one lesson that has to do with beauty is lesson no. 6, which is all about taking a long walk in unfamiliar, beautiful mountains. At this point in the story, Hector is irritated that China is nothing like the film "The Blue Lotus", but a long walk in the Chinese mountains, which he finds beautiful calms his soul and leads him to the old monk. However, though lesson no. 6 is related to beauty, it is counted as a lesson because of the feeling the mountains and clear sky invoke within Hector. Therefore, it's not the actual beauty which truly speaks to Hector's soul. Rather, it's the feeling of being surrounded by a serene environment. Plus, the beauty of the mountains is a natural, untouched-by-man beauty that cannot be changed by humans. This likely has something to do with Hector's enjoyment of it, since the mountains will not change at someone else's whim, nor will they disappoint him, as they are inanimate.

Expectations of social status

Social status is a minor theme in "Hector and the Search for Happiness." While Hector is not haughty or arrogant about his socioeconomic status, his general observations make it clear that he is used to a certain way of living and expects a certain standard of



living in order for one's life to be a good one. For example, Hector is confused as to why his patients live in a wealthy part of a wealthy city, yet continue to want for things and are unhappy. He expects that at this level, individuals would have everything they want and, therefore lead a generally happy life. This expectation overflows to himself, as he expects that since he is a psychiatrist who makes a good living, he should have certain things that help him to look the part, i.e., copies of cultural (international) statuettes in his office. It's only when Hector travels to China and sees the poor women on the oil cloth who are happy, and the poor villagers in Africa who are happy, that he realizes that social status isn't a determinant of happiness as Hector alluded to at the beginning of his journey.

Another manifestation of Hector's expectations of social status is when he's in America. Throughout his journey he refers to America as "the country of More" and the place where

Loneliness/Isolation

Loneliness and isolation is a minor theme in "Hector and the Search for Happiness", and one that Hector doesn't really explore himself. It's more of a theme that exists around Hector and through his actions, especially as he engages himself with other people. Hector's sense of isolation at the beginning of the novel is obvious as his current state is described: dissatisfied with his work, at a stand-still in his relationship with Clara, and basically detached from the life he's built. One cannot feel detached from the life one has built without a sense of isolation. This sentiment seems to come to a head for Hector when he is in China. The morning after his romantic encounter with Ying Li, Hector finds out she's an escort. His sadness seems to be for several reasons: the fact that the affection might not have been true, the fact that what he thought was a happenstance meeting was actually contrived, the fact that a beautiful young woman is stuck in an unclean business, but also for the fact that when he thought he was garnering true affection and companionship from someone - which he's been lacking with his own girlfriend back home - he finds out that it wasn't true. Longing for companionship can make a person quite lonely, and since Hector's jump in mood when after he and Ying Li began conversing makes it clear that companionship is something Hector has been wanting, the fact that it was first fake, then taken away, makes for an increase in Hector's feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Hector's loneliness begins to dissipate after he is encouraged by the old monk to continue his journey and learning more lessons about happiness. It is likely the kinship Hector feels with the old monk that helps him push through his feelings of isolation. As time goes on, Hector adds lessons in happiness that have to do with celebrating and being around those you love. As Hector meets with more and more of his friends around the world, engaging with them in celebrations or even just their day-to-day life, Hector's longing for companionship lessens. He is reminded with each interaction that there are people all around the world who care for his well-being, his happiness, his health, and his safety. By the time Hector arrives home, he is eager to love Clara and enjoy a meaningful relationship with her as they once had.



Becoming satisfied with one's self

Becoming satisfied with one's self is a major theme in "Hector and the Search for Happiness", especially since this sentiment is the catalyst for Hector's around-the-world journey. Hector's dissatisfaction with his career bleeds over into his being dissatisfied with himself and the other areas of his life, including his romantic life. He wonders why, as a generally smart and successful psychiatrist, he can't make people happy. Why do his patients remain unhappy, despite his well-researched interventions? Hector puts the blame on himself, since he sees it as his responsibility to not necessarily fix people but at least to help them be happier with their lives after a certain amount of sessions with him.

Hector deals with his self-dissatisfaction by first deciding to go on a journey around the world to figure out what it is that makes people happy. He seems to think that if he can find the secret to happiness, he will know better how to treat his patients since he will know exactly what will make them happy. Of course, that's not the experience he has, since he learns more than 20 different lessons in happiness and not all of them can be applied to every patient of his. But Hector's self-dissatisfaction dissipates with each leg of his journey.

In China, Hector deals with his self-dissatisfaction by basically ignoring it until it eats him up enough that he can't. He tries to soothe his inner conflict with alcohol, by sleeping with a beautiful, young Chinese woman, and then by trying to find comparisons to a film he likes, "The Blue Lotus", and his experience in China. Finally, he goes for a walk in the mountains and comes across a monastery, where he meets an old monk that sets him back on track. Hector is taken aback by the beauty of his surroundings and is reminded that good things do exist and that his frustration won't last forever. He leaves China with a handful of lessons in happiness, as well as the old monk's wisdom of making sure not to make happiness the destination of one's journey. However, his progress toward being satisfied with himself, his career, and his life seems dismal. Though his brief relationship with Ying Li remains significant for much of the story, there is nothing significantly positive enough that brings Hector out of his funk.

