

The Iron King Study Guide

The Iron King by Maurice Druon

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Plot Summary

The novel of "The Iron King" by Maurice Druon is the first in a cycle of seven books "The Accursed Kings" which chronicle the formation of the Nation state of France from the early Fourteenth Century onwards.

The tale of the "Iron King" concerns itself with the reign of King Philip IV (or Philip the Fair, known for his outstanding handsomeness). Philip the Fair was an autocratic ruler, a widower and the father of four children, Isabella, Louis, Philippe and Charles. Isabella is now, at the start of the book the Queen of England and has been locked into a loveless marriage with King Edward the Second. Philip the fair's three younger sons are all princes of the realm and married to the ladies of Burgundy; Beatrice, Jeanne, and Blanche.

The novel starts with the Chevalier Robert of Artois plotting with Queen Isabella to bring down the princesses of France. Having recently discovered that they are adulterous, he realizes that he can use this fact to bring down their family of Burgundy and the real object of his hatred — their mother Mahaut and his own Aunt. He desires this because Mahaut received lands as a dowry for marrying into the royal family, and he wishes to regain the lands of Burgundy and everything that his family had lost. Robert Artois manipulates Queen Isabella into a plot which will uncover the Princesses and demand the King of France takes action against them.

Meanwhile, Philip the Fair has also just completed his persecution of the Knight's Templar order; claiming that they are heretics and seizing from them their vast supplies of gold and holy artifacts from the Holy Lands of Jerusalem and the Middle East. As the last Grand Master of the Order, Jacques du Molay, dies he utters a curse that will fall upon the French Kingdom throughout the rest of this book and the later six novels.

The rest of the book concerns itself with the plot of Artois and the threat of the curse working itself out; as first one, then another character is poisoned, assassinated or seemingly dies of natural causes. The Kingdom of France is brought to near ruin and saved only by the Lombard Bankers (the leading families of Siennese merchants and gold speculators) who hold the fate of France in their grasp.



Part 1, A Curse; Chapter's 1-3

Part 1, A Curse; Chapter's 1-3 Summary and Analysis

The novel of 'The Iron King' by Maurice Druon begins in the year 1307, and is set in the kingdoms of Early Medieval France and England. The novel concerns itself with the loves, lives and politicking of one of the first 'Capetian' ruling families (King Philip the Fourth, otherwise known as Philip the Fair). King Philip brought about the changes that turned France from a feudal kingdom into the model of one of the first Nation States of Europe. Previous to this the Kingdoms of England, Germania, Normandy, even as far as Spain and Turkey were all divisively ruled by interior barons, dukes and lesser nobles with the sole 'super-power' being that of the Holy Roman Church and the Papacy. During the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries we saw the different monarchs, emperors and regents trying to consolidate their power into their own hands and create unified realms. This story now concerns itself with how the love affairs and the vendettas of the ruling families of proto-France changed world history.

The novel starts with the chapter 'The Loveless Queen' in which we see Queen Isabella, married to King Edward the Second mourning the fact that her husband does not seem to have any interest in her at all. Instead, he is rather more interested in masonry, buildings, and perhaps is taking other lovers. Queen Isabella bemoans these facts to her cousin Robert of Artois, who himself has newly come to England to beseech his cousin on two matters. The first matter is that the Queen's own sister's in law (her brothers being the princes of France) are having numerous affairs, and Robert de Artois has found them out. He fears that scandal will fall on Queen Isabella's father (King Philip the Fair, monarch of France), and that the Princes will each be shamed. Into this scheme he also wishes that the unchaste wives and their family be punished, as it is their family which stole from Robert of Artois his inherited lands and title.

The Queen agrees to help her cousin, agreeing to send three gold purses to her sister's-in-law, on the chance that they would in turn secretly give these gifts to their lovers, and Robert will be in France to discover who these young men are. Robert masterminds this plan, and for a moment realizes that he is falling in love with Queen Isabella's beauty and wisdom. He also presses their intimate moment to his advantage, asking the Queen to speak out on the behalf of the Knights Templar who are even now held under guard by King Philip...

In the next chapter; 'The Prisoner's in the Temple' the narrative switches to Jacques du Molay, the Grand Master of the Order of the Knights Templar, who has been imprisoned and tortured for seven years after refusing King Philip admittance to the Order or lending the regent any of the Templar's prodigious wealth. Molay is now a feeble, emaciated figure who has confessed to fictitious charges under torture and is now fearing for the loss of his own mind. He reflects how powerful he once was; leading crusades to retake Jerusalem and building the citadel at Cyprus - and now is a prisoner inside his own Temple. Unexpectedly he is taken out into the courtyard, where he finds



the other leading figures of the Templar accused by his side, surrounded by archers. He is told that a judgement has been decided and that the prisoners are about to be taken to the steps of Notre Dame for their hearing.

The third chapter; 'The Royal Daughter's in Law' begins with the process of King Philip as he makes his way through the crowded markets of Paris, unknown to most save for his guards who are walking beside him. He is almost knocked over by a Spanish apprentice, who first wants to curse him before realizing who he had just bumped into. King Philip makes his way to his new construction the Mercer's Hall and there glides towards his daughter's-in-law Blanche, Jeanne and Marguerite. He finds them talking to three young courtiers and who seem embarrassed by his sudden arrival, with Blanche quickly teasing the King that she was merely wishing that their husbands could be home more often. After he has gone it becomes clear that the courtiers are in fact the lovers of two of the adulterous princesses, each of which are now terrified that the King suspects them of their actions.



Part 1, A Curse; Chapter's 4-6

Part 1, A Curse; Chapter's 4-6 Summary and Analysis

In the next three chapters of Part One, we see the sentence being passed on the Grand Master of the Templars, the impact this has in the high courts of King Philip the Fair, and also the ongoing adultery of Queen Marguerite (King Philip's daughter-in-law).

At the steps of Notre Dame, the Grand Master Jacques de Molay plus three other senior members of the Templar Order in France are brought before a team of Cardinal Legates (supreme judges of the Papacy), the Archbishop of France, and the Grand Inquisitor of France. In front of the gathered spectators, a crowd of monks and a contingent of guards the Archbishop reads the accusations (that the Templars routinely practiced acts of blasphemy, heresy and perversion). The sentence is read and the verdict is that they Templar Knights are to be spared execution; they are to be imprisoned for life rather than executed. Although this appears to be a reprieve (of sorts), Molay suddenly objects, saying that the charges are false and that the confessions were made through torture. Objections, anger and fights break out in the crowds as the general populous take the sides of the bedraggled and tortured old Knights, and the cardinal Legates are called to make the 'final' judgement issued by the Pope (the supreme authority of the Church in Europe).

As the fights get worse, the Cardinal Legates grow scared, and instead remand the final decision to the King of France, cleansing their hands of the situation. As a riot breaks out, the prisoners are escorted back by the guards to their jails and the officials flee into Notre Dame.

In Chapter 5, "Marguerite of Burgundy..." the narrative switches to the young princess (called a Queen because of her marriage to one of King Philip's three sons), we see Marguerite in her demesne the Hotel-de-Nesle being entertained by a new lady in waiting, Madame de Comminges. Coming to see her is the equerry (courtier-messenger) Philippe d'Aunay, who is also her lover. Philippe is angry that Marguerite has not sent for him, and is surprised when she sees that Marguerite now has a new purse of gold thread. Thinking that it has been given to her by another lover, Marguerite teases Philippe by carrying on this ruse; not letting the young courtier know that it was in fact Queen Isabella of England that sent her and her sister's the purses. Marguerite considers how needy and frustrated her lover is becoming, and also wonders if she can trust her new Lady in waiting, Madame Comminges. When Philippe reveals that Marguerite's husband has been called to an extended council because of this issue with the Templars, the princess Queen of Navarre decides that they will take advantage of their scant time together and arranges a meeting for that very evening.

