The House in Paris Study Guide

The House in Paris by Elizabeth Bowen

Contents

Plot Summary

This novel from the 1930's follows two interrelated narrative lines. The first, set in the present, explores the experiences and perceptions of a young girl, Henrietta, on a temporary stopover at the home of friends of her family in Paris. The second, set in the past, tells the story of the mother of a young boy Henrietta encounters at the house in Paris. In both narratives, the book explores themes relating to the importance of living a life of emotional freedom, the nature and power of motherhood, and the tension between appearances and reality.

The action of the novel begins with a narration of the arrival of Henrietta in Paris, a stop on her way to visit her grandmother in the south of France. Narration describes how Henrietta, primed with stories of Paris' excitement and liveliness, had been looking forward to her visit but is disappointed by the general lack of excitement in both her traveling companion (the reserved, almost stern, Miss Fisher) and in the city itself.

When Miss Fisher warns Henrietta to be careful around the sensitive, troubled boy (Leopold) who is also going to be at the house. Henrietta tells Miss Fisher that she (Henrietta) knows how to behave. Later, however, Henrietta asks Leopold the sort of questions about his history that Miss Fisher specifically warned her not to ask, but after an initial flare-up of confrontation and resentment, the two begin to become friends. They're interrupted first by Henrietta being summoned to meet Miss Fisher's domineering mother (Madame Fisher), and then by a telegram announcing that Leopold's mother, whose visit to see Leopold had been much anticipated, is not going to be coming after all.

The next, and most lengthy, section of the novel tells the story of Leopold's mother, Karen Michaelis. Engaged to marry the reserved Ray Forrestier, Karen struggles against her growing passion for the moody Max, engaged to Karen's best friend Naomi (the Miss Fisher of Part 1). Eventually, Karen's struggles fail, and she and Max have an affair (an affair that resulted, according to comments made by Madame Fisher in Part 1, in Naomi's heart being broken). Narration describes how, as the result of the affair, Karen becomes pregnant with Leopold, but realizes she would not be a good mother to him. Naomi, suppressing her pain beneath an appearance of concern for her friend and her former beloved, makes arrangements for Leopold to be adopted. Meanwhile, the emotionally volatile Max is confronted by the angry, manipulative Madame Fisher, and kills himself.

Back in the present, Leopold, Henrietta and Miss (Naomi) Fisher are excited to learn that the house is to have a visitor after all - Ray Forrestier who, as it turns out, married Karen after Max's death. Narration describes how Leopold's existence has always been a point of tension in Ray and Karen's marriage, how the troubled Karen decided at the last minute to not follow through on her plans to visit, and how Ray came in her place without her knowing, determined to help her regain mental balance by establishing a relationship with her child. Ray convinces the reluctant Miss Fisher to let Leopold travel with him, and Leopold rejoices in finally coming face to face with his mother.

When it's time for Ray and Leopold to catch their train, Miss Fisher realizes it's time for Henrietta to catch her train as well. Ray accompanies Henrietta to the train station, where she is handed over to the unfamiliar chaperon assigned to accompany her on the next stage of her journey. After waving goodbye to her, Ray and Leopold go outside the train station to wait for their train, both looking out at a now lively Paris ... and into a now lively future full of tenuous but compelling hope.

Part 1 - The Present - Chapters 1 and 2

Part 1 - The Present - Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Chapter 1 - Newly arrived from England, Henrietta is driven through Paris in the back of a taxi. As narration describes her initial disappointment in the city's early-morning lack of life, dialogue between Henrietta and her companion, the agitated Miss Fisher, reveals that Henrietta, on her way to the South of France, is stopping off at the Fisher's home between trains at the request of Henrietta's grandmother. As the gray morning becomes slightly brighter, Miss Fisher tells Henrietta there is another guest in the house, a boy about Henrietta's age named Leopold. She tells Henrietta that as the result of an unrevealed set of "strange and sad" circumstances, he is there to meet his mother for the first time in his life. She urges Henrietta to play with him naturally and avoid bringing up why he's there. Somewhat coldly and patronizingly, Henrietta assures Miss Fisher she has nothing about which to be concerned.

As the taxi arrives at the Fishers' house, narration describes both the house and the street (see "Quotes" p.9), and as Henrietta and Miss Fisher go in, comments that "Henrietta took a last look at the outside of the house, which she never saw in daylight again." Narration also describes Henrietta's discomfort inside the house (see "Quotes", p. 11 - 2), her unease at the prospect of meeting Miss Fisher's invalid mother, and her resentment at having to act considerately of both the invalid mother and Leopold (see "Quotes", p. 11 - 1). As narration refers to events ahead of Henrietta that day (see "Quotes", p. 13), it also describes her as having a quick wash and a nap in the salon (parlor). When she wakes up, she finds Leopold in the room with her, who tells her he had come in even though he had been told to not disturb her. She sits up and prepares for conversation.

Chapter 2 - Narration describes Leopold's initial reaction to Henrietta (see "Quotes", p. 16). Meanwhile, their childishly aggressive conversation (see "Quotes", p 20) reveals that Henrietta's mother is dead, while narration reveals that her grandmother and older sister (Caroline) are both very domineering, albeit in their own ways. Narration then describes Leopold's family circumstances - his life with his two aunts and uncle, his arrogant precociousness, and his frustration at living in a small Italian city that has none of the spirit of Rome (where he spent the first part of his childhood).

As Leopold and Henrietta challenge each other about their feelings for their respective absent mothers, how they are to handle being thrown together in this house, and how they both resent Miss Fisher's orders, Leopold plays with Henrietta's dispatch case, accidentally opening it and causing its contents to spill noisily. He becomes increasingly embarrassed as Henrietta admonishes him, both becoming nervously aware that Miss Fisher, who had earlier told them both to be quiet, is coming downstairs.

Part 1 - The Present - Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

The essential purpose of these two chapters is to create curiosity in the reader, to make them want to move further into the story. This is done in various ways. The first is through creating a sense of mystery, as the writing tantalizes the reader with hints of family secrets, intense emotion, and, perhaps most interestingly, characters disobeying what they've been told. There is the strong sense for the reader that if Leopold and Henrietta break Miss Fisher's rules here, how many more rules are they going to break - is Henrietta going to talk to Leopold in ways and about things, she's been told not to?

Another way in which the reader is drawn into the story is through foreshadowing, or the hinting at events to come. Leopold and Henrietta's previously discussed rule breaking is a vivid example of this, foreshadowing as it does their breaking of rules of conversation throughout the book and indeed rule breaking by other characters, particularly Leopold's mother. Other foreshadowings include Miss Fisher's reference to Leopold's "strange and sad circumstances" (which foreshadows the book's narration of those circumstances), the quotation from p. 13, and the reference to how Henrietta never sees the exterior of the house again. This last is particularly interesting, in that it makes the reader wonder how Henrietta's circumstances and the narrative of those circumstances, are going to play out - why, the reader is led to ask, does she not see the house in daylight again?

This section also introduces one of the novel's minor themes, the differences between English and being French. Throughout the narrative, there are several references to the English way of living (calm emotions, less intensity in general) as contrasted with the ways of the French, portrayed as generally more passionate, more fluid, and less restrained. Is this stereotypical, or archetypal - the point is effectively moot, for the contrast exists and for a purpose - to illustrate the greater theme of the importance of living life from a place of passion.

In any case, the imagery of Paris at the beginning of this section seems to suggest that for Henrietta, Paris is uncomfortably similar to England, with the narrative eventually making it clear that life in Paris, as opposed to its streets, buildings and early morning atmosphere, is in fact the life of her dreams and imaginings. This is, again, a manifestation of one of the narrative's principal themes, the importance and/or consequences of living life according to the dictates of passion and/or feeling.

The book's other themes are also introduced here. Its exploration of the nature of motherhood begins with glimpses of the troubled, manipulated lives of those who live without a mother's influence - Henrietta and Leopold. Meanwhile, its exploration of the difference between appearance and reality begins with its portrayal of Miss Fisher, who appears here to be almost neurotic but who is later revealed to be a woman of considerable complexity and depth.

Part 1 - The Present - Chapters 3 and 4

Part 1 - The Present - Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Chapter 3 - Miss Fisher takes Henrietta upstairs to meet her mother, Madame Fisher. Left alone, Leopold notices that Miss Fisher left her handbag behind. He looks through it in the hopes of finding letters about him and discovers an envelope, addressed with what he believes to be his mother's handwriting. He looks inside but feels frustrated when he finds it's empty. He also discovers a letter written by one of his aunts to Miss Fisher, in which the aunt makes clear, over-protective and specific requests for Leopold's care (the aunt asks, for example, that Miss Fisher inquire about Leopold's bowels, "as the effects of a journey are so binding and his digestion easily gets upset"). The letter also hints at a close relationship between Miss Fisher and Leopold's father. Embarrassed by what he's read, Leopold then reads a letter from Henrietta's grandmother, Mrs. Arbuthnot, to Miss Fisher, who is addressed as "Kinfisher", and which reveals that the two women had a casual, but long-standing, friendship. In the letter, the grandmother hopes that Miss Fisher will let Henrietta visit, explains why such a visit is preferable, and details specific, complicated plans for the journey to go smoothly. After reading this letter, Leopold contemplates his own situation, realizes he cannot return to his life with his aunts, and imagines a letter written to them by his mother, in which she reveals her intention to move with Leopold back to England. His imaginations are interrupted by the return of Henrietta.

Chapter 4 - This chapter narrates the conversation between Madame Fisher and Henrietta that took place in Madame's bedroom while the events of the previous chapter (Leopold's reading of the letters) was taking place. Narration describes the room as dark, crowded and oppressive. Miss Fisher knits intently as her mother talks to Henrietta about Mrs. Arbuthnot (Henrietta's grandmother), about Leopold (whom Madame Fisher considers "full of himself"), and about Miss Fisher (whose father, Madame Fisher's husband, was English). Madame Fisher also reveals that Leopold's father Max "broke [Miss Fisher's] heart, leading Miss Fisher to become both watchful and upset" (see "Quotes", p. 46). Narration describes Henrietta's realization that Madame Fisher "no longer felt," though Miss Fisher feels a great deal and Henrietta's belief that her own heart was beautiful and strong. Meanwhile, further conversation on the subject of Leopold's father reveals that Leopold knows nothing of him. Noticing that her mother is suddenly tired, Miss Fisher ushers Henrietta out of the room, but as Henrietta is about to leave, Madame Fisher urges her to "never distress" her grandmother.