In Africa, Hector makes a giant leap toward being satisfied with himself, his career, and his life, and it's mainly because of a mistaken kidnapping (which is another contrast in and of itself). Hector meets more characters in Africa than anywhere else: Marie-Louise and her family, Eduardo, Isidore, Marcel, and a set of criminals. He enjoys spending time with Marie-Louise and her family, especially since they take him in as one of their own. He also enjoys his time with Jean-Michel, an old friend who finds great purpose in his work. Hector observes a great amount of happiness and contentedness in Africa, despite the poverty-stricken environment. He notices that people are happy when they are around those they love, when they are protecting those they love, and when they are finding purpose in their work. Each of these lessons Hector would do well to embrace and internalize, however it's not until he's accidentally kidnapped that he actually does. When Hector is put in a storeroom while the criminals decide what to do with him, he has ample time to reflect on his life. And what he sees is favorable: a



career that has helped people; relationships that have been encouraging, meaningful, and true; and time well spent. It is during this reflection time that Hector takes a big step forward out of his state of self-dissatisfaction. It's almost as though he sees his life as a slow-motion movie and he likes what he sees. Though his work is not done, as he still must visit the professor of Happiness Studies in America and the old monk back in China, at least his perspective is beginning to change.

By the time Hector reaches America, he is in a much better state to present his findings, as he has truly begun to internalize the lessons he's learned thus far. While Hector presents his list to the professor with some trepidation, as soon as the professor validates the lessons Hector seems to let out a breath of relief. He knows his list is quality, but until he meets and dialogues with the professor he has no idea how to quantify and therefore go forth and teach the lessons which he's learned. The professor uses the metaphor of being a martian and trying to communicate one's happiness to a human; the professor makes sure Hector understands that there are three ways to measure happiness in others. This learned knowledge brings Hector around to the idea that his journey has not been for nothing, and that maybe he can help his patients more than he thought at the beginning of his journey. All together, even though Hector thought his main purpose for this journey was to find the secret to happiness so he could help make other people happy, it is ultimately Hector's self-transformation and satisfaction with himself and his state in life that makes the biggest difference for his change in perspective and attitude.

Life purpose

The theme of having a Life Purpose is similar to the theme of becoming satisfied with one's self, however it is manifested quite differently. While becoming satisfied with one's self is a major theme for Hector, having a life purpose runs underneath the surface for all of Hector's characters along his journey. Through character descriptions and conversations with Hector, the reader can pick up on the fact that each person Hector interacts with along his way ponders his or her life purpose as he or she answers Hector's main questions of "Are you happy?" and "What makes you happy?".

In China, one reason Hector might remain unsettled within himself until he reaches the monk is because the two main people with which he interacts - Edouard and Ying Li - are in limbo themselves. Edouard has a monetarily successful career but does not present himself as being satisfied with it, nor does he seem to think it's his main purpose in life. He has a goal of making \$6 million dollars, but at no point does he express with true conviction or passion that his entire purpose of being is to make a lot of money. Ying Li is part of an escort service, and the sadness that clouds her face when Hector finds out shows that she is somewhat ashamed of her profession. She is also scolded by her boss in front of Hector, which is embarrassing. After explaining her family history to Hector, it is clear that she does not believe escorting is her life purpose, but rather that she is stuck in it. It is only the old monk who is content with himself and his life, and it is only then that Hector's spirits begin to lift. The old monk knows his



purpose in life, and his encouragement of Hector seems to make Hector believe that he can find his own, too.

In Africa, his friend Jean-Michel knows his life's purpose very well. His ease in visiting poor health clinics around the area where he lives shows Hector that his happiness and contentment are true, and that having a purpose in life contributes to one's overall well-being. Marie-Louise is confident in her reasons for moving away from her home country, and even Eduardo, whose profession is not necessarily an ethical one, knows that his main purpose in life right now is providing for his family. Hector sees the contrast of people in China who are financially well-off yet carry no life purpose, versus people in Africa who have far less money and yet know who they are, why they do what they do, and are happy about it.

Hector's experience in America is a mix of both China and Africa in terms of observing others' life purpose. Agnes seems to enjoy her life and her work, and she even says so, but she's not explicit in the fact that what she does and the life she has is her life purpose, whether it's working at the university or being a mother or a wife. However, the professor of Happiness Studies is highly enthusiastic about his life's work. He paces excitedly when he answers question, he answers questions with passionate conviction, and he cannot say enough of his profession and the findings he knows of related to Happiness Studies. The professor has clearly found his niche and gives the impression that he knows exactly what his life purpose is - studying happiness and passing on his knowledge - and he is more than happy to live out that purpose day after day.