In Chapter Six, "What Happened at the King's Council," we see that the King of France, King Philip the Fair is trying to hold a court about what to do with the Templar Knights. At the council, alongside two of his children is Charles of Valois and Guillaume de



Nogaret. Valois is the King's brother and the pretender to the throne of Constantinople (Turkey), who opposes the idea that the Templar Knights should be persecuted, instead crying that they should abandon politics and judiciaries entirely, quoting King Philip's 'love affair with the middle classes.' Nogaret on the other hand, Secretary-General of France announces that they have to try and destroy the Templar Knight's once and for all. King Philip's sons appear to be next to useless as they are spoilt and offer only inanities. Distractedly, King Philip announces that he will have the Templar Knight's burnt at the stake.



Part 1, A Curse; Chapter's 7-9

Part 1, A Curse; Chapter's 7-9 Summary and Analysis

The last three chapters in Part I complete the basic plot for the entire book; and sets up the stream of events that occupy the rest of the narrative.

Chapter Seven, "The Tower of Love," sees the young equerry-courtiers Philippe of Aunay and Gautier (his brother) traveling across the Seine river on a boat poled by an old man. Whilst almost everyone else is attending 'the Island of the Jews' to see the burning of the Templar Knights, the two brothers are secretly making their way to the Hotel-de-Nesle to see the Princess-Queen's Marguerite and Blanche. Their boatman cackles and asks them what they are doing, but the two brothers palm him off with excuses, confident that they are being surreptitious in their amorous adventures. When they get to the island they find that the Hotel is empty apart from the princesses (who have sent everyone else away), and there they receive their lovers happily. Playing games, the two Princess-Queen's give to Philippe and Gautier two matching gold purses (the same ones that Queen Isabella sent them from England) as a sign of their pleasure, before Philippe notices out of the window the clouds of smoke rising from the Island of the Jews.

Chapter Eight continues the story but from the other side of the river, as King Philip of France attends the execution of the Templar Knights. A great crowd has assembled, including his son Louis, Nogaret his chief Secretary and Charles of Valois. They watch as the Templar Knights are engulfed in flames and the crowd reacts lustily to the obscene act of violence. Louis, one of the Princes of the realm laughs childishly whilst his father, annoyed, tells him to be quiet and looks on in characteristic detachment. Suddenly, as they are watching the last Templar to burn, Jacques de Molar calls out from his funeral pyre that he calls down a curse upon the Kings of France, and that before the year is out they will be destroyed. The crowd falls into turmoil at this, thinking that perhaps the people of France have committed a great wrong. King Philip however, merely states that he should have had their tongues pulled out before executing them and walks away.

In the final Chapter of Part 1; "The Cut-throats," we see the brother's Aunay leaving the Tower of Nesle as the burning also ends across from them further down river. They are happy and appear victorious in their conquests, until unexpectedly they discover that the ferryman has vanished and they are set upon by a band of armed thugs. The brother's Aunay are about to be mugged when, emerging into their midst is Robert of Artois, who beats back their attackers and appears drunk. He sees that the brother's Aunay are carrying the rich gold purses sent by Isabella and congratulates them on having successfully beaten off their attackers, loudly declaring that he has guessed that they are on a mission of lust that night. Artois tells them that he wouldn't tell a soul and jokes with them, before leaving.



When the brother's Aunay have left the Hotel-de-Nesle, Artois meets up with his band of muggers and pays them for their stunt, telling himself that he now knows who the adulterer's are and he shall bring down the Princess-Queen's with the help of Queen Isabella.



Part 2, The Adulterous Princesses; Chapter's 1-3

Part 2, The Adulterous Princesses; Chapter's 1-3 Summary and Analysis

Part Two of "The Iron King" begins by introducing two of the pivotal players in the book; Spinello and his young nephew Gucci of the Tolomei Lombard bank.

Spinello Tolomei is bartering a contract with Jean de Marigney, one of the officials at court for the sale of a large part of the Templar Gold out-of-the country. This will increase his personal wealth, and also add to the coffers of the Lombard Bankers. Upon a successful negotiation, the aging banker is informed that Robert of Artois would like to see him, to arrange for further credit. It is soon revealed that Artois has been long in debt to the Lombard Bankers with his continual court cases against his aunt Mahaut (for having taken his ancestral home when the King agreed to the marriage of his sons to Mahaut's daughters). Whilst Spinello is wary of extending any greater credit to the brash Artois, Robert has another mission which he wishes to entrust to the bank: to take a secret message to the court of Queen Isabella in England, bearing with it the news that he has found out who the adulterous lovers of the Princess-Queen's are, and with it he sends the iron ring that is his personal sign. This task Spinello entrusts to his nephew, Gucci Baglioni, who immediately warms to the task as he thinks of the intrigue, the adventure and the romance of being able to meet a sovereign queen.

In Chapter Two, "The Road to London" our narrative follows Gucci as he makes his way from France to the coast at Calais. As he makes his crossing of the English channel their boat is beset by storms and gales, and Gucci fears for his life, praying to all of the saints of his favored churches that if he survives this then he swears that he will never leave London or England again. He arrives in one piece, but to find that London and England is not much to his liking. London itself, with its thatched hovels and crowded streets seems to him far removed from the marble splendors of his native Siena and Paris. However, he is bolstered by his indomitable belief that he will seduce the Queen of England.

In Chapter Three "At Westminster" we follow the young Lombard Banker as he makes his way to the palace of Westminster to find it a solemn and fierce place; the guards are surly and treat him roughly, and when he finally sees the Queen, Isabella seems to pay him no more mind than she would any other servant. Gucci performs his duty, showing her a case of jewels that she might like to buy, and as he does so also shows her Robert's note and Robert's iron ring. The Queen nods at this, and sends him away; crushing his hopes and dreams.



Part 2, The Adulterous Princesses; Chapter's 4-6

Part 2, The Adulterous Princesses; Chapter's 4-6 Summary and Analysis

Chapter's Four to Six of Part Two concerns themselves, mostly with the adventures and character of Gucci Baglioni as he makes his way back from England and to his master, Spinello Tolomei the Lombard Banker.

The first Chapter, "The Debt" sees Gucci visiting the family of Cressay who are currently in ruinous circumstances; their gentleman Lord of Cressay having died and leaving his wife, sons and daughter behind to face his debts. As he travels to Cressay, Gucci re-imagines himself not as the lover of a Queen but instead the role of an implacable Lombard banker, sent to bring destitution to a family. When he gets there however, he finds that the Provost (or sheriff) of the land has already had a similar idea and is even then leading off the cattle and arguing with Dame Cressay that her manor house and all of its belongs are now owned by himself. Gucci is put out by his role being usurped, but soon changes his attitudes when he meets the beautiful young daughter Marie. He intervenes on the behalf of his debtors, showing that the Provost was setting the value of their debt far too high, and that he was a banker come to remedy the fact.

In the second chapter, whilst Gucci's eyes are turned towards the daughter, Dame Cressay seeks to enthrall him herself, seeing a way out of her present predicament. She persuades him to stay the night and orders a feast made (as much as they are able, anyway), and agrees with Gucci that she should only pay half of their debt and that they should have their credit extended. The second chapter sees the changeable Gucci fall head over heels for Marie, and dance almost completely to the Dame's tune as he leaves the Cressay household to report back to Spinello of the extortionate practices of the Provost of that area.