Part 1 - The Present - Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

There are several important elements in this section. The first is the introduction of Madame Fisher, one of several mothers who appear in the narrative as manifestations of the book's thematic focus on the various faces of motherhood (see "Themes - The

Nature and Power of Motherhood" and "Topics for Discussion - Contrast the characters and intentions ..."). The second is the general sense of deepening mystery, of secrets buried beneath the superficial actions and words of the characters (a manifestation of another of the narrative's key themes, the tension between appearance and reality). This sense of mystery is developed mostly through foreshadowing, specifically Madame Fisher's implication-heavy comments about Leopold and his past and about Miss Fisher's role in that past.

A third interesting element here is the way in which the author manipulates the narrative line, recounting events that happened simultaneously in successive chapters rather than intercutting them (moving back and forth between Leopold and the upstairs conversation within the same chapter). This can be seen as a structural manifestation of one of the book's key themes, the relationship between appearance and reality. Specifically, separating the two narrative lines (Leopold alone, Henrietta with Madame and Miss Fisher) reinforces the book's thematic contention that one person can never fully know what is happening / has happened in the life of another person. Leopold can never know what happened in Madame Fisher's bedroom, while Henrietta can never know exactly what Leopold did or discovered when he was on his own in the parlor.

A fourth important element here is the introduction of the motif, or repeated imagery, of letters (see "Objects/Places - Letters"). A fifth is this section's exploration of the book's thematic focus on living a life based on feeling, developed through Henrietta's realization of how Madame Fisher no longer feels, while Miss Fisher feels a great deal. Uncovering the reasons why these two women have come to live in the way they have is the essential backbone of the book's plot. A sixth is the glimpse of the English/French tension hinted at in Chapters 1 and 2. Here is an intriguing twist on this theme, in that Madame Fisher, who is French, is described as "not feeling," the opposite of the other French characters. Here also is a possible insight into Miss Fisher's character, torn as she is between her English and French sides

Finally, this section contains a key point in what might be termed "the Leopold plot," the narrative line exploring Leopold's present as related to his past. Here the point comes with his decision to live a life independent of his aunts, whose oppressive control of his life not only shows up in their letter to Miss Fisher but also has echoes in the letter from Henrietta's grandmother, another example of the sort of over-control under which he no longer wants to live. This foreshadows the fact that Leopold begins his journey towards emotional, spiritual, and personal freedom, a journey that parallels (and foreshadows) that of his mother as portrayed in Part 2, The Past.

Part 1 - The Present - Chapter 5

Part 1 - The Present - Chapter 5 Summary

Chapter 5 - Once out of Madame Fisher's room, Henrietta takes a moment to collect herself, dreading going back downstairs to Leopold and thinking about her older sister Caroline whose heart had once been broken like Miss Fisher's, but by a married man. Why could Miss Fisher's heart, she wonders, not mend like Caroline's, who had married a successful man? She also reflects on the unease that resulted from her conversation with Madame Fisher, whose "eyes, her indifferent way of talking, made Henrietta feel that nothing was going on - never had, never would..." Narration also comments that Henrietta, reflecting on the amount of feeling and history she had just encountered, looked at "the bar-like stripes of the paper [and] felt a house like this was too small for so much to happen in." Miss Fisher comes out of her mother's room for a moment, tells Henrietta to go back down to Leopold and asks that she (Henrietta) not think too much about Leopold's mother Karen, who once lived as a boarder with Madame Fisher.

As Miss Fisher goes back into her mother's room, Henrietta goes back downstairs, where she confronts Leopold about his reading of the letters, how he's left her things on the floor (where they were spilled after the case fell open), what she learned about his father and Miss Fisher, and how she thinks Miss Fisher is insane. Leopold agrees with this last, and begins to imagine Henrietta as a friendly part of his new life in England with his mother. He tells Henrietta of his determination to make his new life happen, a determination that Henrietta thinks is going to lead to nothing.

As Henrietta picks up a deck of cards that had fallen out of the case, Leopold asks whether she can tell fortunes with them. She says she was taught how by a governess, and he insists that she tell his fortune. As she's doing so (revealing a fortune full of spades, meaning death), a telegram arrives. Narration describes the dread that grows in both Leopold and Henrietta, dread that is confirmed when Miss Fisher comes in with the telegram and the news that Leopold's mother is no longer able to visit.

Part 1 - The Present - Chapter 5 Analysis

The most intriguing element of this section is the narrative's commentary, in narration and in Henrietta's thoughts, on the contrast between life's smallness (as manifest in Madame Fisher's apparent lack of feeling and the atmosphere of the house) and largeness (as manifest in the emotional size of what seems to have happened to Madame Fisher and inside the house). Here is another aspect of the narrative's thematic focus on appearances vs. reality - specifically, its thematic contention that how an individual appears is not always an accurate representation of how that person has lived. The house in Paris is a metaphoric representation of a human life - how a façade or appearance conceals, perhaps even barely contains, a rich, full, human experience of suffering and/or joy.

Meanwhile, an interesting component of this metaphor is the narrative description of "bar-like" stripes on the wallpaper. The image evoked here is clearly one of a prison, specifically a suggestion that the house has become a prison for those who live there (Madame Fisher, Miss Fisher). This image adds a clearly, and intensely, negative connotation to the metaphor described above. A façade and/or appearance in human life is, in The House in Paris (both the book and the setting) a bad, corrupted, imprisoning thing.

Part 2 - The Past - Chapters 1 and 2

Part 2 - The Past - Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Part 2, Chapter 1 - In the first part of this chapter, narration describes how Leopold's beliefs about his mother and their relationship remained unchanged, untouched by reality and/or disillusionment, as the result of her not showing up for her visit. "In the course of that meeting that never happened," narration goes on to suggest, "that meeting whose scene remained inside Leopold, she would have told what she had done without looking for motives. These he could supply, for he would understand."

Narration then turns to a time ten years in the past when Leopold's mother, Karen Michaelis, traveled to Ireland for a vacation after the announcement of her engagement to a government agent named Ray Forrestier, said engagement leading to a happiness that felt more and more false. Narration describes Karen's musings on her well-bred family (see "Quotes", p. 69), her happiness and peace at being alone, her unwillingness to be "met" and thereby have her solitude broken, and her thoughts about her ever-punctual Uncle Bill, scheduled to meet her. Narration also refers to Bill's wife Violet, Karen's aunt, "a tranquil woman, obtuse and sweet" and to their home, Mount Iris, in the town of Rushbrook.

Chapter 2 - As narration describes the quiet, regular routine of life at Mount Iris, it also refers to Karen's internal restlessness, a growing sense that she's not in the right place. A letter arrives from Ray asking for affirmation of Karen's certainty that she wants to marry him, a letter to which she first responds with impatience and then with a second letter - to Madame Fisher in Paris. Narration then describes the routines of Mount Iris in more detail and how that routine was broken by Uncle Bill's confession to Karen which is made while pulling opportunistic daisies out of the lawn, that Aunt Violet is dying. Later, Karen and Aunt Violet discuss Karen's engagement, with Karen repeating her slightly impatiently certainty that she does indeed want to marry Ray. She says "I don't mind feeling small myself, but I dread finding the world is." Aunt Violet asks whether she ever loved someone else. Karen says she did, but he made her miserable.

Part 2 - The Past - Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

As the narrative shifts its focus from the present to the past, there are developments of all the key themes. The tension between appearance and reality is explored as the narrative contrasts what Leopold believes, or at least wants to believe, about his mother with the story of Karen's truth, which Leopold will never know. This, in turn, is a reiteration of the narrative's apparent thematic point that no individual can ever know the full truth of another. There is also here a new angle on the novel's thematic focus on motherhood, as it begins its exploration of the experiences of Leopold's mother, Karen. A related point is the introduction of the idea of the non-biological mother, a character who behaves in a motherly, nurturing way without actually having given birth to the

individual in question. The non-biological mother here is Aunt Violet who, in her somewhat vague and distracted way, mothers Karen through her increasing uncertainty about her marriage to Ray.

The novel's third main theme, exploring the importance of living from a place of feeling and passion, is the focus of the entirety of Part 2. Plot wise, that exploration is centered on the development of the passionate connection between Karen and Leopold's father, Max, but begins in this section with the exploration of Karen's discontent with Ray, the fertile emotional ground in which the seeds of desire for a passionate life sprout and take root, a desire that eventually leads Karen to Max. Finally, the exploration of the tension between Englishness vs. Frenchness is developed through the portrayal of both the apparently repressed English characters Aunt Violet and Uncle Bill. Here again, though, the narrative develops the additional theme that nothing is what it seems, for beneath the surface English reserve festers the trauma associated with the imminent death of a loved one.

In the meanwhile, important foreshadowings in this section include the references to Ray Forrestier (who plays an important role in the third part of the narrative) and to Karen's heart being broken by a beloved, which foreshadows further developments in the plot. Finally, there is a reappearance of the letter motif - specifically, the letters sent to and fro between Ray and Karen (see "Objects/Places - Letters").

Part 2 - The Past - Chapters 3 and 4

Part 2 - The Past - Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Chapter 3 - Narration describes how slowly and heavily the time passes at Mount Iris with Aunt Violet's imminent death weighing on everybody's mind (even though no-one really speaks of it). Karen makes her excuses and leaves early, taking with her numerous admonitions from Uncle Bill to say nothing to the rest of the family about Violet's illness. Narration describes how Karen realizes before she leaves that a letter from Ray was probably on its way and writes to tell him she is leaving early - she had, she writes, wanted to go to Paris but had had a letter from Madame Fisher saying the house was full. She also says she had learned that Naomi (Miss) Fisher was going to be in London and had gotten engaged to a man named Max, whom Karen doesn't like.

On the ferry, Karen's quiet dinner is interrupted by the arrival of a loud Irish-woman referred to in narration as Yellow Hat because of the hat she's wearing. Yellow Hat explains she's evading an annoying man, and in spite of Karen's reluctance to talk, enters into a mostly one-sided conversation almost drowned out by the atmosphere of the dining room (see "Quotes", p. 95). As Yellow Hat comments approvingly on Karen's sapphire engagement ring and the status it indicates, narration reveals Karen's discontent with herself, and her comment, in response to a remark of Yellow Hat's, that "surely what happens to one is what one makes happen oneself?" At the end of the meal, Yellow Hat and Karen go their separate ways, as "the ship plough[s] ahead steadily through the dark."

Chapter 4 - When she arrives home, Karen discovers that Naomi (Miss Fisher) is already there waiting for her, with narration commenting that Naomi had so intently wished to see Karen that she had arrived early. Narrated conversation reveals that Naomi had come to help wrap up the estate of a dead aunt and that Max has helped her through. Conversation reveals Naomi's gladness that she and Karen are "the same" (i.e., engaged), that Karen somewhat resents the intensity of Naomi's devotion to her, and that Naomi desperately wants Karen to see Max but that Karen doesn't want to see him (they disliked each other as children). Karen realizes she has no choice but to agree (see "Quotes," p. 105). Further conversation reveals Naomi's anxiety about her relationship and insecurity about herself (most notably, narration reveals, when she compares herself to her strong-willed mother). But when Karen asks whether Madame Fisher ever intervenes in Naomi's life, Naomi simply says "Not any more." After a lengthy narrative description of the boarding house run by Madame Fisher, conversation reveals that Naomi intends to continue living with her mother after her marriage to Max, but there will be no more boarders. The chapter concludes with the appearance of Karen's mother, eager to learn about everything that happened at Mount Iris.