It is in Africa that Hector records the lesson of happiness including a life purpose. It helps that Hector observes it in most of the people he meets, especially from the monk all the way to the professor. He's able to bring that sense of life purpose back to his home country and see his profession, his love life, and his life in general with renewed eyes. A lack of purpose can certainly send a person into a downward spiral of questioning one's existence, which is kind of what Hector experienced. It is when his purpose for psychiatry and his relationship with Clara was renewed that he was able to come out of his frustration and confusion and move forward with confidence and contentment.

Religion

Religion is a minor theme in "Hector and the Search for Happiness", but one that must be touched upon, especially considering one of Hector's most influential characters on his journey is an old monk. The first mention of religion is in the very beginning of the novel when the narrator discusses one of Hector's patients, Roger, who spends a great deal of time in a psychiatric hospital because of his tendency to speak aloud in response to the voices in his head. Roger insists the voice in his head is The Good Lord speaking directly to him, but Roger responds loudly and in public, causing people to be alarmed and call the cops. Roger insists that "the Lord is my shepherd, He leads me," which is his response to any question Hector asks him about taking medication or behaving in the hospital. The narrator doesn't spell out Hector's opinion, but almost



every time the God of Christianity is mentioned, He is referred to as 'the Good Lord'; twice He's referred to as 'Jesus' (once by Roger and once on a truck Hector sees driving through his city) and once He's referred to as 'God' (when Hector realizes that believing in God isn't a choice but rather something that either does or does not happen to you). While Hector considers himself to have a religion, it is more because of tradition and family history and less because of his own conviction, as demonstrated by the fact that God, Jesus, the Good Lord, and religion are all discussed from a distance rather than being an intricate part of his own life.

Hector doesn't have any big ideas about God or religion, though he remembers when the criminals take him to their boss that his mom used to always say it's better to talk to God directly than to one of his saints. Here, he's equating God to a boss that could potentially get him out of the mess he was unintentionally put in. Hector's biggest exploration of religion is when he's talk to the old monk. At the monastery Hector recognizes that the old monk's religion works for him, but Hector wonders why the old monk's religion has gotten so popular in other parts of the world, particularly in his own home country where there were plenty of other religions to choose from. Hector also laments that he knows plenty of people who don't have a religion and yet seem content with their lives, and then he knows people who are very devout and yet are miserable. Thus, religion is just one more piece of the confusion puzzle as Hector tries to figure out why, if people have so many things that are supposed to help them and make their lives better, they remain unhappy.

Travel as a catalyst for self-reflection

Travel is a rather obvious theme in "Hector and the Search for Happiness", since the entire premise of the novel is Hector traveling around the world to find the secret to happiness. It is during his travels that Hector not only completes his investigation, but also experiences a personal transformation. On the surface, the reader knows that Hector travels to China, a country with a lot of African-looking people, presumably on the continent of Africa, and the Country of More, presumably America. He chooses each country for a specific reason: China and Africa house two of his oldest and closest friends, and America has a professor of Happiness Studies who work at the same university as one of his former girlfriends (now friends). Hector comments on his plane-rides, especially when he's bumped from economy to business class, and the champagne offered throughout the flight. He also comments on the hotels he stays at in each country. While his comments are complimentary and positive, they are also obviously from a man who is well-traveled, as nothing comes as a complete surprise and he shows no anxiety for being in three different countries within a short period of time. That kind of ease with travel takes an experienced traveler.

It is important to note the undertones of the story in relation to travel. First, Hector needs a change and he needs to find out what makes people happy. He feels as though he can't do that in his own home country, so he needs to go to three far-away countries in order to discover what makes people happy. Whether he needs to or not is debatable, since Hector might have come to the same conclusion reading enough books and



talking to a variety of people in his own city and/or country. Hector's conflict is an inner struggle; ultimately it has nothing to do with the external world. However, it's the notion of needing to get far from what one perceives and his or her problems in order to gain clarity, which Hector certainly does as a result of his travels. Also, the act of constantly traveling and constantly changing one's surroundings lends itself to constant reflection; Hector has to get a grasp on knowing himself if he's going to keep putting himself in situations where he'll be personally challenged. Hector's travels allow him to see different places around the world, yes, but he can also begin to see that the transformation didn't need to take place in Clara or in his patients, but rather within himself.

Freedom

Part of Hector's inner struggle seems to be the feeling of being stuck: stuck in his profession where he doesn't really feel like he's helping people; stuck in his relationship with Clara; and even stuck in his home country since that's where his life and career are. Traveling affords Hector a sense of freedom, and the ability to stretch his perspective a little bit so that he doesn't feel so stuck. Hector expresses this sentiment when he relishes in more alcohol than usual, when he engages in two separate physical affairs, and when he even includes "the freedom to love two women at once" as lesson no. 18. He scratches out that lesson in case Clara ever gets a hold of his notebook, but the fact that he thought of it is significant; it is an example of the freedom Hector is longing for and yet is having trouble finding. It seems that he doesn't necessarily want to settle down in his home country as is; he wants to know if there is something else he should be doing, someone else he should be with, somewhere else he should be, since he's so discontented with his career, his romantic relationship, and his life in general. He is restless for a sense of personal freedom from everything he feels is binding him.