The final Chapter of this section, Chapter Six or "The Road to Clermont" sees Queen Isabella arriving in France with her retinue on a mission to visit her father, King Philip the Fair. Riding to meet them is Robert of Artois and the Brother's Aunay, amongst hundreds of other courtiers, nobles and servants. When Artois gets a chance to talk to Isabella, she quietly reveals that she is here to talk to her father about the actions of the Princess-Queen's adulteries, and inwardly again marvels at her own depth of passion for the manly Robert of Artois. Artois calls the Brothers Aunay to present themselves to Queen Isabella on a ruse that they 'have been noticed' and, flushed with pride they proudly present themselves, still bearing the gold purses that Queen Isabella herself secretly gave the Princess-Queen's.



Part 2, The Adulterous Princesses; Chapter's 7-8

Part 2, The Adulterous Princesses; Chapter's 7-8 Summary and Analysis

Chapter Seven "Like Father, Like Daughter..." of Part two sees Queen Isabella talking to her father the King of France, Philip the Fair. They are ensconced in his private rooms at the Castle of Maubuisson; a secluded castle in France that the King seemingly loves for its quite and tranquility. Here, Queen Isabella tells her father that she is unhappy in love, and that her brothers have married unworthy women. The King at first pays no attention to Queen Isabella's own emotional affairs, as he believes that;

"'I did not marry you to a man,' he said, 'but to a King. I did not sacrifice you by mistake.'"

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On the other charge however, King Philip is greatly angered. He hears about the golden purses, and that they could only have come to the Brother's Aunay but from Marguerite's and Blanche's own hands. He gets up immediately and takes Isabella with him to the Princess-Queen's chambers, where they are busy playing with marionettes (puppets). This particular play had been banned by the King for its seditious comments, but the Princess-Queen's seem to enjoy retelling it to each other.

The King asks them if they are well, and where are the golden purses that his daughter gave to them. They instantly pale, knowing that they have been discovered, especially as the King orders the brother's Aunay to be brought to him, and upon their belts are the golden purses. Tired and angry, the King orders that the Brother's Aunay are immediately imprisoned and a house guard be placed upon the Princess-Queens.

In Chapter Eight; "Mahaut of Burgundy" we see Robert of Artois and his faithful servant Lormet traveling immediately to his ancestral home of Artois, which was given to his aunt because of her favour through her daughters. Although he is triumphant, he arrives like he is the bearer of bad news; that their whole family has been brought into ruin by the actions of his nieces as he tells his aunt what the King has done with Blanche, Marguerite and Jeanne. His aunt at first shocked and suspicious of Robert (who has long been trying to take her to court for his lands back), but when she hears of what her daughters have done fully realizes their error and decides to travel to the King's Palaces herself in order to petition the King for mercy. Just as they are about to leave, Mahaut of Burgundy brings forth her lady in waiting Beatrice d'Hirson to attend her on the journey; the effect that the sulky-looking Beatrice has on Robert is immediate, as he realized that he wants her and instantly falls into an attraction for the servant.



Part 2, The Adulterous Princesses; Chapter's 9-10

Part 2, The Adulterous Princesses; Chapter's 9-10 Summary and Analysis

Chapter's Nine and Ten of Part Two, "The Adulterous Princesses" sees the council being called and the judgement passed on the Brother's Aunay, Marguerite, Blanche and Jeanne.

In "The Blood Royal" the narrative begins by following the actions of Nogaret the Secretary General of France, as he tortures the Brother's Aunay. Rather horrendously and graphically, the two Brothers are carefully dismantled by Nogaret and his team of torturers until the two men can no longer stand or speak. Nogaret then leaves the dungeons and travels to the King's audience chamber where he is conducting a council meeting with his sons, Isabella and Valois. Here, Nogaret tells the king the entire confessions of the two equerries, including every detail, moment, meeting and assignation, before leaving.

The King asks his sons what they would have him do, to which the eldest and the most impetuous, Louis, replies that they should all be put to death. The youngest son, Charles, appears shocked and emotional and unable to make a decision whilst only the middle son, Phillippe (who was married to Jeanne) says that he has decided to not let his wife go; that she comes with her name title and land. Valois speaks up that this is all madness, that if they had not destroyed the Templar knights then Chivalry would still be alive in the country, and such a thing would not happen.

The King however, sees that almost all of his sons are useless (save the middle son), and asks his daughter Isabella what he should do. She states that no heir should come from the Princesses (as Louis already has a son). The King then retires to make his own personal judgement on the case.

In Chapter Ten 'The Judgement' we see Robert and Mahaut arrive for the judgement upon the daughters, and finds them with shaven heads and held under guard in the main halls of the palace. Here the King, through Nogaret announces that the Marguerite and Blanche will be imprisoned in a convent for life, whilst Jeanne (who did not take a lover) will only be imprisoned for as long as her husband or the king decides. The Aunay brothers will have their limbs crushed and hung. At the final moment, when Charles is about to tenderly ask his wife why she did it, Marguerite verbally attacks Queen Isabella, stating that her husband the King of England prefers men to her company, and that she will never know love in all of her life.



Part 2, The Adulterous Princesses; Chapter's 11-12

Part 2, The Adulterous Princesses; Chapter's 11-12 Summary and Analysis

The final chapters of Part Two sees further calamity fall upon the reign of King Philip the Fair, as disastrous news is brought to the court on the very day after his daughter's in law are imprisoned for adultery.

The first chapter in the part, "The Palace of Martrei" records the events of the execution of the brothers Aunay, again in gruesome detail. The Aunay brothers are executed before the crowds of Pontoise while their lovers are forced to watch from cart, dressed in black.. The people of the crowd seem to find the event festive as they joke with their lecherous husbands or are whipped into hysteria by the occasion. Only Jeanne still cries her innocence before she too is taken away. The final scene of Chapter Eleven at the execution sees the beautiful Beatrice d'Hirson strangely approaching the chief executioner and asking for the tongue of one of the hanged men. The executioner knows that this is an old folk remedy but thinks that it also appears to be an act of witchcraft, but says nothing as he cuts out the tongue of one of the brothers and hands it to Beatrice.

In Chapter Twelve, the next day sees a sombre court as no one except the most trusted ministers and closest family are allowed to attend to the King. Robert of Artois is surprised when he is also invited to breakfast with this small circle, and sees it as a sign that favor is now being placed within his hands rather than his Aunt Mahaut's. Here the King calls for his grandson, the son of Queen Isabella and possible future monarch of England. He wonders whether his grandson will turn out to be a strong king (which would be worse for France) or a weak one (which would be an insult to his family, but good for France).

In a private audience the King wonders with his top counselors what he should do, that Louis will have to be freed from his marriage to his wife by having the marriage annulled by the Pope; and knowing too that this would mean a special dispensation being granted, as adultery does not normally allow an annulment of marriage. King Philip immediately decides that he will have to send his minister to the Pope just as a messenger arrives to the court; that Pope Clement, the only French Pope and the pawn of King Philip the Fair, has suddenly died.

King Philip wonders if this is a further effect of the curse of the Templar Knight's, as the Grand Master Jacques du Molay had said that his whole line will be accursed before the year is out.