Part 2 - The Past - Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

The most important element of this chapter is the re-introduction of the character of Miss Fisher, referred to in narration, here and throughout this section, as "Naomi." It's important to be clear that "Naomi" is the "Miss Fisher" of Part 1 - for consideration of this aspect of the novel, see "Topics for Discussion - In what way does the use of Miss Fisher's first name ..." A related, and equally important element, is the re-introduction of Max, referred to by Madame Fisher as the man who broke Naomi's heart (see Part 1, Chapter 4). Astute readers familiar with the traditions of romantic narrative (in fiction, film, theatre, etc) will immediately come to the conclusion that Karen's apparent and repeated dislike of Max is, in fact, a mask for her true feelings of attraction. What the narrative does here is develop two of its themes - the tension between appearance (Karen's dislike) and reality (her attraction), and the related thematic focus on the value of living a life of passion at whatever cost.

Another of the narrative's themes, its focus on motherhood, is also developed here through Naomi's comments on her relationship with her mother and the appearance at the end of this chapter of Karen's mother, who seems (appearance vs. reality again) to be a fairly simple, shallow character but who later in the narrative displays a powerful, compassionate depth of strength. There is, in fact, a powerful contrast between these two mothers - the controlling Madame Fisher and the more submissive Mrs. Michaelis. Both are strong, but the former uses her strength in a corrupt way while the latter uses hers as fuel for her sense of compassion.

Meanwhile, this section also contains a narrative element that in some ways seems jarringly out of place—the character of Yellow Hat. At first glance, her encounter with Karen appears to have next to nothing to do with the overall arc of the narrative, and it could reasonably be argued that it doesn't add all that much to the story. Even Karen's comment that "surely what happens to one is what one makes happen oneself?" comes across as a somewhat heavy-handed summing up of a personal (narrative? thematic?) truth that is, in fact, more effectively played out the action. Upon deeper consideration, however, Yellow Hat can be seen as an example to Karen of the kind of life she simultaneously wants to live but is afraid to - a life that faces the truth of itself (i.e., being pursued by someone not wanted) and takes action (i.e., the risky choice to take refuge and talk with a stranger). In other words, Yellow Hat has the courage to act directly in response to her feelings and take control of her life in a way that Karen at this point doesn't have. The scene therefore functions on three levels: as foreshadowing of Karen's transformation into someone who acts on her passion, a manifestation of the book's thematic focus on living an emotionally-aware life, and as a signpost on Karen's journey of transformation towards exactly that sort of life.

Part 2 - The Past - Chapters 5 and 6

Part 2 - The Past - Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

Chapter Five - The first part of this chapter describes the house (in Twickenham) of Naomi's aunt, and how Naomi stays in the kitchen to prepare tea while Max joins Karen under a blooming cherry tree in the now unkempt garden. Narration describes how casual and comfortable the three of them had been the day before (see "Quotes," p. 111), and how at the time Karen considered herself foolish for having worried so much. Narration also briefly describes the circumstances of Karen and Max's relationship in Paris - how Max had been friends with Madame Fisher, how he had always been around the boarding house but had been remarkably discreet around the young female boarders, and how Karen's discreetly wise mother made sure Ray was around when Karen returned to England (see "Quotes", p. 113-114). Narration also describes how at lunch, Karen had felt like her relationship with Max was like the end of a book. But that, narration points out, "had been yesterday." Under the cherry tree, Max tells Karen he doesn't want to go back to Paris but doesn't want to stay in England. Karen assumes he doesn't want to go because of the boarders still at Madame Fisher's, leading her to comment that she considers the year she spent there when she was the age of the boarders as a waste of time, mostly because she had no sense of humor. When Max reproves her for wanting to find everything funny, their conversation turns into a sudden, short argument, in which Karen eventually protests that here, "in a place that's hardly a place at all, in a house belonging to somebody dead," she's not really herself. At that moment, Naomi appears with the tea.

Chapter 6 - As Naomi comes out, Karen and narration both reflect on how hard and good and generous a worker and friend Naomi is. As Karen continually avoids Max's eyes, the three of them (see "Quotes," p. 121) banter about the merits of being English, while narration comments on Max's intensity and his apparent foolishness at being between Naomi, who is watching him with devotion and Karen, who is trying to not watch him at all. Their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of a tradesman. While Naomi goes in to deal with him, Karen reflects on her mother's comments that Max and Naomi would be good for each other (see "Quotes," p. 124) partly because Naomi is such a good and patient person. As Karen reflects on her mother's perceptions, Max comments again on his Englishness, his conversation revealing that his English father died when Max was very young. In the silence that follows, and as Naomi is cleaning and locking the house, Karen and Max remain seated in the grass, Max's hand pressed onto Karen's. After a few moments, their hands draw apart ... and Naomi comes back out, commenting that "this time tomorrow" she and Max will be on their way back to Paris.

Part 2 - The Past - Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

There is a complex layering of theme, image and meaning in this section. First, there is the contrast between the house here evoking emotional and personal repression and the house in Paris, which evokes, throughout the novel, passion and feeling. The most important point to note in this context is Karen's reference to not feeling like herself. This, it seems, is a clear statement of the novel's thematic perspective - that without living a life connected to true feeling, an individual isn't really living authentically. A related point is how the contrast between the two houses is also an evocation of the English/French tension that plays out throughout the novel (The house in this section is in England.). This tension also becomes evident in the character of Max, who, like Naomi, is from mixed English/French parentage and who, as the narrative eventually reveals, is tortured by the two sides of his nature in ways that Naomi, in her experience, only begins to touch upon.

The romance between Karen and Max develops further here, developing the theme of living life connected to feeling even if that feeling is repressed and/or expressible only through the secret holding of hands. It's important to note here that while the narrative doesn't explicitly make the point, it's very clear that the moment of holding hands beneath the cherry tree is the moment at which Karen is awakened to the truth of her feelings for Max, although she isn't yet fully aware of the depth of her feelings.

Meanwhile, there are developments in the novel's thematic focus on various sorts of motherhood. There are glimpses of a non-biological mother/child relationship between Madame Fisher and Max, and of a side of Mrs. Michaelis that is as controlling as Madame Fisher.

Finally, there is a very dark foreshadowing here of the father/son relationship between Max and Leopold. Specifically, when Max refers to the death of his father when Max was young, it foreshadows his own death before Leopold is even born.

Part 2 - The Past - Chapters 7 and 8

Part 2 - The Past - Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

Chapter 7 - As Karen sees Naomi and Max off on their way to Paris, narration describes how Karen struggled to put the feelings that resulted from her contact with Max aside. In the weeks that follow, Karen strives to put Ray into the forefront of her mind, while at the same time wondering about Aunt Violet's state of health. One day, the mail brings a letter for Mrs. Michaelis from Madame Fisher in Paris, but it remains unopened for several hours, leading Karen to become increasingly curious about the information it contains. At teatime, the opening of the letter is delayed further by the arrival of another letter, this one from Uncle Bill announcing Aunt Violet's death. Mrs. Michaelis strives to rein in her feelings of grief and loss, eventually disappearing upstairs. Later that day, with her mother still upstairs, curiosity gets the better of Karen and she opens the letter from Madame Fisher, which (among other things) drops hints about Madame Fisher's unhappiness about Naomi's engagement to Max. The letter also includes Madame Fisher's promise to give Karen a nice wedding present. Reading the letter makes Karen wonder whether Madame Fisher had ideas about her (Karen) and Max. Meanwhile, when Mrs. Michaelis finally gets around to reading the letter, she says she doesn't really feel the need to answer ... but then comments to Karen that everything seems so "unreal."

Chapter 8 - A few weeks later, while her parents are out at the theatre, Karen receives a phone call from Max. In very few words, they make arrangements to meet in Boulogne. As she hangs up, Karen wonders how she's going to get through the time until they meet. On the day of the rendezvous, Max meets Karen off the boat and escorts her to a café, where they have lunch as they discuss Madame Fisher (who Karen thinks is in love with Max), how they each made the arrangement to meet intending to not actually talk (the implication is they each intended to only have sex), and how unhappy they would be if they actually became a couple. Their conversation turns to historical small talk, and eventually they stroll around the town. They wander the city for the entire afternoon and then go to dinner, at which time Max confesses that he does not want to leave, or even hurt, Naomi (see "Quotes", p. 159). This makes Karen weep, which in turn makes Max tell her he doesn't want to stay the night with her when she's upset. They make arrangements to meet in Hythe (on the British side of the English Channel) the following week.

Part 2 - The Past - Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

The novel's exploration of Frenchness vs. Englishness takes an ironic turn in this section, as Karen and Max meet in Boulogne (France) but, while speaking indirectly about their feelings for one another, don't actually act on them. While in France they fall victim to English repression. It's only later, when they meet in Hythe (in England), that the reverse takes place - in the land of repression, they let their feelings manifest

physically. Meanwhile, an additional manifestation of this theme (not to mention of the "living with feeling" theme) can be found in the description of how Mrs. Michaelis copes with the news of Aunt Violet's death. She clearly strives to repress her feelings but ends up, as a result, feeling as though everything's "unreal." Here again is an encapsulation of the novel's thematic statement that feelings are the only aspect of life that are real and true.

Also, the letter motif again appears, this time manifesting in both the letter from Madame Fisher and the letter from Uncle Bill (see "Objects/Places - Letters").

Part 2 - The Past - Chapters 9 and 10

Part 2 - The Past - Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

Chapter 9 - Narration describes, with intensely poetic language, the gray rainy day of Hythe as Karen and Max arrive, make their way to their hotel, and have dinner. Narration also points out that Karen took off her engagement ring and put on a plain wedding band.

Lying in bed as Max sleeps, lovemaking having apparently been completed, Karen asks herself what she's done and, in language that alternates between first person present and third person past, contemplates her situation. She considers how things have changed but must appear to have stayed the same, and how she made sure she couldn't have a child but has thoughts of who that child might be (at one point first person narration directly addresses Leopold). She realizes she values her relationship with Naomi more than a relationship with Max and that Madame Fisher must have been aware of what had, and/or could, transpire between Max and Karen. She resolves to no longer let him into her life ... and then, the following morning, allows him to take her into his arms.

The next morning, Karen asks Max whether he could live "here." Narration suggests that he understands her to mean England, but she points out that she only means in a small coastal town like Hythe. As they walk through the town, Karen realizes that she feels "more isolated with him, more cut off from her own country than if they had been in Peru." (see "Quotes', p. 172).

