

Jacob's Room: Novel Study Guide

Jacob's Room: Novel by Virginia Woolf

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Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Woolf, Virginia. *Jacob's Room*. Harcourt Brace, 1960.

Jacob's Room is a linear novel concerning the life of Jacob Flanders, a fictional character whose life spans from approximately 1888 to 1914. It is written in the past tense. The novel begins during Jacob's early childhood. Jacob's mother, Elizabeth "Betty" Flanders, takes her three sons to Cornwall, England in the wake of her husband's death. In Cornwall, Betty grieves for her husband while watching her sons play on the beach. Later, Betty and her sons return to their home in Scarborough, England, where Betty continues to receive weekly visits from her friend and neighbor, Captain Barfoot. Captain Barfoot's relationship with Betty appears to be similar to that of a suitor, and though Betty is a widow, Captain Barfoot is still technically married. Betty receives a love letter from Andrew Lloyd, a local clergyman. However, she rejects Mr. Lloyd's advances because she is still aggrieved by her husband's death.

The novel moves ahead to Jacob's time in university. Jacob attends the University of Cambridge, thus residing outside Scarborough for the first time in his life. There, he studies literature and meets various future friends such as Timothy Durrant and Richard Bonamy. Although Jacob, Timothy, and Bonamy are all from wealthy families, Jacob's upbringing appears to be much more rural than those of his friends. During a school vacation, Jacob sails around the coast of Cornwall with Timothy Durrant, and they arrive at Timothy's hometown. There, Jacob meets Mrs. Durrant and Timothy's sister, Clara Durrant, both of whom seem to take a liking to Jacob.

Once Jacob graduates from university, he moves to London instead of returning home to Scarborough. In London, Jacob never seems to pursue a steady occupation because he has no financial incentive to do so. Instead, he continues his studies independently and attends various social events in the city. He develops a romantic relationship with a beautiful yet somewhat unstable girl named Florinda. Despite Florinda's uneducated background and wild temperament, Jacob and Florinda develop a sexual relationship. Meanwhile, Clara Durrant and a young woman named Fanny Elmer find that they have fallen in love with Jacob. Clara, who moved to London after completing her studies, finds that her attempts to become closer to Jacob do not come to fruition. Fanny Elmer, a dancer, attempts to become closer to Jacob by reading his favorite books, but Jacob ends up leaving London after deciding to take a tour of Continental Europe.

Jacob travels abroad at the age of 26, first visiting Paris and then Greece. Jacob finds that he has become quite sick of modern life, and he decides that the remedy would be to visit Greece and tour the ancient ruins. Jacob has spent much of his time in London studying ancient Greek literature, and he comes to idealize the art and civilization of the ancient Greeks. In Greece, Jacob writes letters to his friend Richard Bonamy proclaiming the virtues of his visit. However, Jacob becomes distracted from his sightseeing when he meets Sandra Wentworth Williams, a married Englishwoman who is touring Greece with her husband, Evan Williams. Jacob becomes quickly frustrated



by this distraction, as well as Sandra Williams' inaccessibility. He eventually returns to London, where he speaks excitedly of his journey to his friends. However, he remains lovesick, and a feeling of alienation and purposelessness soon overtake him once more. When World War One breaks out in Europe, Jacob enlists in the British army and is killed in combat. The novel ends with a scene of Betty Flanders and Richard Bonamy distraughtly clearing out Jacob's London apartment in the wake of Jacob's death.



Chapter 1 - 3

Summary

In Chapter 1, the novel opens in Cornwall, where Elizabeth “Betty” Flanders is on vacation with her three sons following the death of her husband. She sits at a desk in the boarding house and writes a letter to her friend Captain Barfoot, who is back in Betty’s hometown of Scarborough. Her sons play about outside. Her elder son, Archer, calls out for her middle son, Jacob. Betty goes outside to find her boys playing along the beach. Jacob finds a large crab in the sand, and then he finds a sheep’s skull. His mother tells him to put it down, but he refuses. Betty brings her boys inside and puts them to bed. Betty then says good night to Rebecca, the nanny, and Jacob sleeps in his bed with the sheep’s skull lying at his feet. Rain gently patters on the roof of the boarding house.