Part 3, The Hand of God; Chapter's 1-3

Part 3, The Hand of God; Chapter's 1-3 Summary and Analysis

The first three chapters of Part Three; "The Hand of God" begins with Chapter One "The Rue des Bourdonnais" in which we see Beatrice d'Hirson, the Lady in Waiting to the Mahaut, visiting the street of the candle makers. Here we discover that this famous street is well known for its physicians, doctors and crafts people - and also for acts of alchemy.

Beatrice goes to a particular shop that she knows well, which we see is a candle maker's shop. Here she meets the disfigured and disabled Everard; an ex Templar Knight who was taken in by the candle maker to work in the back rooms. Beatrice encourages him to join her in her vendetta against the Secretary General Nogaret who killed her mistresses daughters. She offers up the dried remnants of the tongue of the Brother Aunay (which she had brought from the executioner at the gallows), also with powdered mercury. They both know that Nogaret buys his special candles from this shop, and Beatrice asks Everard to impregnate them with this poison.

In the next chapter, "The Tribunal of The Shadows" Beatrices' plan bears slow fruit as she waits for Nogaret to eventually use the poisoned candles. He does so in his fashion; that of working late into the night hunched over his table and the next day starts to feel ill. Whilst attending a council with the king, Nogaret's condition deteriorates. The council is about how to push the election of the next Pope into France's favour, and we discover that the rest of the Bishopric of the European World want the Papacy to return to the Vatican, and not be seated in France. This is completely unacceptable for King Philip the Fair, who sees that if he can control the Papacy as he did done with the previous incumbent (Pope Clement), then he can control his subjects and the treasuries of the church that much better. Unfortunately this plan can not be brought to fruition as Nogaret suddenly falls violently ill and is taken to his quarters. He dies a few days later, to the complete surprise of the court around him.

In the third chapter of Part Three; "The Documents of a Reign" we see how Nogaret's death has left a bureaucratic hole in the heart of King Philip's reign. Philip the Fair is with his chief clerk poring over all of the documents that Nogaret had kept, deciding which ones would have to be destroyed and which ones could be safely passed on to Nogaret's successor. During this clandestine meeting, the King has a strange epiphany as he reads of all of the hundreds and thousands of tortures and people that he has put to death in the name of his reign. He also reads the accounts and reports of his people who have spoken out against him and he wonders, not for the last time - what his final legacy will be: as a great King, or merely an autocratic tyrant ('The Iron King') who favored taxes over all else. His aide tries to assure him that this will not be the case, as he has effectively unified the Nation-State of France, and has removed the authority of the Papacy from the monarchy, and also succeeded in creating the 'bourgeoisie du rois'

(or the 'prestige of the King;' the middle classes) a section of society who were able to free themselves from bondage and and not be the serfs to any particular lord other than the king himself. Suitably comforted, King Philip the Fair continues with his task.



Part 3, The Hand of God; Chapter's 4-5

Part 3, The Hand of God; Chapter's 4-5 Summary and Analysis

Chapter Four, 'The King's Summer' continues the mood previously described, of King Philip the Fair loosing his surety of authority. The writer reveals in Chapter Four how, during the summer following Nogaret's death the king took to journeying to his summer residences (his 'escapes') in a seeming quest for peace of mind, but could find none. He is constantly beset by problems of state, in particular the problems with the treasury and the question of Flanders.

In Chapter Four it is revealed that the Kingdom of France is involved in a decades long rivalry with the province of Flanders, who refuse to join the young Nation_state and periodically are either occupied or emerge into open revolt. The constant war with Flanders has cost the Treasury dearly, and the King realizes that they will need to overcome this province finally, in order to gain from them their wealth and treasuries (thus bolstering the fledgling Nation-State's own finances). The King organizes a People's Assembly - the first to be held on matters of finance, in which his orators state that, since the middle classes have been borne (the bourgeoisie du rois) there are now more mouths to feed, more general wealth in the country but that this demand more harvests and more grains. They will need to annexe Flanders once more to gain control of their fertile lands.

The King's officers win the debate thanks to the manipulation of the crowds, but realize that they will have to finance their military campaign somehow. Having persecuted the Jews for centuries, they see that they cannot any more squeeze them for money. Instead their attention turns towards the fabulously wealthy Lombard bankers.

In Chapter Five, Power and Money, Spinello Tolomei holds his own council of the Lombard-Bankers and reveals the king's wishes; that he will persecute them as he did the Templar Knights in order to seize their wealth for the capture of Flanders. They discuss what to do about this, and all, to a man decide that they would rather leave the country of France with their gold than be subject to such outrage. Tolomei has another plan however, remembering that he has a parchment from the King's own chief officers sanctioning the embezzlement of Templar gold for personal gain. He convinces the Lombards that they should offer to make a fantastic loan to the king for his war effort, whilst holding the threat of this scandal over the monarchies head at the same time. To this end he sends his nephew Gucci, with the original contract concerning the Templar gold along with a thousand gold francs into hiding, lest he need him at a later time. Then Tolomei visits the Coadjutor de Marigney (one of the senior officials in the realm) and reveals that he has evidence of corruption that the Archbishop of France might like to see, if the Lombards were to be attacked.



Part 3, The Hand of God; Chapter's 6-7

Part 3, The Hand of God; Chapter's 6-7 Summary and Analysis

In the middle chapters of Part Three; "The Hand of God" we see the Lombard Bankers scabbling to gain control over the monarchy, and Tolomei's plans bearing fruit.

Chapter Six 'Tolomei Wins' sees the elderly Lombard Banker awakened in the middle of the night by a procession of guards and the Archbishop Marigney. Fearing the worst, Tolomei hurriedly dresses and attempts to appear calm as the Archbishop enters his home.

Here, in a private meeting the Archbishop challenges the Lombard Banker why he has been threatening the monarchy and Tolomei reveals that he still has the signed contract that reveals that Archbishop Marigney embezzled Templar gold for his own profit. The Archbishop at first pleads with Tolomei, trying to convince him that the monarchy has no intention of persecuting the Lombards, and then offers to Tolomei that if he hands over the contract Tolomei himself will be spared. When even this attempt fails the Archbishop grows angry and decides to ransack the banker's rooms, telling his guards to stand watch over the Lombard-Banker. Safe in his knowledge that nothing will be found, Tolomei states how he has sent the contract away into safe hands, and it will only be revealed if the court refuses the Lombards offer of the prodigious loan. The Archbishop leaves angrily.

Later that Chapter, the Archbishop Marigney informs the Coadjutor of what has transpired, who is furious with the man and swears that he should never have had the man appointed Archbishop in the first place. Marigney merely states that he was the only one who was able to support France's own claim for the Papacy and thus it had to have happened the way it did.

Elsewhere, in Chapter Seven; "Gucci's Secret's" we find the young banker Gucci Baglioni travelling to his secret hideaway of Cressay, where he stays with the family that he saved from destitution. Here he conducts a secret love affair with the girl Marie (whom he is falling in love with), under the very nose of the Dame Cressay, her mother, whom herself has affections for the young banker. Here Gucci feels at last that he has a noble purpose and conspires with Marie to hide the contract and the gold in the ruined chapel of Cressay.



Part 3, The Hand of God; Chapter's 8-9

Part 3, The Hand of God; Chapter's 8-9 Summary and Analysis

The last two chapters of the novel of "The Iron King" by Maurice Druon see the novel resolve itself as 'the curse' finds its way to King Philip the Fair himself.