Chapter 10 - The following morning, Karen watches with growing alarm as Max, with a speed and non-stopping determination that seems to her unusual, writes a letter. As they leave to find a post office to buy a stamp, she sees it's addressed to Naomi and convinces him to not mail it until after she (Karen) and he have talked. Their conversation reveals that they both believe Naomi knows about their feelings, and that Naomi arranged for them to get together so they can get those feelings out of their systems. Karen explains the reasons why she came to Hythe (see "Quotes", p. 176). Max explains his reasons for proposing to Naomi and his distaste for both her and her mother (see "Quotes", p. 179); on impulse Karen tears up Max's letter. A few moments later, they agree to marry, commenting that their desires are about something greater than happiness. Narration describes how their discovery of new truths about themselves and about each other was the "beginning of love" and comments that Karen's feelings are similar to those she had when "she first thought of Leopold" (in the wakeful moments after first making love with Max). They agree that Max should write to Naomi and tell her the truth. As they walk back to the town Karen runs on ahead, but Max walks more slowly, "looking back for the last time at the canal."

Part 2 - The Past - Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

The previously discussed, and ironically toned, reversal of the novel's thematic premise about the differences between Englishness and Frenchness develops further here, as passionate feeling in England leads Karen and Max to places of emotional fulfillment, at least temporarily, that they couldn't connect with in France. Meanwhile, there are few, if any, references to the two mothers (Mrs. Michaelis and Madame Fisher) in these two chapters. There is the sense that both Karen and Max are acting independently (for the first time?) from the control/influence of the powerful older women who have had such a strong influence on their lives.

This is not to say that the novel's thematic focus on motherhood goes unexplored. On the contrary, it's examined with a powerful intensity through the narration of Karen's thoughts about her unborn, perhaps at this point un-conceived, son. While it's interesting to note that narration gives Leopold his name, it does so without conveying the sense that Karen knows his name. The reader knows who narration is talking about, but Karen doesn't. All she knows is that in spite of her precautions, she has become a mother and is aware that her life from that moment on will be defined by her child's presence in her life. This is perhaps the absolute core of the novel's thematic exploration of motherhood - that it is all-consuming, perhaps even inevitable, and ultimately obsessive.

Meanwhile, the final moments of Chapter 10 function on several levels - as foreshadowing of Karen's obsessions with her son and her feelings, and of Max's fatalistic sense that his future has been ruined by his acts of passion. The thematic connection here is to the novel's focus on passion as a driving force of life, suggesting that while passion is powerful and often irresistible, and that while a life without passion is both unlived and unlivable, such passion can also be destructive, of self and of others.

Part 2 - The Past - Chapters 11 and 12

Part 2 - The Past - Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

Chapter 11 - After Karen and Max go their separate ways, Karen takes the train back to London and reflects upon both what had happened and what was going to happen (see "Quotes", p. 185). When she gets home, she finds that the house is very quiet, that there is a letter from Ray, and a note by the phone. She avoids both and goes upstairs, only to find that her mother is awake and waiting for her. During an awkward conversation, Karen reminds her mother that she was with a friend for the weekend. Soon afterward, Mrs. Michaelis goes downstairs, coming back up right away. This makes Karen curious, and she, too, returns downstairs, only to discover that the note by the phone is gone. She notices that there are still faint traces of the pen's impressions on the next sheet of paper and discovers that the note was in fact a message from her friend, calling while they were supposedly together. In short, Karen discovers that her mother has discovered she was lying.

Narration describes how quiet the next week is (see "Quotes", p. 190), with both Karen and her mother avoiding discussion of what they both know. Uncle Bill, down for a visit, seems awkward and upset, and eventually goes home early. His unexpected absence gives Karen and Mrs. Michaelis a chance to be alone together, and Karen brings up the note, explaining that she was with Max and that she and Max want to be together. For her part, Mrs. Michaelis gently tells Karen that she's behaving like an "infatuated woman" and that she hasn't thought her actions through. She convinces Karen to wait a month before telling Ray or making any announcements, eventually confessing that she tore up the original note because she felt that after Violet's death and Bill's visit, she couldn't face any more upset.

Chapter 12 - The chapter begins with hints of a tragedy - a mysterious telegram from Naomi, references to stories about Max in the French newspapers, and comments about an inquest and police investigations. Eventually, on a day when Mr. and Mrs. Michaelis (see "Quotes", p. 197) are out, Naomi arrives for a conversation with Karen. During that conversation, Naomi reveals that Max committed suicide and tells what happened. She says she received the letter he wrote after being with Karen in Hythe, that her mother read it and kept Naomi isolated, that Madame Fisher confronted Max with her knowledge of how long he'd cared for Karen, and that Max slit his wrists in front of her before escaping into the street and eventually dying alone. Naomi also tells Karen that since that time, Madame Fisher has herself been unwell, that Naomi has been taking care of her, and that Naomi never intended to leave her mother to live alone.

Karen comments that she thinks Madame Fisher loved her power over people in general and over Max in particular, too much to be truly well once it was fully expended (as she did with Max). She also reveals that she's pregnant with Max's child and that she intends to spend a year in Europe while waiting for the child to be born. Naomi reacts quite matter-of-factly, discussing how Ray might react and suggesting that Karen

tell him. Karen says that's not possible, passionately explaining that she wants the child to be born more than anything ("why", she asks, "should Max leave nothing?") and that she intends to make sure it lives well. Life with Ray, she implies, would make this impossible. The practical Naomi then promises to help Karen plan how to handle the situation. Their plans are interrupted by the readiness of dinner. As they go down to the dining room, narration reveals that Mrs. Michaelis has covered the furniture in her bedroom with sheets - the implication is that she has left for an indefinite period.

Part 2 - The Past - Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

Three of the book's principal themes are developed in intriguing and interrelated, ways in this section. First is the exploration of French/English differences and conflict, with the portrayal of life in London—the truth mostly unspoken and kept secret, emotions kept firmly in check, lives in repressed turmoil—contrasting with the life in Paris—the truth explosively revealed, emotions broadcast widely, lives in loud upheaval. The second is the way in which various manifestations of motherhood present themselves. Aside from the genteelly-tortured motherhood of Mrs. Michaelis, there is the manipulatively destructive attitude of Madame Fisher towards her biological child Naomi and her spiritual child Max. There is also the passionately emotional maternal quality of the English Karen contrasted with the practical, realistic maternal quality of the French Naomi.

Finally, the book's thematic focus on living life with passion is explored from two vividly contrasting perspectives. The first is Karen's, in which her determination to ensure her child's life comes across as a positive change. The second is Max's, in which his determination to live according to his feelings for Karen results in his tragic death, brought into being by Madame Fisher's equally passionate determination that he live his life according to what she believes is best. The development of this particular theme in this section is more ambivalently presented than ever - two sides of the same coin, one dark and life-destructive, one light and life-affirming ... both inevitable, both human, and apparently both preferable to living a life of Englishesque repression.

There is a key piece of foreshadowing in this section, as the various references to Ray foreshadow his appearance in Part 3, and the important role he's about to play in defining the remaining action and thematic explorations.

Part 3 - The Present - Chapters 1 and 2

Part 3 - The Present - Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Chapter 1 - The action of this chapter picks up where the end of Part 1 left off - the point at which Miss Fisher (Naomi) announces to Leopold and Henrietta that Leopold's mother (referred to in narration as Mrs. Forrestier) is not coming. At first, Leopold reacts dispassionately, responding in ways that taunt and upset Miss Fisher. He later tells Henrietta, once Miss Fisher has gone upstairs in answer to a summons from Madame Fisher, that he wanted to say such things only to hear how they would sound. Narration describes how Henrietta "would grow up to date her belief that nothing real ever happens from Leopold's mother's not coming this afternoon." As she and Leopold contemplate each other and their situation, however, narration suggests that while they're physically distant and apparently uncomfortable, Henrietta feels immense sympathy for Leopold and he feels an immense, grieving need for comfort. As he starts to cry, narration suggests that "Leopold's solitary despair made Henrietta no more than the walls or table." After a while, Henrietta comforts him by leaning up against him, her own tears beginning to flow. After they've both wept for a while and eventually calmed down, they become aware that after a lengthy silence, there are sounds of movement from upstairs. Shortly after they separate from each other, Miss Fisher returns, saying that Madame Fisher wants to speak with Leopold. He volunteers to go up right away.

Chapter 2 - When he goes into Madame Fisher's room, Leopold is welcomed in a way that Henrietta was not - with a squeeze of Madame's aged, feeble hand. Conversation reveals to Leopold that his father (Max) did not ever know him, that Madame Fisher is dying, and that she has a powerful interest in his well being - an interest, however, that does not stop her from being somewhat indifferent about his fierce resistance at the prospect of returning to his life in Italy. Her indifference leads to an outburst of frustration from Leopold - frustration with the Italian family, with the way they live and the way they want him to live. This, in turn, leads Madame Fisher to speak (with, according to narration, many pauses for her to catch her breath) of what happened after his birth - how he lived first in Germany, how the woman caring for him there suddenly died, and how Miss Fisher found a new family for him (the Americans with whom he now resentfully lives). As she speaks, narration indicates that a visitor arrives downstairs, but that neither Leopold nor Madame Fisher pays much attention - they are too much involved with the past. Eventually, the stream and intensity of words makes Madame Fisher quite weak, and she becomes very still, almost deathlike. Leopold becomes concerned, crying out in his mind for her to revive. She does, briefly, as they both hear footsteps coming up the stairs. Leopold asks to stay, but when she comes in, Miss Fisher tells him he must leave.

Part 3 - The Present - Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

The first point to note about this section is that Naomi (referred to once more as Miss Fisher) gives the name of Leopold's mother as Mrs. Forrestier, indicating to the reader that Karen has indeed married Ray. This creates a sense of curiosity in the reader - how did Karen eventually come to a decision that, in preceding chapters, she was evidently passionately unprepared to make. That curiosity is answered in Chapter 2 and in subsequent chapters, when both Madame Fisher and Ray Forrestier explain what has happened to Karen, as well as why and how she became what she has become.

The second noteworthy point here is narration's comment about Henrietta's belief that nothing real ever happens. This is an example of one of the book's frequently repeated stylistic elements - commenting on the action, rather than simply narrating what happened, offering opinions and attitudes and describing what happens in the lives and worlds of the characters after the boundaries of the narrative have been reached. For further examination of this aspect of the book, see "Style - Point of View".