On his travels, Hector does find a sense of freedom, though it is more from himself and the cycle of negative thoughts that were consuming him at the beginning of his journey. Yes, Hector finds physical/geographical freedom as he travels from one country to another, jet-setting from China to Africa to America, all on his own schedule. However, his personal sense of freedom from the inside-out is more significant and more important, since it is that aspect of freedom which will bring him home a happier man. Through his interactions with his friends - new and old - along his journey. Hector is freed from his self-expectations of perfection and "fixing" people; he is freed from his tendency to make comparisons of external beauty vs. internal contentment; and he is freed from his need to find one specific secret to happiness. The freedom Hector finds via his travels and interactions brings him back to his starting place a more emotionally healthy, emotionally present, and overall happier person.

Fear

Fear is a theme that is only overtly expressed once by Hector, but it seems to be a central catalyst for Hector's journey. Hector clearly expresses emotional and physical



fear when he is accidentally kidnapped in Chapter 17, wondering if he's going to die, how he's going to die, and if he'll get to complete his investigation of what does and does not make people happy. He has enough time in the storeroom while sitting on a beer crate to come to terms with the possibility of dying that night, and he even writes letters to his parents and Clara, telling them what they've meant to him and how he's happy with his life thus far. He even overcomes his fear enough to slip a note to the criminals in an attempt to convince them to let him go. However, it is the underlying sense of fear at the beginning of Hector's journey that seems more important.

Not only does Hector need to be freed from the negative thought cycle he's caught in, but he also seems afraid of his life staying exactly how it is for the rest of his time on Earth. And since Hector is dissatisfied with how things are going, he likely can't help but wonder, "What if this is it? What if this is my life? What if I can't do anything else to make these people better, and I'm stuck in this same position for the next 30 years?" That's enough to scare anyone to action. Hector's fear ends up being a positive, since it is a motivator for him to set himself on a life-changing and perspective-changing journey around the world. Hector's fear does not seem nearly as present as he travels, likely because any kind of learning or new interaction is a step away from the life he was afraid to stay stuck in. By the end of his journey, Hector comes full circle and does not seem afraid of anything his life has to offer, including his career and his love life with Clara.

Styles

Point of View

"Hector and the Search for Happiness" is told from a present-tense, third-person perspective. The narrator seems to act as the main character Hector's inner thoughts, as Hector's is the only thoughts and feelings the reader gets to know. The reader learns of Hector's adventures and the various ways in which Hector internally - and sometimes externally - processes through his experiences, his self-transformation, and his feelings that go along with each one.

In terms of what the author is likely trying to convey, it's important to note that the author, Francois Lelord, had a similar experience to Hector: he went through his own period of being dissatisfied and disillusioned with his career and his state of life, and therefore took off from his home country (France) and went to Hong Kong as he thought about his life and his profession. While Lelord didn't experience - to the reader's knowledge - what Hector experiences in the various countries, the reader can safely assume that Hector's feelings and processing of his experiences are rooted somewhat in Lelord's personal experience. Because of that, and because Lelord had previously written best-selling self-help books based on his profession as a psychiatrist, the reader can look at the story from almost a based-on-a-true story perspective. It seems the author is trying to pass on in the form of fiction what he learned during his own time of self-discovery.

Language and Meaning

"Hector and the Search for Happiness" was originally written and published in French in 2002; it was not translated into English until 2010. The fact that it was translated is essential to understanding the sometimes staccato flow of the text. As with any text that is translated from one language to another, sometimes words or phrases simply have no exact match between the languages, leaving the translator to come as close as possible. Also because of its origin in the European book market, the reader will notice non-Western spellings, such as 'globalisation', 'realised', 'travelling', and 'signalling', among others. The author's (and possibly translator's) decision to leave the spelling as obviously European rather than American is a way for the reader to remember that Hector is not American. He speaks English because he is a well-educated professional, but he is not American.

The constant descriptions of abundance and beauty everywhere Hector goes are important for the reader to note. Aesthetic beauty is a theme running throughout "Hector and the Search for Happiness", as Hector considers one of his plights his ability to immediately spot beautiful women and be distracted by them. However, in terms of environmental abundance and beauty, Hector's surroundings are given more attention to detail than any other aspect of the novel. Thus, the reader should consider Hector's



continual inner conflict of comparing external factors of abundance and beauty - which he had previously assumed meant would make people happy enough - to people's inner senses of dissatisfaction and restlessness. The fact that the author concentrates on describing Hector's various environments as magnificent and beautiful, contrasted with his inner self which is desolate and yearning, gives the reader a focus.

The flow of the text also gives the image of a narrator telling the story from the corner of a stage as Hector's life plays out on the stage in front of an audience. Some of the phrasing used, such as "if you'll remember", indicate that the third-person narrator is speaking to a specific audience. This contributes to the reader's involvement in Hector's journey and the ability to internalize for him or herself the lessons Hector learns along the way.