In Chapter 2, the narrative then moves forward to after Betty has returned with her sons to Scarborough. Betty receives a visit from Captain Barfoot, a friend of hers who comes to see her every Wednesday. His wife, Ellen Barfoot, is crippled and ill. Betty thinks of her dead husband, Seabrook, who she wishes to be a good example for their sons, although he never had a very steady occupation in life. The narration exposit upon the surrounding area, which is made up of misty moors and neighbors who all know one another. Mrs. Flanders walks about the moors with her youngest son, Johnny, while Archer and Jacob play independently. In the rode, they meet Andrew Floyd, the local clergyman who teaches Latin to Archer and Jacob. Mr. Floyd visits with Mrs. Flanders and leaves behind a letter declaring his love for her. Mrs. Flanders reads it and is overcome with passion. However, the feeling is not as strong when she next reads the letter, and the passion soon subsides, she writes Mr. Floyd a reply saying that she cannot reciprocate his love. Months later, she reads in the newspaper that Mr. Floyd has married and has become the rector of an estate.

Captain Barfoot continues to visit Mrs. Flanders on Wednesdays, and while it seems clear to the neighbors that Captain Barfoot wishes to woo Mrs. Flanders, she only views him as a friend and is not sure that she will ever be able to remarry. Moreover, although Captain Barfoot’s wife is ill and unable to walk, she is still alive. Captain Barfoot also tells Mrs. Flanders that he will be joining for the local Council, which will occupy much of his time. This further diminishes the feasibility that he and Mrs. Flanders may ever be married. Thus, in absence of a spouse, Mrs. Flanders decides to send Jacob to university. Captain Barfoot encourages this. Thus, Jacob enrolls in the University of Cambridge in 1906.

In Chapter 3, Jacob takes the train to Cambridge for his first semester at university. There, he meets fellow student Timothy Durrant, a student of literature. Under Durrant’s guidance and influence, Jacob takes an interest in literature himself. Durrant informs Jacob in the ways of modern literature and commercial literature verses classic texts. The last section of Chapter 3 is told from the perspective of the university faculty. The



narrative conveys the faculty's impressions of the students and their own thoughts on literature. They lecture on classic Greek writers such as Virgil, and they describe the contrasting personalities of students such as the quiet Jacob and the lively Richard Bonamy.

Analysis

The first chapter of the novel is generally vague in terms of plot, but it helps to establish tone, relationships, and the disrupted nature of the narrative's beginning. The novel is fairly scant in terms of plot details, expositing only that Mrs. Flanders has recently lost her husband and gone away with her son to Cornwall in order to grieve. However, the chapter is quite informative in terms of tone and the pattern of the novel's structure. The chapter is quite calm, even mundane, allowing the trauma of Mrs. Flanders' recent bereavement to remain below the surface. Moreover, it is significant that the chapter is told from Mrs. Flanders point of view, for even though Jacob is the central character, the novel is generally told through the perspectives of those around him.

One of the most interesting and complicated things revealed about Mrs. Flanders life back in Scarborough is her relationship with Captain Barfoot, although the narrative gives as little exposition as possible upon this point. Captain Barfoot appears to be a longtime friend of Mrs. Flanders, and his attentions towards her are similar to those a suitor would give to an eligible woman. However, Captain Barfoot is still technically married. His wife's illness is not discussed in detail by the narrative, which tells the reader nothing more than "Mrs. Barfoot was an invalid" (15). Moreover, Mrs. Flanders seems to remain quite attached to her dead husband, and it is unclear what her true thoughts on Captain Barfoot's apparent attraction are. This relationship of thwarted love, along with Mrs. Flanders recent bereavement, set the melancholy tone that seems to pervade all of the novel's scenes in Scarborough.

Mrs. Flanders's episode with Andrew Floyd further complicates Mrs. Flanders's position, as it seems to indicate that she still loves her husband, and yet there appears to be an implicit trace of regret within her after she rebuffs Mr. Floyd. When she reads in the newspaper that Mr. Floyd has married and become the rector of an estate, Mrs. Flanders appears to take the news pleasantly enough, but the contrast between the dour moors and the environment of a refined estate imply other possibilities for Mrs. Flanders' internal state. Namely, the direct result of her rejection of Mr. Floyd appears to be that she is to remain on the melancholy moors of Scarborough instead of living on a fine estate. This episode of a possible missed opportunity adds a further dimension to the sadness of Mrs. Flanders state, representing her inability to move on in the wake of her husband's death.

Chapter 3 represents several significant shifts in the narrative while simultaneously reinforcing certain patterns the narrative has set up. For example, the chapter opens with a description of Jacob from the point of view of a stranger, the non-recurring character Mrs. Norman. This reinforces the structural convention of Jacob as the central character but not the point-of-view character. The chapter also reinforces the tonal



conventions of describing the mundane activities of life while hinting at the inner emotional lives of the characters. In terms of narrative changes, the narrative begins to focus more on Jacob's life than his mother's, as he moves away from Scarborough and begins to become his own person. The evolution of Jacob on his own will continue and become one of the main focuses for the rest of the novel.