A third important element in this section is the emotional camaraderie that blooms between Henrietta and Leopold. There is the strong sense here that although Henrietta is ostensibly shedding tears in sympathy, she and Leopold are essentially mourning the same thing - the lost influence of their mothers. This is, in turn, a manifestation of the book's thematic focus on various aspects of motherhood, as is Leopold's conversation with Madame Fisher, in which she clearly tries to exert the same sort of maternal pressure on him as she did on Max. It seems in this moment that Madame Fisher has learned nothing from Max's tragic death ... it also seems, however, that her corrupt sense of being maternal has finally destroyed her physically in the same way as it destroyed her morally all those years before. One last manifestation of the book's emphasis on maternalism is the resentment with which Leopold responds to the "artificial" maternalism of his "adoptive" American family.

Finally, Leopold's confrontation with Madame Fisher can be seen as the book's climax, the point of highest emotion, thematic intensity, and narrative effect. What Leopold is doing in this scene is living his life according to his feelings (in the way the narrative advocates so strongly), telling off the ogre-like Madame Fisher in ways that Karen, Naomi, and Max have failed to do. The action to this point has been building to a place where Leopold, as the metaphoric embodiment of the desire for freedom and passion in all the main characters, casts off the dangers of corrupt maternalism and emotion in order to live according to an unknown, but beckoning, emotional truth.

Part 3 - The Present - Chapters 3 and 4

Part 3 - The Present - Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Chapter 3 - As he comes out of Madame Fisher's room, Leopold encounters Henrietta, again sitting on the steps. She tells him that Miss Fisher told her not to say who the man waiting downstairs was. That man, narration reveals, is Ray Forrestier, come to see Leopold in Karen's place. Narration describes how he left Karen in Versailles, how impressed he was with Naomi's calmness when he arrived, and how nervous he is beneath his own façade of calmness. That nervousness makes itself apparent when Leopold comes in and surprises Ray with his pointed questions, his self-possession, his face so much like Karen's, and his manner so much like Max's. Narration also reveals that Karen has a belief that Leopold represents much more in her life than just her child and presents an "unspoken dialogue" between her and Ray in which they argue over why Karen gave Leopold up for adoption without consulting Ray. That dialogue also contains references to Ray's willingness to give fathering Leopold a chance, to Karen's desire for a simple marriage, and to their mutual confusion at each other's truths. Narration describes Karen's efforts at making their marriage a work of art (see "Quotes", p. 245), how occasionally excerpts from their "unspoken dialogue" came out into the open, and how Karen impulsively decided she wanted to see Leopold.

As the conversation between Leopold and Ray continues, Ray dismisses Madame Fisher's influence on all their lives - "She counts much less than you think," he says. Leopold asks whether he's actually met Madame Fisher, and when Ray indicates that he hasn't, Leopold responds dismissively. Conversation then turns to the possibility of Ray taking Leopold out of the house, first for a tour around Paris, second for a reunion with Karen, and third for his moving in with her and Ray. Before the discussion can be concluded, however, Miss Fisher returns.

Chapter 4 - Miss Fisher announces that Henrietta's train is to leave shortly and then goes looking for her, finding her in the dining room and eventually offering her tea. When Miss Fisher goes back into the salon to find out whether Leopold also wants tea, Leopold slips in to talk to Henrietta, revealing that Ray has offered to take him away to Karen and asking whether Henrietta has ever, as Madame Fisher once said she had done, seen "a tree growing out of a crack in a grave?" Meanwhile, in the salon, Naomi and Ray are discussing the logistics and repercussions of Ray's taking Leopold. "I think," Naomi says, "it is sometimes simpler to do preposterous things." She then asks Ray to take Henrietta to catch her train, saying she can't leave her mother. Ray agrees, saying he'll take Leopold at the same time. The house, he says, will be "quiet sooner."

Arrangements are made, and after a warm farewell to Miss Fisher during which she caresses Leopold tenderly and embraces Henrietta with unexpected enthusiasm, Ray, Leopold and Henrietta drive off (see "Quotes", p. 260). As they drive, narration describes the intensity of emotion in everyone in the taxi and how it all shows up in physical discomfort. At the same time, Ray urges Henrietta to say nothing to anyone

about the events of the day, and Henrietta agrees. At the train station, Ray buys Henrietta some food for the journey and a souvenir, which she accepts happily. The person arranged to take Henrietta on the next phase of her journey is waiting, and after a brief, intense farewell, Henrietta walks away.

After they've been left alone, Leopold asks Ray where they're going (see "Quotes", p. 267). Ray leads him out of the station to find a taxi, narration describing the self-conscious unease with which they walk and talk with each other, each silently contemplating the future. Outside the station, narration describes them as standing "at a commanding, heroic height above the level of Paris", looking out over "the city crowned with signs and starting alight with windows ..."

Part 3 - The Present - Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

The first element to note about this section is its evocation of the tension between appearance and reality - specifically, how Ray's surface calmness barely covers the turmoil of his feelings, at the same time as Leopold's surface and internal state are actually more harmonized than any other character in the book. He is not hiding his feelings like Karen and Mrs. Michaelis and Naomi; he is not concealing his agenda like Madame Fisher; he is not tortured by his feelings like Max and Naomi and Karen, and perhaps most importantly, he is not unaware of his feelings like Henrietta. He is firmly on a journey towards emotional wholeness and integrity, a journey that he sees as beginning with Ray and continuing with his reunion with Karen. In that context, meanwhile, it's interesting to consider how Henrietta catches a ride with Leopold and Ray to the train station. In this, there is the sense that she has at least the possibility of going on a similar journey as that of Leopold's journey, but the fact that she ends up being returned to the complicated, restrictive rules of travel set up by her grandmother suggests that her version of the journey is less likely to end successfully.

Other interesting narrative elements include the sudden surge of feeling evident in Miss Fisher when/as she's saying goodbye to Henrietta—perhaps a sign that Miss Fisher is becoming a bit more Naomi in her outlook, and the reference to Karen striving to make her life with Ray a work of art (see "Quotes", p. 245). This is clearly ironic given the frequent references to Karen being an artist and, at the beginning of her engagement to Ray, a frustrated and blocked one.

There are also several powerful metaphoric images in the book's final pages. The reference to the house in Paris being "quiet sooner" suggests that the feelings and passions of all who lived there, even for a little while, will soon be calm. By contrast, the final images of Paris coming to life contrast vividly with the images of the dead, empty Paris as seen by Henrietta in the book's opening chapters, suggesting that life is awakening in the characters in the same way as life is awakening in the city. Finally, there is the powerful image of the tree growing out of a grave. For further consideration of the possible meanings of this image, see "Topics for Discussion - Consider the image of 'a tree ..."

Finally, there is a particular stylistic element to note. This is the way in which the narrative suddenly, but not unexpectedly, details the unspoken dialogue between Karen and Ray. This is the most significant example of how the author, throughout the narrative, takes sudden stylistic diversions to support her thematic contention that nothing, not even her way of telling her story, is what it seems or is going to stay the same. Other themes are also evoked here - another variation on perception vs. reality, in that neither Ray nor Karen seem willing and/or able to actually have the dialogue but keep the feelings it evokes buried; on the power of motherhood seen in Karen's long dormant desire to act on her connection to Leopold, and on living from a place of passion. The unspoken dialogue is, in fact, all about passion but explores the theme in a profoundly ironic way - while characters may be keeping their feelings to themselves, they're still acting upon them. Karen and Ray are simultaneously being both English and French ... the fourth of the narrative's major themes.

Characters

Karen Michaelis

Karen Michaelis is one of the last of the novel's major characters to be introduced, at least by name. She is referred to a couple of times in the early chapters, but only as Leopold's mother. In spite of that fact, she is clearly the novel's protagonist, or central character. It is her journey of transformation - her choices, her actions and reactions, her perspectives and feelings - that drives both the narrative's thematic explorations and its two main plots ... the present plot involving what's going to happen to Leopold and the past plot—the love triangle between Karen, Naomi Fisher, and Max. It is Karen's exploration of her true feelings and of the actions she takes as a result of that exploration and her growing trust in the belief that feelings illuminate truth that define the narrative's incidents and all four of its principal themes (see "Themes" and "Topics for Discussion - How does Karen's story ...").

The novel's portrayal of Karen is multi-faceted, complex and textured, in that her self-questioning, her simultaneous uncertainty about and celebration of her feelings and truth, and above all her tendency to act upon her instinct rather than her thought processes (i.e., how she thinks she should act) come across as manifestations of a kind of spiritual restlessness. Her increasing urgency to test the boundaries of truth and experience is not only compelling in a female character of the period in which the novel is set (the early part of the 20th Century - see "Style - Setting") and female characters in general, but in any character. Her search for the discovery of the relationship between personal truth and instinct/feeling is an archetypal and universal one, given specific form and shape here by the thematic focus on (among other things) the nature of motherhood.

Miss Fisher (Naomi)

In many ways, this character is a clear contrast to Karen (see "Topics for Discussion - In what ways are the characters ..."). In other ways, however, she is a character of considerably more depth than she at first appears - her multi-faceted personality is less vividly apparent and/or portrayed than Karen's, but that doesn't make it any less interesting. On the contrary - it's very possible that Naomi Fisher is the most complex, intriguing character in the book precisely because her true depths and/or complexities are hinted at, rather than overtly explored in the way Karen's are.

A particularly interesting point to note about this character is the way narration changes how it refers to her. In Part 1, she is referred to as Miss Fisher in narration, with her first name being revealed only in dialogue with Madame Fisher, her mother. In Part 2, the section of the book in which her past is more thoroughly explored, narration refers to her as Naomi. Part 3, with its return to narrative focus on Henrietta and Leopold, also returns to referring to her as Miss Fisher. For further consideration of this aspect of the

narrative, see "Topics for Discussion - In what way does the use of Miss Fisher's first name ..."

It's very possible to see Naomi Fisher as a victim of her mother, of the faithless Max, and of the impulsive (self-indulgent?) Karen. While it's true that in many ways she is certainly victimized, or at the very least treated thoughtlessly, it's also true that the narrative clearly portrays her as a person of strength and character, perhaps motivated more by true, selfless love than any of the other characters. Is the narrative making the point that such selflessness results in pain and rejection? Or does the novel value such love over passion of the sort that drives/defines Karen, Max and Madame Fisher? It's hard to say, but the novel's evidence that Naomi Fisher's strength and compassion are to be admired would appear to suggest otherwise. The point is not made to suggest that passion be invalidated, but rather to suggest that through Naomi Fisher, the novel is suggesting that both sides of the "living by feelings" coin are valid and valuable.