Structure

The author of "Hector and the Search for Happiness" places Hector's adventures split up into 32 short chapters, contributing to the staccato nature of the text. Each chapter seems to represent a portion of Hector's story, like if he was telling the story to his friends, the chapters would be where the pauses would exist. The story moves forward one experience at a time with flashbacks here and there whenever a situation causes him to reflect. However, the flashbacks are always from a recent part of his journey rather than what might typically be considered a flashback of an earlier time in the character's life. Hector is entirely focused on his investigation of happiness all throughout the novel, and he brings the reader through that by giving the reader almost every detail - big and small - of his journey.

The nature of the short chapters also allows the reader to soak in and process the story a little at a time, as it seems Hector needs to in order to properly digest his experiences. There is no delineated beginning, middle, and end, only in terms of page numbers. Hector's journey is not spelled out in the beginning for the reader, and so the reader is unsure of how many countries he'll be visiting. Hector's self-transformation also goes back and forth in terms of holding on to the lessons he's learned. The reader must be able to go with the fluidity of Hector's journey.



Quotes

He felt dissatisfied because he could see perfectly well that he couldn't make people happy.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph Page 5, paragraph 1)

Importance: This statement describes Hector's entire purpose for embarking on an around-the-world journey in search of happiness. Though his country of origin is never named, the narrator makes it clear that it is a country of plenty, especially the region in which Hector lives and works. The contrast of his patients having everything material - and sometimes relational - that they could possibly ask for, yet they remain unhappy, is the impetus for Hector's dissatisfaction with his current state. Hector enjoys being a psychiatrist, but he is frustrated that he can't fix people's lives enough that they are happy.

Lesson no. 1: Making comparisons can spoil your happiness.

-- Hector (Chapter 4 paragraph Page 19, paragraph 7)

Importance: Hector keeps track of the happiness lessons he learns throughout his journey by recording them in a notebook. This first lesson is learned when a man named Charles, whom Hector met on the plane to China, was grumbling about being in business class instead of first class. After evaluating the situation and the different levels of happiness between himself and Charles, he decided that making comparisons can spoil one's happiness. This first lesson is significant because not only does Hector come back to it time and time again as he reviews his notes, but also because it's the first of 23 lessons Hector records on his trip.

Lesson no. 2: Happiness often comes when least expected.

-- Hector (Chapter 4 paragraph Page 20, paragraph 2)

Importance: The second lesson Hector records in his notebook, Hector decides it is worth recording because his first one isn't incredibly positive, since his first lesson was about not spoiling happiness. Lesson number 2 is significant not only because it's one of his 23 lessons, but also because it gives insight into the way Hector is approaching his happiness lessons. Part of Hector's dissatisfaction with his current professional state is the fact that he can't "fix" people and make them happy. Hector holds a great deal number of expectations and stereotypes about himself as a psychiatrist, one of which is evident when he feels the need to write a second lesson immediately after his first because he felt like his first wasn't positive enough.

Lesson no. 3: Many people see happiness only in their future.

-- Hector (Chapter 6 paragraph Page 27, paragraph 5)

Importance: Hector learns this lesson after discussing business in China with his friend Edouard. Much reflection goes into this lesson as he contemplates Edouard's work life, Edouard's goal to have a specific amount of money, and then all the other people



working to achieve a certain dollar amount in their professional lives. This is Hector's 3rd lesson out of 23 total that he records in his always-handy notebook.

Lesson no. 4: Many people think that happiness comes from having more power or more money.

-- Hector (Chapter 6 paragraph Page 27, paragraph 7)

Importance: Similar to lessons 1 and 2, lessons 3 and 4 are "learned" at the same time. However, while lesson 2 is a reaction to the negative spin on lesson 1, lesson 4 is basically an addition, or a further observation, of the circumstances surrounding lesson 3. As with lesson 3, here Hector is thinking about business men and women who toil away in search for their own personal happiness. Each lesson is significant in its own right, but for different reasons, as each lesson - or a couple lessons put together - refer to a different group of people.

Lesson no. 5: Sometimes happiness is not knowing the whole story.

-- Hector (Chapter 6 paragraph Page 30, paragraph 4)

Importance: Lesson number five in Hector's list of lessons on happiness comes quickly after lessons 3 and 4. It also comes the morning after his sexual encounter with Ying Li. Since Ying Li represents one of Hector's ideals - perfect beauty - it is significant that his lesson pertaining to her is that happiness is not knowing the whole story. Once he realizes that Ying Li is an escort, his heart saddens a bit but to him, her beauty remains and he is thankful for having known her. He wishes he didn't know her actual profession of being an escort, but he is glad to have met her and interacted with her.

Realising that he'd understood nothing is never pleasant, but for a psychiatrist it's even worse.