Chapter Eight; "The Meet at Pont-Sainte-Maxence" begins with showing the reader that the King is on a hunt while attending one of his 'country escapes'. He has recently been going off to his quieter palaces and lodges more often, and now the summer has faded to early autumn again finds himself preoccupied, troubled, and trying to regain some peace of mind by hunting alone. He is chasing a stag through the woods with his dog, and seemingly loses the scent when he comes across a small crofter's hut; belonging to a simple man known as Andre of the Woods. Andre the woodcutter recognizes the wealthy hunter and tells him where he saw the stag fleeing into the copse, and King Philip is moved to ask him whether Andre of the Woods is a happy man. The peasant reveals that he has never been happy, as the King's own creation of the 'middle classes' had allowed him to buy his way out of his serfdom and establish himself as a woodcutter on his own land. Grateful for the support as much as for the hunting advice, the king gives to Andre his silver hunting horn before moving on to capture the stag.

Disaster strikes as the king appears to see visions of the cross before him as he suffers a brain hemorrhage before he can kill the stag, and his semi-conscious body is found by his retinue a few moments later.

In the final chapter; "The Great Shadow over the Kingdom" we see that the King has started acting strangely, constantly thirsty, complaining of seeing people who are no longer there, and losing the power of movement in his limbs. His condition gradually worsens and the rest of the court believes that it is the effect of the Templar curse taking its toll on the French line of kings. King Philip the Fair eventually takes to his deathbed, where the Royal Inquisitor administers his last rites and oversees his final will and testament; he is so weak that he is almost forced into agreeing with whatever the closest around him urge him to do. The novel ends with the death of the Iron King, Philip the Fair of France, who died with his eyes open.



Characters

King Philip IV, the Fair

Philip the Fourth, also called Philip the Fair and 'The Iron King' is an autocratic tyrant of the early thirteenth century. This means to say that he rules his provinces of France totally, attempting to centralize all of the civic, religious, military and economic power into his own hands.

He is the father of Queen Isabella of England (whom he married to King Edward), and father to Louis of Navarre, Phillippe and Charles (who he married to the Mahaut's daughters of Burgundy) in an attempt to solidify the differing regions of France.

Philip the Fair is deemed to be one of the handsomest men in Europe, and this fact is contrasted with his ugly style of government: that of torture and persecution. He appears to be a very self-controlled man, always choosing reason over emotion, expediency over passion. These character traits make him unapproachable to most of his inner court, and through the course of the narrative Philip the Fair has to learn what it means to fail before he is finally able to unleash his emotions.

Isabella, Queen of England

Queen Isabella, Queen of England and wife to King Edward is the eldest child and only daughter of Philip the Fair of Spain. She was married to a king in an effort to cement relations between the two warring nations, but is deeply unhappy with her new life there. She has one child, Edward the Third, but hopes of any future heirs are slim as it appears that her husband cares little for her affections.

A deeply unhappy and frustrated woman, Isabella still strives to do her duty to her people and above all her family, even though she herself feels slighted at every turn by the English court. She becomes involved in a plot to unseat the Princess daughters of Mahaut with Robert du Artois when she hears of their unfaithfulness to her brothers. The Queen Isabella represents, perhaps, the son that King Philip should have had as she is regal and capable of making harsh decisions which are tempered by her own emotions. She appears to act vengefully towards the accused in the novel, perhaps acting out her own frustrations, resentments and despair at not being able to find love in her own life.

Edward II, King of England

Edward the Second, King of England is husband to Queen Isabella of France, and leader of the fierce little nation of England and Wales (before it incorporated Scotland and Northern Ireland, becoming the 'United Kingdoms').



Edward appears seldom in the book of "The Iron King", but his lack of presence itself becomes a powerful motivator for the Queen as it also is reminiscent of his lack of attraction, care or attention for her. He is shown to be a jovial, good natured man who takes more care with his peers, soldiers and courtiers than he does his own family or even his own wife.

Robert III of Artois

Robert the Third of Artois is a giant of man, who once could have ruled the province of Burgundy in France, were it not for this region being granted to his aunt Mahaut for the hands of her daughters to the Princes of the realm. Robert Artois spends the rest of his life trying to correct this 'mistake' and seethes with anger towards his more distant relations.

An intensely passionate man, Artois barely seems able to contain his feelings as he explodes onto the stage of politics, showing his deviousness as well as his ruthlessness as he employs his cousin the Queen Isabella in his plots to bring down his Aunt and shatter the good faith the monarch has in her. Artois in this novel best exemplifies the theme of ambition, as he seems to know no bounds in his quest for vengeance, and who appears to be constantly scheming to get his own way.

Monseigneur Charles, Count of Valois

Monseigneur Charles, the Count of Valois is King Philip's younger brother, and also named variously the Emperor of Constantine and the Ruler of Jerusalem. His many titles are more honorific boasts than they are any real claim to power, as Valois seems fond of collecting bizarre claims through conquest, marriage or treaty to lands that he has no hope of conquering himself.

Valois stands in the book as one of the few characters who supports 'the Age of Chivalry' which for him is represented by the feudal laws common before the fourteenth century, the Knight's Templar and the romances of the Norman knights. Valois seems to believe that Philip the Fair's attempts to centralize power and persecute the Templar have lead to the death of Chivalry, of 'things being in their proper place'.

Monseigneur Louis, Count of Navarre

Louis, Count of Navarre, is King Philip's eldest issue and as the Prince-Regent, in line for the throne upon King Philip's death. However, Louis seems to have little direct powers of sovereignty and is almost totally unsuitable for the task of managing a kingdom. Through the course of the narrative his immaturity and his semi-psychotic behaviors are shown in the way he reacts to the gruesome executions (with delight and derision) and to the news of his own wife's adultery (passionately arguing for her to be put to the death). We can assume that Louis of Navarre, who pays little attention whilst



attending the meetings of the council is perhaps a spoiled young man who has never known war or hardship or the vagaries of political life.

Guillaume de Nogaret

Guillaume de Nogaret, Keeper of the Seals of the Kingdom, the Secretary-General of France and Chief Torturer is King Philip the Fair's right hand man in all things to do with state. He rules alongside King Philip almost as a ghost, whose precision and utter ruthlessness defends the throne from the King's enemies surer than many armies. Nogaret spreads fear about him wherever he goes, overseeing as he does the offices of the torturer's and judicial courts, and the task falls to him to ply from the Brother's Aunay their confession of adultery when the time comes to find a sentence for the Princess-Queens. Nogaret is, similar to King Philip, almost unemotional, in the way he obsessively collects facts, reports and figures of all of his dealings (reports and records which mostly have to be destroyed upon his death). It is only when he is attacked and removed from the affairs of state by a poison attempt that Nogaret finally begins to feel any remorse for what he has done, and the King himself feels some confusion and uncertainty over his actions.

Jacques De Molay, Grand Master of the Knights Templar

The Grand Master of the Knights Templar plays a small part in the book directly as a character (occupying only three chapters of Part One), but his words and his legend stretches across the rest of the novel of the Iron King like a haunting specter.

Jacques du Molay was a minor nobleman of no real great upbringing, until he joined the brotherhood of Knights and fought his way on many crusades to the very top of his order. At the time of his death he had overseen the attacks on the holy lands (Jerusalem and the middle east), as well as losing large provinces when he was unable to sustain the crusades so far overseas. Now an ageing man, we understand from the narrative that he has been in prison for seven years following Philip the Fair's seizure of the Templar treasuries for his own (Frances') benefit.

Molay is executed by Philip the Fair at the beginning of the book, and his curse upon the French Kings seems to stand like a promise and a threat for the rest of "The Iron King", as the story follows first the downfall of the Princess-Queen's, then Nogaret, the French Papacy and finally the King himself. He represents, for all intents and purposes, the theme of the lost age of Chivalry for the narrative.