Mrs. Michaelis and Madame Fisher

These two characters are the mothers of the two central characters - the former is Karen's mother, the latter is Naomi's mother. They are grouped together here because they essentially serve the same purposes - as contrasting manifestations of one of the novel's central themes (see "Themes - The Nature and Power of Motherhood"), but perhaps more importantly, as manifestations of the sort of lives against which their respective daughters are reacting. Mrs. Michaelis is the sort of reactive, emotionally-repressed woman Karen refuses to be, while Madame Fisher is the sort of manipulative, emotionally-indulgent woman Naomi refuses to be. Both are powerful forces in the lives of their respective daughters, and both, in their own ways, strive to exert their influence. Both women are passive/aggressive, both wounded, and both calculating, but Mrs. Michaelis tries to control through gently repressive disappointment, while Madame Fisher asserts control through confrontation and insinuation. On first glance, there is the sense that the narrative is interested in portraying Mrs. Michaelis as a somewhat more positive character. Upon deeper consideration, however, especially of the way she disappears from Karen's life and difficulties at the end of Chapter 12, it becomes very clear that Mrs. Michaelis, like the more pointedly cruel Madame Fisher, is determined to let her daughter know exactly how disappointed she is with her behavior.

Henrietta

Henrietta is a guest at the house in Paris, a young girl without a mother who is visiting the Fishers while in transit from one pseudo-home to another. She is the character through whom the reader enters the book - Part 1 is narrated, for the most part, from her point of view - but ultimately, her story is peripheral, both narratively and thematically, to that of Karen. Henrietta's story is not irrelevant though. Her journey of transformation in many ways is a parallel to Karen's, a subplot that illuminates the main plot through reiteration and/or repetition. Henrietta's movement from emotional innocence and/or naivete parallels those of both Karen and Naomi Fisher. It's interesting

to note that Henrietta's movement takes place while she's still a child; whereas, those of Karen and Naomi Fisher take place while they're adults. Is the novel suggesting that discoveries of the nature and/or power of feeling, both good and bad, are best learned in childhood?

Leopold

Leopold is the other child visiting the house in Paris. Like Henrietta, he is "between families," and like Henrietta he doesn't have what he perceives to be a "real" family of the sort for which he desperately longs. This desperation is evident in the way he both imagines a new life with his mother in Part 2, and leaves for just such a life with Ray, a man whom he barely knows and perhaps shouldn't trust, in Part 2.

The most interesting point about Leopold, though, is not his actual existence, but what his existence means to Karen. In Part 2, when Karen first has sexual relations with Max, she imagines what having a child means and specifically what her child means to her. The narrative refers to that child as Leopold, even though Karen, in her own mind, doesn't. Narration establishes a clear link between what Karen imagines and what actually comes into being as the result of her actions. The second point about the Karen/Leopold relationship is that the narrative isn't exactly clear on what Karen imagines. It doesn't come right out and say what motherhood means and/or will come to mean - it only hints that Karen knows it will mean something profound. That meaning becomes apparent in Leopold's nature - which is the third key point about the importance and/or purpose of the character. Leopold is who he is (i.e., a child with no true parents), dreams what he dreams (i.e., of emotional fulfillment), acts upon those dreams (i.e., leaving with Ray) and, above all, is certain of that fulfillment in the way Karen never really is. Neither are any of the other main characters (Max, Naomi, etc). Leopold has faith while all the other characters have only questions.

Max

Like the other central characters, Max has a complicated family background. Biologically, he is of mixed English parentage like Naomi, meaning that he is a manifestation and/or embodiment of the narrative's thematic interest in the tension between being French and being English. Again like Naomi, he is spiritually and emotionally the product of both that mixed parentage with all its implications and of the emotional manipulation of Madame Fisher. He is deeply damaged and, like Karen, quite restlessly searching for meaning and/or truth in his life. While he, like Karen, finds a degree of peace in their relationship (specifically, an alleviation of their frustrating passion for each other), he is unlike Karen in that that peace doesn't last. His restlessness has roots in a deeper pain than either Karen's or Naomi's, with the result that he is far more tortured about his situation than either woman and therefore driven to much more drastic action ... i.e., suicide.

Ray Forrestier

Ray is referred to briefly in the first two parts of the narrative, essentially serving as a touchstone and/or goal of reliability, security, and safety for Karen. These aspects of the character Ray exist only in the minds of Karen and her mother. The perceptive reader will note, in the brief narrative descriptions of Ray's questioning letters, manifestations of insecurity and emotional restlessness in many ways similar to those evident in Karen. Granted, his don't seem to run as deep and don't define either his character or his story in the same profound way - at least, not in Part 1. In Part 3, however, when he shows up to meet Leopold, Ray discovers a longing he never knew he had for the possibility of emotional fulfillment Leopold represents, at first only to Karen but now to Ray himself. This fulfillment, the narrative implies, is the realization of the kind of life Ray dreamed of only superficially (neurotically?) in Part 1, but that he knows Karen has always dreamed of, and continues to dream of, with life-guiding passion - the kind of life he believes he and Karen can live together if Leopold joins them.

Uncle Bill and Aunt Violet

Karen's aunt and uncle appear relatively briefly, in the early chapters of Part 2, but make a vivid impression. They are, in many ways, a clear manifestation of three of the novel's key themes. Specifically, in the different ways they deny the reality of Violet's life-threatening illness, they are evocations of the English/French tension—their silence on the subject of Violet's death is portrayed as very English and the sort of reaction that Karen rejects. They are also evocations of the tension between appearance and reality, in that Bill and Violet, in spite of the reality of Violet's illness, present the appearance of nothing wrong, and of the necessity of living with passion and/or feeling, in that Bill's repression of his grief seems to lead him into an uneasy, pained half-existence. Violet is also an evocation of the motherhood theme, in that she takes a quiet, motherly, "have patience, dear" sort of approach to both keeping her health a secret from her "daughter" (Karen) in order to spare her pain and to the issue of Karen's uncertainty about her engagement to Ray.

Yellow Hat

This character is something of a curiosity, in that she appears only once and the author seems to want her to have some kind of important impact, but is not terribly clear on what she (the author) wants that impact to be. Yellow Hat's characteristics are certainly clear - she is loud, aggressive, assertive and clear in her own mind about what she wants. It's very possible that as such, she is intended to be a contrast to the less certain, less assertive Naomi and Karen, as well as to the more subtle Mrs. Michaelis, the wispy aunt Violet, and the manipulative Madame Fisher. Yellow Hat comes across as an example of forthrightness in both feeling and action, a sort of touchstone and/or measuring stick by which Karen measures herself and the reader can measure the attitudes and actions of the other characters, mainly the female ones but the males as well.

Leopold's Italian Relatives and Henrietta's Family

Both Leopold and Henrietta come to the house in Paris as, in a way, refugees from stifling, artificial family lives. In Leopold's case, he is with a smothering, over-sensitive American foster family ... in Henrietta's case, she is with a father who doesn't really know what to do with her and a domineering grandmother and aunt who expect her to behave in the way they dictate. Leopold and Henrietta are both, at the time the novel begins, being raised in environments that have nothing to do with who they truly are but have more to do with what they are expected and/or believed to be. Their experience at the house in Paris, however, wakes them both up to insights and understandings into their own identities ... an experience parallel to that of the other characters who have lived there (Karen, Naomi, and Max) and who have come to their own understandings in spite of the attempts at spiritual smothering/manipulation made by the house's owner, Madame Fisher.

Objects/Places

Paris

The capital city of France is the setting for the first and third parts of the narrative and is referred to frequently throughout the second half. The city has for years evoked romance, intensity of emotion, and a certain freedom of passion, evocations that are also present here in metaphor (in the narrative) and in the perspectives and experiences of the central characters. In other words, to live in Paris is to live in a world of feeling.

The Fishers' House

The home of Naomi Fisher and her mother, Madame Fisher, is "the house in Paris" of the book's title. It is portrayed as a place in which the seeds of feeling are planted, in which those feelings sprout into passion, and in which the flowers of that passion are ruthlessly cut off in the prime of their bloom. In that sense, there is a powerful, intriguing tension between the house's metaphoric qualities of being both life affirming and destructive.

The Salon

This main floor room in the Fisher's house is the setting for many confrontations and much heartbreak. It is a room with emotional ghosts and a history. More fanciful readers might imagine that the emotional echoes of confrontations between (for example) Madame Fisher and Max are still playing in the room's atmosphere and are awakened (replayed?) by the confrontations between Henrietta and Leopold and between Leopold and Ray.

Henrietta's Case

When she comes to the house in Paris, Henrietta brings with her a small suitcase, what today would be called a "carry-on" what in the book is called a "dispatch case". The case is accidentally opened by Leopold, with its contents spilling across the floor, much to Henrietta's upset. This spilling can be seen as metaphorically foreshadowing the "spilling" of feelings that takes place throughout the narrative, not just those spilled in that room (Henrietta's, Leopold's and Ray's in the present, Madame Fisher's and Max's in the past) but also the feelings of the other characters (Karen, Naomi, Max) throughout the narrative.

Henrietta's Deck of Cards

One of the items that falls out of Henrietta's case is a deck of playing cards that she uses to tell Leopold's fortune. As discussed in the analysis for Chapter 5, the "death" that she sees in his fortune is perhaps most obviously a metaphoric foreshadowing of the "death" of his initial hopes for reunion with his mother. It can also be seen as a representation of Max's physical death, the death of Naomi's hopes for love, and the death of Henrietta's innocence. The point to note here is that the pain of most of these deaths is transcended - Max's death is transcended by his son's Leopold's existence; the death of Naomi's hopes is transcended by the growth of her selfless compassion, and the death of Henrietta's innocence is transcended by her joyful embracing of life and feeling.

Mount Iris

This is the quiet English home of Karen's quiet English Aunt Violet and Uncle Bill, the place to which Karen retreats to sort out her complicated, noisy storm of feelings and doubts about her relationship with Ray. This, and the house in Twickenham (see below) are portrayed as emotionally-restrained contrasts to the emotion-filled house in Paris.

The House in Twickenham

Twickenham is a suburb of London, England, meaning that the house there (visited by Naomi, Karen and Max following the death of its owner, Naomi's aunt) is, like Mount Iris, intended to be a metaphoric representation of English repression, contrasting with the emotionally freer house in Paris. That said, emotions are somewhat freer here (in Twickenham) than they are at Mount Iris - at least Max and Karen progress to holding hands.

Victoria Station

London's Victoria Station is the setting for an important moment of confrontation/realization for Karen. As she's saying goodbye to Naomi and Max, who are leaving London (and Karen in a ferment of emotional repression) to return to Paris (and their loving happiness), she suddenly realizes how desperately she wants to be with Max - in other words, leave the emotionally repressed world of London and the English forever (see "Themes - Living British vs. Living French").

Letters

Letters appear throughout the narrative - Leopold opens letters to Miss Fisher, Miss Fisher reads letters about Leopold and Henrietta, Ray sends Karen letters pleading for confirmation of her feelings, etc. On each occasion, albeit to varying degrees, the letter

is a revelation of a feeling, a belief, a situation, etc. that is present but unspoken. Throughout the narrative, letters are triggers, in the characters who read them (illicitly or not) for an expansion of the experience of living from a place of feeling and/or passion. For further consideration of the narrative value of letters, see "Topics for Discussion - Consider each of the letters ...