Discussion Question 1

What is the function of the first chapter? In what ways does it serve as a useful starting point for the novel? What are its structural and tonal characteristics?

Discussion Question 2

What appears to be the true nature of the relationship between Mrs. Flanders and Captain Barfoot? What is stated directly about this relationship, and what is ambiguous or implied?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the structural and tonal difference between Chapter 3 and the previous chapters? How do these differences relate to the change in Jacob's environment?

Vocabulary

nib, herring, perambulator, undulate, confound, exasperate, opal, mutability, vitality, bulrush, sulphurous, aster, jollity, inextricable, exhilarating, strident, burnish, crinoline, verdigris, parish, vivid, inconsequent, ecclesiastical, courier, fulvous



Chapters 4 - 5

Summary

In Chapter 4, during a school vacation, Jacob Flanders and Timothy Durrant sail on a boat near the Scilly Isles of the coast of Cornwall. Jacob sits trying to read Shakespeare on the boat, but the wind keeps ruffling the pages. Jacob has never managed to read a Shakespeare play all the way through, but he is determined to do so now because Shakespeare is so well revered, even more so than the classic Greek writers. Jacob and Timothy seem to have quarreled during the trip over inconsequential things, but they are both still moved by the sight of the Scilly Isles. Jacob removes his clothes and goes for a swim in the sea. When he climbs back in, he accidentally knocks his Shakespeare book overboard, where it sinks into the sea. They sail around the Scilly Isles for a while, with Timothy steering and Jacob relaxing and singing occasionally.

The narrative then shifts to a town on the coast of Cornwall, where Mrs. Pascoe, a neighbor of the Durrants, goes about some of her daily cooking preparations. Mrs. Durrant comes to visit her and says that her son will arrive in a day or two, as he is sailing from Falmouth with a friend in a small boat. The narration then describes the land around them in rather idyllic terms. Jacob and Timothy arrive one or two days later, six days after they had originally set sail from Falmouth. Jacob sits down to dinner with the Durrants. Mrs. Durrant asks about the voyage, and Timothy's sister Clara asks if Jacob and Timothy quarreled at all. Clara seems somewhat shy around Jacob. Later, Mrs. Durrant sits outside looking up at the stars with her friends. Jacob joins them, and Mrs. Durrant thinks that he is awkward yet somehow "distinguished-looking" (61). Before the end of the visit, the Durrants say how nice it was to have Jacob and that he should visit again sometime.

In Chapter 5, the narrative moves ahead to after Jacob has graduated from the University of Cambridge. He is 22 years old. He has completed his studies in literature and has moved to London. Jacob boards an omnibus and thinks about how people are generally liked closed books that are very difficult to open and read. Jacob thinks upon the rhythms of daily life in the city and seems to think of them as rather tiresome. As the other denizens of London return home from work, Jacob returns home from a bookstore, where he has purchased a book about the Byzantine Empire. Back at his apartment, Jacob receives a visit from Richard Bonamy, an old school friend. They discuss a new edition of literary scholarship and ridicule the author for taking certain liberties. The narration describes Jacob and Bonamy's relationship as amicable and largely based on mutual interest in classic art, music, and literature.

In her diary, Clara Durrant writes that she likes Jacob Flanders because "he is so unworldly. He gives himself no airs, and one can say what one likes to him" (71). The narration implies that Clara Durrant is in love with Jacob, although she is not yet old enough to be able to admit this to herself. Meanwhile, Jacob and Bonamy are still discussing art and literature, and Jacob mentions that the Durrants are having a party



soon that they should attend. Back in Scarborough, Captain Barfoot visits with Mrs. Flanders. Barfoot is now a town councilor, which is why he has not been able to see Mrs. Flanders as often.

Analysis

These chapters represent several important shifts in Jacob's social relationships, affecting his present and future experiences of life as a young man. One of these social shifts concerns his relationship with the Durrants. Jacob becomes good friends with Timothy Durrant at university, but their six-day-long voyage from Falmouth to Cornwall appears to mark the degeneration of that relationship. They argue and become annoyed with one another, apparently due to the fact that they must spend almost an entire week in each other's company in a small and isolated space. However, in almost ironic contrast, Jacob appears to quickly form connections with the rest of Timothy's family. Mrs. Flanders finds Jacob quite interesting despite his awkwardness. She even comments that she made a similar voyage to Jacob's when she was a young woman (61). Clara, meanwhile, seems rather drawn to Jacob despite seeming rather shy. While Timothy gradually disappears from the narrative as his friendship with Jacob slowly weakens, the other Durrants become more prominent, especially Clara, who finds herself falling in love with Jacob.