Tolomei Spinello

Tolomei is the elderly Lombard Banker (originally from Sienna) who has lived and worked for the last thirty years in Paris; one of Europe's wealthiest capitals. Tolomei is



the head of the Tolomei Bank; which serves all of France and directly the rulers of the realm with loans, notes of credit and the powers to sell or trade good abroad.

Tolomei and his nephew Gucci Baglioni are both members of the Lombard Banking fraternity, or one of the first international groups of merchants, traders and speculators that originate from Sienna and travelled to different parts of Europe to set up a banking business. From Paris, Tolomei is one of the heads of the Lombard's in France and, as such enjoys a vast network of influence that contains many a noble's mistakes, loans, and debts.

Gucci Baglioni

Gucci Baglioni is Tolomei's nephew and apprentice in Paris at the Tolomei Bank where he is learning the art of the Lombard Banker. Gucci Baglioni is shown to be a highly impetuous young man, with various dreams of seducing Queen's or fighting evil tyrants, or being one of the most fearsome bankers of his times. He is used, unwittingly by Robert Artois as a messenger to the court of Queen Isabella to carry with him an iron ring and a message for the Queen (a mission he mistakes as gallant adventure, but is in fact one of sly vindictiveness). After this escapade Gucci finds a lover in the person of Marie Cressay, a lesser noblewoman from France, and Gucci imagines himself to be like a knight-errant. Gucci represents the warring ambitions and dreams of his age; perhaps exhibiting the confusion and loss of the 'Age of Chivalry' as he strives to find a role for himself.



Objects/Places

Paris

The city of Paris is itself the main location for most of the events of the novel of "The Iron King". Being as it is the nation's capital, it is here that King Philip holds his court through the majority of Part One and Part Two, and to here that he is trying to draw power (both economic and political). Paris is seen as one of the most impressive, cultured and well-established cities of the Early Medieval period, and is compared favorably with the other provinces of France, with England, Sienna and even the Vatican.

Notre Dame

The Cathedral at Notre Dame is one of the wonders of the modern world in the Fourteenth Century; and it is the most significant symbol of religious authority in France. At the time of this novel, the Papacy is operating out of France, and so the symbol of Notre Dame becomes conjoined with the symbol of France's religious power. It is also here that the Knight's Templar are brought to hear their judgement.

Hotel-de-Nesle

The Hotel-de-Nesle in Paris is set upon a spit of land that sticks out into the Seine river in the city, and is a location given to the Princess-Queen's during their years as the wives of the princes of the realm (King Philip the Fair's sons). The Princess-Queen's instead use this place to host their secret assignations with their lovers the Brother's Aunay.

Mercer's Hall

The Mercer's Hall was one of the wonders of King Philip's Paris, as a place where merchants, noblemen and any trader come come to sell their goods. It was, in many respects a temple to commerce and stands in contrast to Notre Dame. It is through this location that the writer examines the 'secular' nature of King Philip's reign (here that the King order's a People's Assembly) rather than the religious.

France

The Kingdom of France itself is the largest setting for all of the events in the book of "The Iron King" (although some adventures take place outside of its borders). It's many provinces are, at this time only barely melded together by the rule of King Philip, and



France at the moment can be seen as emerging from the Dark Ages and feudalism into becoming an established, almost secular Nation-State.

London

The city of London, in the country and Kingdom of England is encountered through the character of Queen Isabella (the daughter of King Philip, married off to Edward of England). Even though it is a far older city than Paris, London is shown to be far more rudimentary, with dirtier streets, mean houses and thick with smoggy smoke of the many people who live there. The young banker Gucci Baglioni considers it 'uncultured' when he travels here on a mission to give a secret note to the Queen of England from Robert of Artois.

The True Cross

The True Cross is one of the greatest treasures of the Knight's Templars, and is thought to be vast golden cross with a tiny piece of the 'real' cross of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It is seized by the Treasury of France when the Knight's are persecuted, and is later given to a monastery as the last dying wish of King Philip the Fair.

Everard's Candle

The candle of Everard, the ex-Templar Knight is commissioned by Beatrice d'Hirson, lady in waiting to Mahaut, to be made as a vehicle to poison the Secretary General of France, Guillame de Nogaret. The Candle has within it the dried up remains of the tongue of one of the brothers Aunay and a compound of mercury, and is delivered to Nogaret's offices where it's fumes eventually poison him.

The Gold Purses of Queen Isabella

The Gold purses of Queen Isabella are used in a ruse by the English Queen and her cousin Robert of Artois to entrap the lovers of the Princess-Queen's; Marguerite, Blanche and Jeanne. They are sent secretly by Queen Isabella to the three Princesses, who then give them to their lovers, are then used as a means to reveal that Marguerite and Blanche have been conducting affairs.

The Iron Ring of Robert Artois

The Iron Ring of Artois is sent by the nobleman in the safe keeping of the young banker Gucci Baglioni to the court of England to be shown to Queen Isabella alongside a secret note from Artois to the Queen. This ring is the sign that the note is authentic, and that its contents report the truth.



Themes

Ambition

Ambition is one of the underlying themes of the book, as it plays a large part in almost all of the characters that take a part in the events of the plot.

Ambition is examined obliquely through the actions of the central characters and the effects that their actions have on the world around them, so for example we see the Ambition of the Secretary General of France; Guillame de Nogaret's ambition to crush the Order of the Knight's Templar so he can seize their wealth and further destabilize the power of the Church in France. This ambition for Nogaret creates an almost missionary zeal as he drives his persecution of the Templar through in the beginning of the book; Part One. However as we see, ambition always has consequences; Nogaret's personal crusade divides the people against the King, and calls down 'the Curse' of Jacques du Molay.

We can theorize that the subject of ambition, for the author, always leads to struggle and indeed is the major cause of conflict in the book. This is notably seen in Robert of Artois' ambition to destroy his aunt Mahaut and her daughters (who are the Princess-Queen's married to King Philip's sons). In a bid to wreak vengeance, destroy his enemies and so regain his family lands Artois seeks to become once again one of the most powerful families in Europe who will seemingly stop at nothing to achieve his aims.

Ambition itself, is presented as a never-ending curse that afflicts those that possess it. Not content with merely unsettling or quietly dealing with the matter of the Princess-Queen's adulteries, Robert de Artois enlists the help of his cousin the Queen Isabella of England, and hires thugs to attack the lover's of the Princesses; actions that eventually lead to the schisms between England and France and the hundred years war. For the character of Guccio Baglioni, the nephew to the Lombard Banker Tolomei, his ambition drives him to dare to try and become the lover of the English Queen, Isabella.

Ambition is shown in almost all of the male figures of the book, and we can see it even in the edicts of Philip the Fair, King of France as he calmly claims for his own the riches of the Templar Knights and consolidates power to his own rule (away from the Papacy). King Philip appears to be twisted by his ambition, but not blinded by it as Robert of Artois is.

In general, we can understand that the writer is presenting a view of Medieval History that is very 'human.' The events of history (the formation of the French nation-state as a stable, autonomous body, away from the feudal baronies that existed before it), is above all seen as individual's acting on the behalf of their own ambitions, no matter what the consequences are. A rather unsettling fact that we are forced to consider, is that world events and historical narratives are not the result of historical trends of societal forces, but are rather the result of the ambitions, greed and desires of small numbers of



powerful people. It is this connection between the Individual and History that we can assume the author Druon wishes us most to understand.