Boulogne

Boulogne, France is the setting for Karen's and Max's first meeting without Naomi. During their day's visit, they reveal their feelings for each other and also the depth of those feelings - specifically, the complicated questions of identity and/or self that acting on those feelings would awaken. This makes the setting evocative of a darker side of two of the book's key themes - the importance of living from passion and the tension between "Englishness" and "Frenchness." For further consideration of both "dark sides" see "Themes - Living with Passion" and "Living British vs. Living French").

Hythe

Hythe (n Britain) is the setting for Karen and Max's second encounter, where they actually consummate their relationship and act on their feelings. There is a powerful irony at work here, in that one of the book's most important expressions of feeling takes place in a setting metaphorically evocative of emotional repression. In other words, on a personal level, both Karen and Max (but particularly the half-British Max) are conquering their sense of Britishness, of emotional repression, on what might be described as repression's home turf. They are putting aside how they were born in the name of how they want (are determined?) to live.

Themes

Living with Passion and Feeling

This is the book's central theme, with the rest of its major themes essentially serving as sub-themes, amplifications, and/or explorations of it. The journeys and stories of all the characters can, in various ways, be seen as variations on this particular theme (see "Topics for Discussion - Discuss how the stories of each of the book's named characters ...).

On first glance, it would be tempting to suggest that the book thematically and narratively celebrates living with/from this perspective and that repression is a negative value while emotional freedom is a positive one. More in-depth consideration, however, might lead the reader to the interpretation that the novel is, in fact, ambivalent on the subject. Yes, the novel clearly suggests that it is necessary to live life from a place of passion and feeling. It further suggests that a life not lived from that place is stifled, unfulfilled, untrue, and "un-self" - the novel is clearly arguing that an individual can't know oneself and/or one's truth if s/he doesn't live with at least a degree of awareness of feelings and motivations. But there is also the very clear sense that growing awareness of feelings and acting upon those feelings can also bring suffering. This is true of several characters - in particular Karen and Max, whose lives end up tortured to varying degrees because they acted on their feelings, but the point is also true of Madame Fisher, Aunt Violet, and even Leopold.

Overall the book seems to be making the thematic suggestion that to live fully, peacefully, and long, one must know oneself through one's feelings but only act on those feelings carefully and responsibly. It's important to note, however, that while there is a glimpse of this thematic perspective in the character of Yellow Hat, none of the main characters actually acts/lives in this way. Naomi Fisher comes closest, but she, too, has her share of suffering from which her sense of responsibility and compassion emerged.

The Nature and Power of Motherhood

By far the most vividly explored aspect of the book's main theme (see "Living with Passion and Feeling" above) is the repeated motif of motherhood - specifically, of various manifestations of maternal feeling. All the main characters in one way or another are affected and/or influenced by the strong presence of such feelings, as manifest either in a mother figure active in their lives or by functioning as a mother figure themselves. There is no one type of mother in the book, no one sort of maternal presence. What the novel presents is a series of variations on an archetype (universal image), several different kinds of maternal nature, maternal power, and maternal function, all of which are grounded in an intention to live a life of passion and feeling.

The primary example is Karen - biologically mothered by the martyred, repressed Mrs. Michaelis ... spiritually mothered by the passionate, manipulative Madame Fisher ... metaphorically mothered (when Karen's life is in crises) by the competent, practical Naomi Fisher ... and, above all, passionately determined to experience motherhood herself. This latter is particularly interesting, in that Karen's passion grows after her child's father, Max, disappears from her life. This is itself an interesting point, in that father figures in the narrative are, for the most part, peripheral or absent. The exception is Ray, who in the book's final third eventually becomes a surrogate father to Leopold, but even then there can be no doubt in the reader's mind that the primary parental influence in Leopold's life is going to be that of his mother, Karen.

Appearance vs. Reality

This sub-theme is also an aspect of the book's main theme "Living with Passion and Feeling, in that for many of the characters and situations "reality" is defined as feeling - what, how, and why they feel what they do and what they do as a result of those feelings. "Appearance" is defined as what the characters do to conceal their feelings, or, as the narrative would have the reader believe, the characters' identities.

There are vivid examples of this throughout the novel. These include Karen's "appearance" of being happy about her marriage to Ray when her feelings are ambivalent at best, Aunt Violet's and Uncle Bill's appearance of living a normal life when both are shattered by Violet's impending death, and Mrs. Michaelis' failed attempts to preserve the appearance of normalicy when she is in fact devastated by Violet's death.

This theme also manifests in terms of the novel's narrative and style. As previously discussed, Miss Fisher (as Naomi is called in Part 1) comes across as somewhat stuffy and even a bit neurotic but is revealed in Parts 2 and 3 to be an individual of deep, competent compassion. The same sort of thing happens in terms of Henrietta who is first portrayed to be naïve and shallow, but who is eventually revealed to have a wide streak of insight and compassion in her, perhaps more so than most other characters. In her, the narrative seems to be suggesting that people are never really who and what they appear to be upon first impression. This is also true of Ray who at first appears stolid and unemotional, but reveals unexpected strength, compassion, and courage, perhaps more so than most other characters.

Living British vs. Living French

There is, on some level, an almost stereotypical aspect to this sub-theme. Throughout history, in art and in life, the French have been portrayed and/or perceived as being more emotionally fulfilled and connected to themselves and each other and their lives than the English. On some level, the novel and its characters play into this perception/stereotype, in that "Frenchness" (feeling) is generally portrayed as a positive value while "Englishness" (repression of both self and others) is generally portrayed as negative. But like the larger exploration of the "Living with Passion and Feeling" theme,

there is an ambivalence, a two sidedness, to this theme. Yes, the narrative comes across, at least in its early stages, of enthusiastically advocating a life based on passion, portraying it as both desirable and longed for (in the stories of Henrietta and Karen). Later in the narrative, however, a life lived in such a way takes on darker aspects, most vividly in the life and actions of (the French) Madame Fisher, whose life of manipulation is driven by a passionate desire for control and whose actions, defined by that desire, result in destruction. This destruction takes several forms - the literal destruction of Max, the spiritual destruction of Naomi, and the corrosive self-destruction that results in her becoming an invalid.

"Englishness," however, is also portrayed as destructive. There is the very clear sense that the novel connects Aunt Violet's physical death to her (English) repressed emotions and the "spiritual" death of Karen's relationship with her mother to the latter's similarly repressed feelings. In other words, both "Englishness" and "Frenchness" are eventually portrayed as ambivalent.

It's important, however, to note that "Englishness" and "Frenchness" come together, or at least they start to, in the character of Ray, whose English restraint moderates his passion for Karen, and by extension Leopold, without stifling it. As Leopold leaves the house in Paris (a powerful symbol of the ambivalence associated with living a life of feeling), the novel draws to its close with a portrayal of hope for balance between passion and responsibility ... between "Frenchness and Englishness."

Style

Point of View

In broadest terms, the narrative is written from the third person point of view. There are times when that point of view is quite objective, recounting events as the characters experienced them. There are also, however, several occasions when the author inserts commentary and/or observations about the characters' experiences, both in the moment they're being described and at points later in the characters' lives. An example of this is how, at one point, narration comments on the origins of Henrietta's belief that nothing real ever happens (Part 3, Chapter 1) - a demonstration of how the narrative occasionally offers opinions and attitudes rather than simply narrating what happened. At points such as these, the narrative takes on a slightly lecturing tone - not patronizing, just a bit self-conscious of its own meaning and intent.

On another note, the narrative frequently shifts back and forth between the focus of its point of view. Specifically - Parts 1 and 3 focus on the present on the characters of Leopold and Henrietta. It's important to note here that within each part, the narrative at times shifts still further, narrating events from Henrietta's point of view in one chapter, in Leopold's in another, and in Part 3 shifting again to narrate from Ray's point of view. Part 2 focuses on Karen and her point of view; there are few, if any, internal shifts of point of view in this part. The point of view is exclusively Karen's, creating the sense that it is her story and her experiences that are ultimately central to the novel's overall thematic and narrative intent.

Setting

There are several noteworthy values to the novel's various settings, many of which are thematically relevant. In broadest terms, the book's main geographical settings (England and France) serve to highlight the novel's thematic focus on the tensions between "Living English and Living French," itself a sub-theme of the novel's overall thematic emphasis on living a life connected to and/or defined by feeling (see "Themes"). Within those geographical/ metaphorical borders, there are physical settings with similar thematic resonances - the house in Paris itself and the house in Twickenham and Aunt Violet's English home, Mount Iris are further evocations of the novel's thematic interest in Englishness vs. Frenchness. Similarly, but more ironically, the settings for Karen and Max's intimate encounters in Part 2 (Boulogne and Hythe - see "Objects/Places") also function in this level.

Meanwhile, it's important to take into account the narrative's setting in time. The book was written and published in the early 1900's, a period in which women's rights were just beginning to take real root. The suffragettes in the early 1900's had begun the process of fighting for the recognition of women's value and identity, but realization of their goals was far from a done deal. When this is taken into account, Karen's struggle

and determination to live an independent, self-defined life takes on much more weight. In this context, she is struggling against the will of her family, the ways of her upbringing, and the practices of her home country (England). By claiming emotional, sexual, and maternal independence she is struggling against the perspectives of society as a whole. Consideration of setting defines The House in Paris as a novel of late first-wave feminism.

Language and Meaning

For the most part, the language employed in the writing of The House in Paris is fairly straightforward, albeit with a sometimes heavy-handed poetic sensibility. There are times, as mentioned above (see "Point of View") when both language and meaning take on a slightly lecturing quality. There are also times at which language becomes somewhat self-conscious in its attempts to evoke a character's emotional experience and/or mental state. At such times, it veers dangerously close to being over-wrought, and a touch Gothic. But again, these are exceptions - generally, the language employed by the author evokes at least a degree of insight into the characters and their situation.

Whether that insight leads to compassion and/or empathy is another matter. A particularly intriguing aspect of the novel is the way it veers back and forth between its thematic agenda (i.e., advocating a life lived according to passion and feeling) and allowing the reader to make up his/her own mind about the characters as they narratively explore that agenda. The novel's language evokes the thematic idea and the potential consequences of acting on that thematic principle but ultimately leaves it up to the reader to define, for him/herself, whether the consequences are worth the choice - specifically, whether the consequences for Karen, Max, Leopold and the rest of the characters are worth their emotion/passion-defined choices.

Structure

The novel is structured in three parts - 1 and 3 are set in "the present," and part 2 is set in the past. In purely narrative terms, this structure serves to create a sense of mystery and intrigue (Part 1), offers explanation (Part 2), and moves the main characters in both parts forward in their personal journeys of discovery and transformation (Part 3).