-- Narrator (Chapter 7 paragraph Page 33, paragraph 2)

Importance: The narrator is describing Hector's realization that while his initial interaction with Ying Li was going on, he didn't really understand what was going on. When Hector met Ying Li, he called their emotional and romantic connection 'love'. After learning that she is an escort, he realized he didn't really understand what he thought he understood. This is significant in and of itself, because a person is frustrated when what they thought was true ends up not being true at all. However, for Hector it is worse because he expects himself, as a high-caliber psychiatrist, to understand all forms of social interaction. When his expectations of himself fail, Hector is further frustrated and dissatisfied with himself and his place in life.

Lesson no. 6: Happiness is a long walk in the mountains. He thought about it then crossed out 'in the mountains' and replaced it with 'in beautiful, unfamiliar mountains'.

-- Hector (Chapter 8 paragraph Page 36, paragraph 4-5)

Importance: Hector's 6th lesson is quite a person lesson, just as lesson 5 was. Hector chooses this as his 6th lesson after experiencing a bit of emotional peace after climbing a mountain in China. Along the way he becomes the only person on the path, which



allows him to concentrate on what the narrator describes as beautiful mountains surrounding Hector's walk. This lesson comes at a time when Hector seems even more dissatisfied with his life, ever since finding out the truth about Ying Li. Surrounding this lesson, Hector is also observing that his surroundings are less like the movie "The Blue Lotus", a movie with which Hector compares his upcoming trip to China as he's on his way there. The fact that Hector found peace on his walk through the mountains is significant because of his growing disillusionment, and it was a powerful enough feeling that it warranted one of his 23 lessons.

Lesson no. 7: It's a mistake to think that happiness is the goal.
-- Hector (Chapter 10 paragraph Page 48, paragraph 5)

Importance: Hector records this lesson during a personal reflection of his time with the old Chinese monk. Not letting happiness be one's life goal was one piece of advice the old monk gave Hector. Though the text explains that Hector isn't sure he understands the lesson, he clearly thinks enough of the monk to record his advice as one of his lessons in happiness.

Lesson no. 8: Happiness is being with the people you love.
-- Hector (Chapter 10 paragraph Page 48, paragraph 8)

Importance: Hector writes lesson no. 8 right after he writes lesson no. 7. He had already reflected on the old monk's words of wisdom, and now he's reflecting on the Chinese women he observed in the cafe when he was waiting for Edouard. He remembers seeing them smiling and laughing with one another, and it made enough of an impression on him that he gained a lesson out of it. Lesson no. 8 also shows the importance Hector places on relationships, even if he doesn't recognize the fact that he does that.

Lesson no. 8b: Unhappiness is being separated from the people you love.
-- Hector (Chapter 11 paragraph Page 56, paragraph 5)

Importance: When Hector records this lesson he is on a plane from China to his next destination. He writes it after watching a baby be very upset when the baby's mom walked away, leaving the baby with the nanny. Since Hector felt that he already learned what happiness is in terms of proximity in relationships, he felt the need to remind himself what happiness is not in regards to a person's loved ones, in this case, being separated from them.

Lesson no. 9: Happiness is knowing your family lacks for nothing.
-- Hector (Chapter 13 paragraph Page 66, paragraph 8)

Importance: Lesson no. 9 is another lesson that relates to relationships. It is an observation Hector makes after he thinks the barman in Africa, Isidore, has a second job to provide for his family, and after Eduardo checked his wife's prescription pills with Hector to see if they were really what she needed. Hector sees both men as providing for their families and making sure they are safe and secure as a lesson in happiness,



since Isidore seems so happy even though he's just a barman, and Eduardo seems relieved when he gets the name of some pills that might really help his wife.

Lesson no. 10: Happiness is doing a job you love.

-- Hector (Chapter 13 paragraph Page 66, paragraph 9)

Importance: Similar to lesson no. 9, Hector learns this lesson after interacting with Isidore, who seems content as a barman but also says he enjoys going to his second job. Before Jean-Michel reveals that in that country a 'second job' actually means 'mistress', Hector believes Isidore is happy because he loves his jobs. This is likely a significant lesson for Hector because of his own dissatisfaction with his own career.

This made Hector think about Ying Li and Clara, and he went very quiet for a while.

-- Narrator (Chapter 13 paragraph Page 66, paragraph 11)

Importance: One of Hector's greatest inner conflicts throughout his journey is the fact that he loves Clara, the girl from his home country whom he's been with for many years, but he also has a strong physical and emotional connection with Ying Li, an escort from China. He considers what he and Ying Li shared - one night of physical intimacy - love, but he also knows that what he has felt for Clara for so long is also love. This quote is an indication that Hector's struggle is not over.

Lesson no. 11: Happiness is having a home and a garden of your own.

-- Hector (Chapter 14 paragraph Page 71, paragraph 5)

Importance: Lesson no. 11 is important because it is an add-on to other lessons he feels that he had learned earlier in his journey. Hector's interaction with Marcel, Jean-Michel and Hector's bodyguard in Africa, inspired lesson no. 11 after Marcel explained why people are happier in the country than in the city. Hector understood and had already recorded the relationship aspect of Marcel's explanation of happiness in other lessons, but Marcel also explained that people in the country were happier than people in the city because they had more space and more land that was considered their own. Hector's observation of the difference in the happiness levels between people in the city and people in the country was enough to warrant him learning an 11th lesson.