Love

The theme of Love, and sometimes the lack thereof is a major motivating theme behind the events in "The Iron King" by Maurice Druon. This theme is predominantly exemplified through the characters of the Brother's Aunay and the Princess-Queen's Marguerite, Blanche and Jeanne, as well as through Queen Isabella, Gucci Baglioni and Robert of Artois.

The theme of Love takes many different forms; the Love of power, romantic love and of course, lust. Each of these characters symbolizes one of these aspects of Love, and their actions play out the dramas and conflicts associated with it. For example, the Princess-Queen's Marguerite, Blanche and Jeanne are unhappy in love. Their husbands are the young princes of the realm, the sons of King Philip who appear to be immature or too busy to spend much affection on them. This in turn leads them to turn their affections elsewhere to the Brother's Aunay; a pair of courtier equiries to the noble court. This 'love' is shown (particularly through Blanche and Marguerite) as more of a form of lust for adventure and freedom, which these two sisters find in the arms of the young noblemen, and is not really a form of romantic love at all. The author here is making the point that 'real' romantic involvement and honest of emotions was incredibly difficult at the times of Medieval, courtly France where marriages were made for land and power over affection. We can assume that these two sister's were never really in love with their husbands at all, and are using their sexual adventures more as an outlet for their frustrated sense of helplessness.

The sister of Jeanne on the the other hand is an exception to this idea. She is complicit in the affairs as she arranges and makes the appointments through which Marguerite and Blanche can meet the brother's Aunay, but she remains faithful to her own husband, and we can assume that there is a measure of affection (or perhaps an over measure of fear) in her relationship. For Jeanne as for Queen Isabella, romantic love is set in opposition to Power and Politics, both of whoms' feelings always must play a secondary role to what is the most politically expedient thing to do.

Queen Isabella in particular best describes the theme of romantic Love in the way that she is neglected by her husband King Edward, who appears to favor the people and his young courtiers far more than her advances. This is slowly killing Isabella's feelings of love and she becomes a waif-like, yearning figure similar to the 'princesses in the ivory tower's' straight out of fairytale. We can see in the way that she almost falls into attraction with Robert of Artois at the very beginning of the novel that she is desperately unfulfilled, and is almost willing to accept any man's affections. However, she pulls herself back from this brink in Chapter One, and so sets her character up in opposition to the lustful Marguerite and Blanche as the paragon of romantic love rather than selfish lust.



Love however, emerges in other forms in the book. The Love of power and vengeance is best described through Robert of Artois, who is blinded by his desire to bring down his aunt Mahaut and her daughter's the Princess-Queen's of France. Artois himself, we can judge, is as much blinded and tortured by his lust for ambition as Blanche and Marguerite are. In many ways, even though they are plotting against each other and are sworn enemies, Robert, Marguerite and Blanche all symbolize the same set of failings and inevitably have the same story arc: that they must face or overcome their own passions or be consumed by them when they get out of hand.

Interestingly, the lack of Love itself can be shown as a theme, particularly in the character of King Philip the Fair, ruler of France. He apparently shows no affection or care for anyone' certainly not his sons or his people as his judgements are always calculated, cold and cruel. The only affection he does seem to bestow is characteristically his racing hounds, whom he pets and has a great regard for. It is worth noting the prime difference in his affections is that it is directed to one of his pets - an animal that he can feel superior to and can control, rewarding it if it has been good, and punishing if it has been bad. This is perhaps the only form of Love that King Philip, the autocratic dictator, is capable of.

Characteristically of the times that this novel is trying to evoke, we can assume that Love is seen as almost a dangerous, wild and passionate force which bubbles under the surface of 'courtly etiquette' - similar to how the emotions are portrayed in Shakespearian plays; these dangerous emotions must be expressed and reconciled lest they destroy the characters from within.

Chivalry

The theme of Chivalry is used and referred to in the book almost as a dream that some of the characters try to emulate, but increasingly fail to acquire. With the destruction of the Knight's Templar in particular the character of Valois declares that the age of Chivalry is dead (a fitting prophesy when we see the events of the book start to unfurl).

Chivalry itself is a dream of honorable, courtly behaviour that was much favored by the feudal kingdoms after the first millennia (notable the Norman kingdoms). It was a benchmark of tradition that ensured that knights, nobles and lords alike would act 'properly' towards each other; and is perhaps best symbolized in this book by the last order of Knights, the Templar guardians of Jerusalem. When Philip the Fair chose to persecute the Order of the Knight's Templar and thus solidify power into his own Nation-State of France, he effectively ended the Age of Chivalry, and moved his realm into the age of politics (away from feudalism). Whilst this is seen as a welcome move by the Lombard Bankers and certain officials (Nogaret The Secretary General for one), it perhaps also shows a deep division in the imagination of Europe at that time, as countries are trying to establish themselves as properly autonomous, with no rules of behavior save that of commerce.

As an ideal, Chivalry is much valued by the younger characters (Gucci, Robert and Isabella) who liken it to a time 'when the world made sense') and who use the idea of Chivalry to occasionally justify their actions. However, we can see that (particularly with Robert Artois) any notion of Chivalry is quickly subverted by the theme of Ambition, as the characters descend into plotting, scheming and bickering with each other.

Style

Point of View

The novel of "The Iron King" has multiple points of views, all of which are largely written from a third-person personal viewpoint. This means that the narrative of the story is presented from an 'outsider' stance looking in at each character's actions, thoughts and emotions. Some notable exceptions are the diversions to the personal first person viewpoint (when one of the protagonists has a larger share of the story) and the diversions into third person objective (where there is a strong narrative voice which recounts historical asides and facts).

In general, the whole impact of this mostly third-person style is to present the story as an act of history, and gives the actions of the characters the weight of truth and actuality. This sense of the historical narrative is enhanced by the use of footnotes and appendices, in which the author; Maurice Druon makes comments and notes about the historical background to places, individuals and social movements at the time.

For the personal view points, the main protagonists and antagonists) are; King Philip of Spain, Robert of Artois, Queen Isabella of England and the Princess-Queen's. Adding to this list is the short-lived character of Jacques du Molay and the Lombard-Bankers, Guccio Baglioni and Spinello Tolomei. As each of these character's have their own, rather complicated agenda's it becomes necessary for the author to delve into the personal point-of-view to reveal their feelings, thoughts and attitudes. This is done in the manner of a factual aside, for example for Guccio Baglioni.

"He went down on one knee again and then retired, relieved at having accomplished his mission, but very disappointed of his dreams."

This kind of personal aside from the narrator about his character's is common throughout the book and provides a small insight into the nature of the character's, but serves really to highlight the emotional action in a scene or chapter.

Each character's point of view is predominated according to their characterization Robert of Artois is angry, jealous, passionate, and his thoughts and actions follow suit whilst Queen Isabella appears to be pensive, withdrawn and thoughtful. The different points of view of the characters clash and try to dominate their chapters; so we see a little of the emotional clashes at work between the Brother's Aunay and the Princess-Queen's as Marguerite might be revealed as feeling 'excited' whilst another aside will reveal Gautier as feeling 'annoyed'. In this way the author tries to show that often, the scenes with a number of characters always also exhibit conflicting agenda's and motivations.

The last point to make about the differing points of view of The Iron King is that the people are almost always talked about in the third person, and given little autonomy



save when an individual character stands out from the crowd. The people of France and England are merely a backdrop to the Wills of the royal courts, a deliberate effort on the behalf of the writer to ensure that the action is concentrated on the 'mover's and shakers' of Medieval Europe.