In thematic terms, this structure echoes and reinforces one of the book's sub-themes, that of "Appearance vs. Reality" (see "Themes"). In this context, Part 1 can be seen as, in a sense, the "appearance," the characters and story and situation the reader first encounters. Part 3 is a continuation of that first impression, but the reader's perceptions and insights are deepened by the fact that Part 2 has come between the two parts, thereby illuminating the "reality" of what has brought the Part 1 characters to where they are in their lives. Part 2 tells its story and explores its central character, Karen, in order to illuminate, thematically and narratively, the emotional, familial, and spiritual situations of the main characters in the present ... their "reality" as opposed to their "appearance."

Or to look at it in yet another way, because Part 2 is not only substantially longer but substantially more emotionally complicated and textured, Parts 1 and 3 can be seen as literary bookends, defining the thematic and narrative boundaries of the central story. While the characters in Parts 1 and 3 are who they are and do what they do, Part 2 explains why, its events defining the inner lives of the Part 1 and 3 characters in the same way as Part 2 takes place "within" their structural borders.

All in all, then, structure in The House in Paris can be seen as a manifestation of the author's complex, multi-faceted thematic intent.

Quotes

"Up and down the narrow uphill street the houses were all heights: none so small as the Fishers'. At each end, the street bent out of sight: it was exceedingly quiet and seemed, though charged with meaning, to lead nowhere ... it would not really have surprised Henrietta if no one had ever walked down that street again." p. 9

"Already, [Henrietta] longed to occupy people's fancies, speculations and thoughts." p. 11 - 1

"[Henrietta] felt the house was acting, nothing seemed to be natural objects did not wait to be seen but came crowding in on her, each with what amounted to its aggressive cry." p.11 -2

"Today was to do much to disintegrate Henrietta's character, which, built up by herself, for herself, out of admonitions and axioms (under the growing stress of: If I am Henrietta, then what is HENRIETTA?) was a mosaic of all possible kinds of prejudice. She was anxious to be someone ..." p. 13

"[Leopold's] own inner excitement was so great that nothing outside, in this house, struck him as odd at all. But he had seen, from the way she had lain stretched on the sofa before waking, that even in sleep Henrietta was being exposed to unfamiliar sensation ... she might marvel, but nothing, thought Leopold, would ever really happen to her." p. 16

"With no banal reassuring grownups present, with grownup intervention taken away, there is no limit to the terror strange children feel of each other, a terror life obscures but never ceases to justify. There is no end to the violations committed by children, quietly talking alone." p. 20

"Sudden tragic importance made [Miss Fisher] look doubtful, as though a great dark plumed hat had been clapped aslant on her head." p. 46

"Feeling like a kaleidoscope often and quickly shaken, she badly wanted some place in which not to think." p. 48

"[Henrietta] found herself for the first time no more asking for notice than if she had stood beside an unconscious strong little tree: moving her elbow his way she felt his arm as unknowing as wood." p. 56

"Karen had grown up in a world of grace and intelligence in which ... the War and other fatigues and disasters had been so many opportunities to behave well." p. 69

"[Karen] did not so much ask herself why she was here as why she was ever anywhere. She supposed that it is partly why women marry - to keep up the fiction of being the hub of things." p. 76

"The you inside you gathers up defensively; something is stealing upon you every moment; you will never be quite the same again. These new unsmiling lights, reflections and objects are to become your memories, riveted to you closer than friends or lovers, going with you, even, into the grave ... untrodden rocky canyons or virgin forests cannot be more entrapping than the inside of a house ... " p. 77

"Milky-faced Irishwomen looked around like vacant madonnas, their unspeaking eyes passing slowly from face to face; women like this accept that all men are the same, simply one fact: man." p. 95

"Under her unassumingness, Naomi had a will that, like a powerful engine started up suddenly, made everything swerve." p. 105.

"...[Karen's] memory had exaggerated [Max]. The meeting she tried to avoid amounted to almost nothing. All through lunch, she was conscious of something missing its mark in her, and did not know whether she were sorry or glad." p. 111.

"First love, with its frantic haughty imagination, swings its object clear of the everyday, over the rut of living, making him all looks, silences, gestures, attitudes, a burning phrase with no context. This isolation, young love and hero worship accomplish without remorse; they hardly know tenderness." p. 113-114

"With three or more people, there is something bold in the air: direct things get said which would frighten two people alone ... to be three is to be in public, you feel safe; the person so close before becomes a face at the other end of a tray. Are you less yourself than you were? You will never know." p. 121.

"Mrs. Michaelis to Karen: "...there is always that touch ... of womanishness about [Max] that a woman would have to ignore and yet deal with the whole time. He would see through a strategic woman at once; only a simple good woman would do for him.'" p. 124

"Goodbyes breed a sort of distaste for whomever you say goodbye to; this hurts, you feel, this must not happen again. Any other meeting will only lead back to this. If today goodbye is not final, someday it will be; doorsteps, docks and platforms make you clairvoyant ..." p. 129.

"...this time next year [Karen] would be Karen Forrestier, living in a house she had not seen yet ... she saw herself familiar with their new hall door, staircase, and firesides, picturing times of day in the future house, making tomorrow fatten thin today." p. 132

"... since the day she had walked away from Victoria, her thoughts had bent strongly to whatever in marriage stays unmapped and dark ... she had now to look for Max in Ray." p. 133

"Before? Before? Whom with? He had been a man for years, and Boulogne had been here always. With Naomi...? She did not picture any exact other woman; it was his whole experience that stood over her ... this is the worst of love, this unmeant

mystification ... jealousy is no more than feeling alone against smiling enemies ... " p. 149

"'I cannot live in a love affair, I am busy and grasping. I am not English; you know I have no humour to cushion myself with; I am nervous the whole time. I could not endure being always conscious of anyone. Naomi is like furniture or the dark. I should pity myself if I did not marry her." p. 159

"You feel most foreign when you no longer belong where you did ..." p. 172

"'I thought you felt as I did, that this finished the past but did not touch the future. Being here does not seem to belong to now, it belongs to the year in Paris when I used to want you so much even to look at me. If I had not felt this was something that should have happened long ago, and that belonged to when it should have been, if I had not known you loved her and felt she was the now, I should never have come...'" Karen to Max, p.176.

"...[Naomi's] eyes snatch at me and she cannot do things calmly ... her love of me is love of her own pain. Her mother watches her watching [me], and misses nothing. I cannot live with them both.'" Max to Karen, p.179.

"When Max spoke of marriage, no child of theirs had been present. What he wants is that I should be tender to him, know him and not go away ... his life will stay his life, as it was before. Leopold belongs to when I thought of Max going, when I thought I must stay alone." p. 185

"This was like being a dog in a house in which they are packing up quietly, or a sick man from whom it is kept that he is going to die. If a silence rears its head, it is struck down like a snake, but with a light smile, as though you had struck the head off a grass." p. 190

"...in these weeks since the telegram [Mrs. Michaelis] had, as a mother, risen to her full height, wrapping Karen up in gentleness and in a comprehension that sometimes came too close." p. 197

"[Miss Fisher] ... did not, even to Henrietta, look foolish, as women disregarded so often do ... her body moved itself - till, all at once, the glance she cast round the salon seemed to be torn from her." p. 213

"Henrietta had not realized till this moment that two races, in feeling, go to make up the world, or how nonplussing it is when both meet in a room ... If I had cried when [Leopold] upset my dispatch case, he would have liked me much better, she thought." p 214

"[Leopold] is weeping because he is not going to England; his mother is not coming to take him there. He is weeping because he has been adopted; he is weeping because he has got nowhere to go. He is weeping because this is the end of imagination -

imagination fails when there is no now. Disappointment tears the bearable film off life." p. 219

"'I have lived among sheep, they have been my life ... do you think I could not have struck the faces I saw then?'" Madame Fisher to Leopold, p. 229

"By being not well in mind ... Karen had done him one good turn - drained him into herself, so that nothing in him resounding or fluid was left, no nerves left and no blood, so that when he had had to come here, as he saw he had had to come here, he came as brittle and dry as dried cuttlefish." p. 238

"Feverishly, [Karen] simulated the married peace women seemed to inherit, wanting most of all to live like her mother. In nothing spoken did [Ray] and she disagree. She could not do enough for him ... Their life in London, their house in the country, their travels, were pictures with each detail deliberate and intense; their peace was a work of art." p. 245

"...the taxi ground into motion and moved off; they left [Miss Fisher] standing there, staring out at the patch of dark where they had been." p. 261

"The station is sounding, resounding, full of steam caught on light and arches of dark air: a temple to the intention to go somewhere. Sustained sound in the shell of stone and steel, racket and running, impatience and purpose, make the soul stand still like a refugee, clutching all it has got, asking 'I am where?'" p. 267

Topics for Discussion

Contrast the characters, intentions, and actions of the book's various mothers, both biological (Madame Fisher, Karen, Mrs. Michaelis) and spiritual / figurative (Naomi Fisher, Henrietta's grandmother, Leopold's aunts, Karen's Aunt Violet).

Discuss the concept of the archetype. In what ways do the various portrayals of motherhood in the novel reflect the archetype of "the mother"?

In what ways does Madame Fisher's circumstances (illness, being unable to leave her room, the dark oppressiveness of that room - see Part 1, Chapter 4) reflect and/or manifest her character, her actions, and / or the consequences of both?

In what way does the use of Miss Fisher's first name (Naomi) in Section 2 reflect the novel's thematic focus on appearance vs. reality - or, more specifically, the idea that there is always more to a person's life than what they reveal?

Consider the image of "a tree growing out of a crack in a grave" as referred to in the book's final chapter. What feelings does this image evoke? What emotional state? What kind of actions and / or attitudes? What characters does the image suggest? What actions? What experiences?

How does Karen's story dramatize and / or illuminate the novel's four main themes?

In what ways are the characters and / or stories of Naomi Fisher and Karen Michaelis the same? In what ways are they the different? Consider their family circumstances and their reactions to those circumstances (specifically, their relationships to their mothers). Consider also their experiences with/reactions to their feelings, their relationships with the children in their lives, their actions when confronted with obstacles, etc. What is your perspective on which character (i.e., which choices, which perspectives, which attitudes) the novel presents as a kind of thematic ideal?

Consider each of the letters read throughout the narrative. In what ways do they function as described in "Objects/Places - Letters" ... that is, as triggers for expansion of the characters' experience of feeling?

Discuss how the stories of each of the book's named characters, even the minor ones (Yellow Hat, Aunt Violet, Uncle Bill) are reflections of its central theme relating to the necessity, value, and repercussions of living according to the dictates of passion and feeling.