Lesson no. 12: It's harder to be happy in a country run by bad people.

-- Hector (Chapter 14 paragraph Page 71, paragraph 7)

Importance: In Africa, Hector's eyes are opened a bit to harsh realities unlike those his patients see, such as drug lords and drug wars. Hector's patients are all from affluence and excessive material goods; their experience of unhappiness is from something completely different than those who experience unhappiness due to drug lords and drug wars. Hector's eyes are also opened to dirty politics, which are explained to him by Marcel. Though Marcel is likely cynical due to his job of bodyguard - a position that is trained to see threats first and ask questions later - Hector listens intently and believes Marcel's description of the politicians in his country.



All this might explain why, locked in his storeroom that smelt of dead rat, Hector wasn't very scared of dying. Because when you think about something a lot, you become less and less scared of it.

-- Narrator (Chapter 18 paragraph Page 88, paragraph 3)

Importance: At this time in the novel, Hector is in a precarious situation. He has gotten caught by some criminals and is currently locked in a small storage room that smells like dead rat. He has been scared and contemplating his entire life, and how sad he is that he thinks he's going to die. However, this statement shows that Hector is capable of moving past his strongly negative feelings and being okay with a current situation. While this is not a lesson in happiness for Hector, it is certainly an important part of his journey as he learns to embrace a terrifying situation and not be so terrified.

Lesson no. 13: Happiness is feeling useful to others.

-- Hector (Chapter 19 paragraph Page 95, paragraph 2)

Importance: Hector records lessons 13 and 14 after his day with Jean-Michel, a doctor friend of his who helps poor people try and stay healthy by visiting clinics in poor African villages. Hector watches Jean-Michel treat patients, but he also has a good conversation with Jean-Michel about why he enjoys practicing medicine in a place where he can't make a lot of money doing so. When Hector sees how content Jean-Michel is with his career because of feeling useful to others, he decides it's an important enough lesson to include in his notebook.

Lesson no. 14: Happiness is to be loved for exactly who you are.

-- Hector (Chapter 19 paragraph Page 95, paragraph 3)

Importance: Hector records lessons 13 and 14 after his day with Jean-Michel, a doctor friend of his who helps poor people try and stay healthy by visiting clinics in poor African villages. Hector watches Jean-Michel be completely comfortable in his own skin while amongst his patients and friends. Hector remembers that during university, Jean-Michel was always sought after by women but Jean-Michel was never interested. Through conversation, Hector finds out that in Africa, Jean-Michel feels that he can be exactly who he is and not have to worry about being judged or ostracized for it. When Hector sees how content Jean-Michel is with himself and his life because of feeling like he can be himself, he decides it's an important enough lesson to include in his notebook.

Lesson no. 15: Happiness comes when you feel truly alive.

-- Hector (Chapter 20 paragraph Page 99, paragraph 9)

Importance: Lesson no. 15 comes to Hector as he is observing people at a party. One of the people at the party had told Hector that when there was a reason to celebrate, you have to celebrate because it didn't happen very often. Hector was watching people dancing, drinking, and having a great time - looking like they were really living it up, giving Hector the idea for his 15th lesson.



Lesson no. 16: Happiness is knowing how to celebrate.
-- Hector (Chapter 20 paragraph Page 99, paragraph 11)

Importance: Hector's 16th lesson is written immediately after the 15th, because he felt like the 15th lesson didn't really explain what he was trying to say. Since he recorded these two lessons while watching people enjoying themselves to the fullest at a party, he wanted to make sure he remembered that the idea of celebration was part of the lesson in happiness. Thinking about celebration led him to thinking about Edouard in China, who enjoyed celebrating with expensive alcohol, which led him to thinking about Ying Li. It's important to note that while Hector is recording his lessons in happiness while in different countries and with different people, he is connecting them together as one memory triggers another.

Lesson no. 17: Happiness is caring about the happiness of those you love.
-- Hector (Chapter 22 paragraph Page 110, paragraph 8)

Importance: Hector learns lesson no. 17 from Djamila, the female passenger who is quite ill and who Hector helped to calm down during a medical emergency. He knows Djamila must think about death on a regular basis because of her illness, and yet what she talked about was wanting other people - her children, her brothers and sister, and her fellow citizens - to be happy and to feel safe. Even through her illness, Hector notices that she smiles and explains that her happiness comes from knowing that the people whom she loves are happy and safe.

Lesson no. 18: Happiness could be the freedom to love more than one woman at the same time.
-- Hector (Chapter 23 paragraph Page 114, paragraph 4)

Importance: There are two important things to note about this quote from the novel. First, Hector records this lesson after having a dream that includes Clara, Ying Li, and Marie-Louise's cousin, whom he has a physical encounter with after drinking a lot at a party. While Hector is not conflicted about Marie-Louise's cousin, he does get his feelings for Ying Li and Clara mixed up. Even though he knows he's not in love with Ying Li, but with her emotions, he continues to feel a connection with her that is deeper than just the physical attraction. In his perfect world, he could love both Ying Li and Clara. Second, it's important to know that Hector scratches out this quote with "lots of little squiggles on it" because he is unsure of who might read it in the future, specifically Clara. Hector does confess the lesson to the old monk in a later chapter, but for now he crossed it out, knowing that women would not agree with this lesson in happiness.