Setting

The Setting for the majority of the novel of "The Iron King" by Maurice Druon is that of Paris itself, with excursions to the city of London and the court of Queen Isabella of England, and sometimes other provinces of France itself. Other regions of the world; Spain, Italy, the Vatican City, Germania and now modern-day Turkey are mentioned in passing where they become relevant but their removal from the thoughts and speech of most of the character serves to enhance the feel of Medieval Europe; where travel was long, often difficult and arduous. We are reminded that Europe was a 'connected' place, with the actions of one nation affecting another, but often this connection worked along lines of cause-and-effect, where one messenger would tell another and another until rumor, hearsay and reports can reach the ears of the main character's of the novel.

The main setting is that of the Palace of King Philip and some of the other notable buildings of Paris; the Notre Dame, the Mercer's Hall, the Bank of Tolomei, and the Hotel-de-Nesle on the Seine. These monuments occupy the narrative as strongly as any character as we are reminded that each were marvels of their age. The buildings themselves become symbolic of a theme or an aspect of the Nation that we are examining.

In this way the Hotel-de-Nesle becomes at once a boudoir and a secret getaway for the Princess-Queen's with their meetings with their lovers held there, whilst the Mercer's Hall becomes the 'public space' where courtiers, Kings and nobles can interact. Similarly the Bank of Tolomei itself becomes its own realm encapsulating the spirit of the Lombard Banking system of these times; filled as it is with mercenary decisions, counting-clerks and carefully managed appointments. These three places; the Hotel, the Hall and the Bank themselves signify three important 'aspects' for the novel; Love, Politics, and Money.

The Setting in general, aside from that of Paris is Medieval Europe in the early fourteenth century (1307); it is accurately and minutely described by the author, who endeavors to evoke the sights, sounds and sensations of the different areas (from London's smoke and mud-filled streets to the fish and perfume markets of Paris). Important features of the settings are described by the author who, we can see is trying to be as historically accurate as possible; describing the fact that horse-born travel is the most common form of travel, that roads are rarely cobbled and that each area, from the docks to the riversides to the central parts of the city all have their own flavors and atmospheres.



Language and Meaning

Description

Structure

The structure of *The Iron King* is that of three parts, each of about ten to twelve fairly short Chapter's. These 'episodes' serve to move each character's plot line on through the narrative immediately and with haste, building up to the next instalment and borrowing from the previous. The book has the feeling similar to a film or a production script in this manner; that there are many interweaving story lines (Robert's Vendetta, Philip's persecution of the Knight's Templar, the Lovers' Secret Agendas' etc) which are each given a full chapter side by side with each other, before colliding and resolving, producing conflict and moving on.

As the book is separated into three parts we can see that each Part has its own story arc; the first of course being 'The Curse' sets the rest of the book up as the curse of Molay, the last Grand Master of the Templar Knights. The first part introduces all of the main characters and what motivates them, whilst the story line of the persecution of the Templar Knights runs its course and the Kings of France are finally, and ultimately cursed by the ageing Knight. This climatic scene acts as a resolution to the first Part and sets up the sense of foreboding for the following.

In Part Two, the story shifts (with this sense of foreboding) to the machinations of Robert and the Princess-Queen's, as Robert tries to expose them, shame them, and bring himself to fortune. The question of their inevitable disgrace is the promise and the resolution of Part Two.

In general, the book is fast-paced and appears well plotted, with a lot of movement, travelling and communication between the characters as they try to halt, help or hinder each other's plans. The use of many small chapters helps this sense of pace and tension.

Another point to make about the Structure of *The Iron King* by Maurice Druon is that the story is sandwiched historical accounts; the forward and the appendices of footnotes. These serve to give the reader some historical grounding in what they are about to read and creates the sensation that they are about to read a piece which is more historical fact than it is fiction. These 'extra' pieces of the story create the allusion to fact and truth, even though we cannot be totally certain that the events and the personalities of the early Fourteenth Century were as Druon describes them here.



Quotes

"Those two people who had this long interview upon a March afternoon of 1314, in the Palace of Westminster, could not know that, as a result of their actions, they would....become the artisans of a war between the kingdoms of France and England which would last more than a hundred years." Part 1, Chapter 1, Page 28.

"'I am guilty,' went on Jacques du Molay, 'only of having yielded to your promises, your threats and your tortures. I protest, in the name of God who hears us, that the Order of which I am the grand Master is innocent.'" Part 1, Chapter 4, Page 58.

"Was Marguerite alone? Was she daring to receive him in her room, without witnesses, when the King of Navarre might be in the vicinity?" Part 1, Chapter 5, Page 63.

"Valois could not stomach the fact, grandson of Saint Louis as he was, that the kingdom should be governed by a man of the people." Part 1, Chapter 6, Page 72.

"Pope Clement, Chevalier Guillaume de Nogaret, King Philip, I summon you to the Tribunal of Heaven before the year is out, to receive your just punishment. Accursed! Accursed! You shall be accursed to the thirteenth generation of your lines!" Part 1, Chapter 8, Page 92.

"It might well be that through Isabella's interest Guccio would reach that high destiny for which he felt himself designed. The history of princes and empires had many examples of stranger things than that." Part 2, Chapter 2, Page 118.

"'I don't have to tell you, Isabella, what we owe to our position and that we are not born to succumb to personal sorrows. We do not lead our own lives, but those of our kingdoms, and it is there alone that we can find content...if we conform to our destiny.'" Part 2, Chapter 7, Page 154.

"'Vocation is a noble name for passion. In that heart of lead and iron, which was Nogaret's, there existed the same egotism, the same fierce necessity which compels the lover to sacrifice... Nogaret lived in a world in which everything was ordered by one rule: reasons of State.'" Part 2, Chapter 9, Page 170.

"'And I, even if I have not had happiness, at least I have known pleasure, which is worth all the crowns of the world, and I regret nothing.'" Part 2, Chapter 10, Page 183

"'The curse begins to work out, Beatrice. One of them is dead already. The hand of God strikes swiftly, particularly when assisted by the hand of man.'" Part Three, Chapter 1, Page 198.

"'And those who complain, Engeurrand, will never know that what they demand and



what I should like to give them depend upon time and not upon my will." Part Three, Chapter 3, Page 214.

"If there is no robbing of the Lombards, there will be no scandal as far as you are concerned. Should I fall, Monseigneur, you will fall too. And from a greater height." Part 3, Chapter Six, Page 231.

"I shall come back, beautiful Marie,' he said again; 'I swear it because there is nothing I want so much in the world as you.'" Part 3, Chapter 7, Page 242.

"It was murmured that the king of France was out of his mind. In fact, he was beginning take his way out of the world." Part 3, Chapter 9, Page 251.



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the theme of Ambition in the novel of "The Iron King"? What character best represents this theme in their actions and why?

Discuss love as seen in the novel of "The Iron King", are any of the character's in Love? What characterizes their love, and what are its greatest obstacles?

'With the death of the Knights Templar, there was an end to the Age of Chivalry. Discuss this statement, its truth and falsity with relation to the events of the book.

Why does Philip the Fair's reign try to persecute the Lombard Bankers, and what events stop him from doing so?

What is the significance of the iron ring of Artois?

In what manner does Guillaume de Nogaret die? Why was he killed?

Discuss the changes in King Philip the Fair's character at the start and at the end of the novel of "The Iron King".

Why do you think the two sister's Marguerite and Blanche committed adultery with the Brother's Aunay? Discuss their crime, their punishment and your reactions to it.