Lesson no. 19: The sun and the sea make everybody happy.
-- Hector (Chapter 24 paragraph Page 116, paragraph 4)

Importance: The significance of this quote is mainly in the fact that it's one of Hector's lessons in happiness. He learns it when he observes the fact that rich and poor people both enjoy the beach the same amount. Learning this lesson also makes Hector decide that if he is every really poor, he will move to a sunny city that has a beach so that he



wouldn't feel as poor. Hector's thoughts around lesson no. 19 remind him of lesson no. 1 about making comparisons, because of his feeling that even if he was poor, he wouldn't feel so poor if he lived in a sunny city by the sea. Also, at this point, Hector feels that he's coming to the end of his lessons in happiness.

Lesson no. 20: Happiness is a certain way of seeing things.
-- Hector (Chapter 29 paragraph Page 145, paragraph 6)

Importance: Hector learns this lesson after watching a squirrel beg Hector for Hector's lunch. He thought about how the squirrel's happiness depended on the kind of comparisons he was able to make: if the squirrel know how much was really available that he couldn't eat, the squirrel might not be as happy, but if the squirrel didn't know about how much food Hector really had, the squirrel would be happy with just a small amount (if Hector would share, which he doesn't). Hector's thoughts on the squirrel led him to thinking about Djamila, the woman on the airplane whom he helped on their way from Africa to America. Djamila smiled despite the fact that she was rapidly approaching death, which is an action that had a profound impact on Hector's lessons in happiness.

Lesson no. 21: Rivalry poisons happiness.
-- Hector (Chapter 29 paragraph Page 147, paragraph 2)

Importance: Similar to Hector's first lesson in happiness, that comparisons can spoil a person's happiness, this lesson is one Hector learns when watching the Happiness Professor be jealous of a man who likes the same girl he likes. Hector watches the professor go from happy after he and his girlfriend share a kiss, to angry when his girlfriend just chats and laughs with a male colleague. Hector learns this lesson in a similar vain as the rest, by observing his surroundings, both people and environment, and noting what he observes.

Lesson no. 22: Women care more than men about making others happy.
-- Hector (Chapter 29 paragraph Page 148, paragraph 3)

Importance: Hector records his last three lessons within a span of minutes. This particular lesson is one Hector notes after reflecting on how some of the happiest people he's seen on his journey - Agnes helping the professor to recover his good mood, Djamila wanting her younger brothers to be happy, Ying Li sending money to her family, and Marie-Louise's cousin who had given him a surprise - were women attempting to make other people happy, therefore granting themselves a certain level of happiness. Hector doesn't share his men vs. women observation with the professor, but he believes it to be true based on his observations.

Lesson no. 23: Happiness means making sure that those around you are happy?
-- Hector (Chapter 29 paragraph Page 148, paragraph 6)

Importance: What is most interesting to note about this quote, this last lesson, is that it has a question mark at the end. Hector records this last lesson immediately after noting that men and women treat differently the happiness of others. This is Hector's last



lesson in happiness, and it is unclear as to why the question mark is at the end. One reason may be that it is similar to lessons no. 17 and 22. Another reason may be that he knows he is at the end of his lessons in happiness, and he's not sure this one is different enough to warrant its noting.

He closed the notebook, looked at the list again and then he said, 'You really have done a fine job. All your lessons are very good. I have nothing to add.'

-- Narrator/The old monk (Chapter 30 paragraph Page 150, paragraph 6)

Importance: The old monk is a character that Hector was hoping to both impress and learn from as he presented his 23 lessons to the monk. Hector wanted to impress the monk with everything he had learned, since the last time they met Hector was toward the beginning of his search for happiness. Hector also wanted to learn from the old monk, since at their first meeting he felt like the monk held the secret to happiness and just wasn't sharing it with Hector. The fact that the old monk, Hector's picture of the epitome of happiness and contentment, believes Hector has nothing to add to his list, he is thrilled yet disappointed, since he wanted more wisdom from the old monk.

The old monk looked at Hector and said, 'Do you tell all your patients the same thing?' Hector thought for a moment and said that he didn't, that it depended on their character, on whether they were young or old, on whether they'd experienced true unhappiness or not.

-- Old monk/narrator (Chapter 30 paragraph Page 152, paragraphs 2-3)

Importance: Hector has been recording lessons in happiness, yet he continues to hope that there is one all-encompassing answer to the question of what makes people happy. The old monk points out that Hector doesn't use the same treatment or say the same things to every patient that comes into his office. Hector concedes that the old monk is right, however Hector also maintains that there are basic principals to which he returns time and time again. Hector has a hard time accepting the fact that there is no easy answer to the question, "What makes people happy?"