Another important relationship developed in this section is the friendship between Jacob Flanders and Richard Bonamy. Bonamy is mentioned briefly in Chapter 3 as being a schoolmate of Jacob's (43), but Richard is not portrayed as a close friend until Chapter 5. Jacob and Bonamy share similar interests of classic art and literature, but Bonamy seems generally more knowledgeable of these subjects, especially in areas such as music and painting. Bonamy is also shown to be a foil for Jacob in terms of personality. While Jacob is generally quiet and tends to keep to himself, Bonamy seems far more outgoing, taking it upon himself to come visit Jacob and have conversations. The friendship between Bonamy and Jacob is shown to be far stronger and more amicable than the relationship between Jacob and Timothy, and while Timothy is generally ignored by the narrative after Chapter 4, Bonamy remains a fairly prominent character from Chapter 5 onwards.

Chapters 4 and 5 continue the pattern of developing Jacob as a character through the perspectives of the people around him; these characters all seem to have slightly different impressions of Jacob, but the accumulated impressions help build a more complete picture of Jacob as a character. Mrs. Durrant, for example, views Jacob as awkward but distinguished in some indefinable way. Clara Durrant, meanwhile, describes him as generally unworldly but direct in terms of communication. These observations are given at two different points in Jacob's life, but they help to create a portrait of Jacob's evolution as a person. In his late teens, he is still struggling to define his identity and interests in the world, and by his early 20s, he seems to more clearly grasp his interests, but he still seems unworldly due to his rural upbringing and lack of personal knowledge. The novel also appears to use this method of storytelling as a way of developing other characters as well. Characters' impressions of Jacob seem to also



serve the purpose of illustrating that character's personality. Clara, for example, is shown to be kind and sincere but still rather inexperienced. She refers to Jacob as unworldly, but then the narration comments on her inability to recognize her own love for Jacob (71).

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of Jacob and Timothy's voyage from Falmouth to Cornwall? How do the concept and the events of the voyage reflect upon them as characters?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Jacob's interactions with the Durrants? In what ways do these interaction develop Jacob as a character? In what ways do they advance the novel's themes?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Jacob's relationship with Richard Bonamy? In what ways is Bonamy different from other characters? In what ways is this relationship significant to the themes and the narrative?

Vocabulary

quarrel, dividend, pungent, cleft, pilchard, piety, paeon, portentous, cormorant, monotonous, lacquer, scullery, conjecture, tease, lecherous, wholesome, gannet, emphatic, vivacity, aquiline, capricious, spectral, convolvulus, din, scrupulous



Chapters 6 - 8

Summary

In Chapter 6, in London, Jacob goes out to dinner with a young woman named Florinda he has been seeing. She states cryptically several times that she is “frightfully unhappy” (74), but she does not elaborate. They have dinner together but decide to leave after two female strangers flirt with Jacob. Later, in the morning before dawn Jacob walks up a hill at night with Timothy Durrant. It is the morning of November 6th, November 5th being Guy Fawkes Day. Jacob and Timothy quote classic Greek writers like Aeschylus and Sophocles, shouting the words at the top of the hill in drunken celebration. The narration comments upon the strangeness of Jacob’s love of Greek, since his knowledge of the ancient Greek language is somewhat limited, and he knows very little of ancient Greek history.

The narrative then transitions back to Florinda, who is apparently ill. The narration exposit upon her backstory, relating to the reader that both of her parents are dead and that Florinda lives in a rather cheap and shabby lodging house. Florinda’s name was given to her to signify the flower of her maidenhood, but it is unclear whether or not she is still a virgin. Jacob seems to think she is quite chaste, and Florinda is quite drawn to Jacob. Jacob envies her seemingly free and unanchored life, thinking his own life rather sedentary closed off in comparison. Florinda comes to his apartment and speaks about famous painters, and later they go to dinner again. Florinda has an argument with a stranger that quickly grows heated. Florinda knocks plates to the ground and then flees the restaurant. Jacob follows her out, and they go back to his apartment. Jacob finds her beautiful yet stupid, but the narration implies that he sleeps with her in spite of himself.

In Chapter 7, Mrs. Durrant and Clara attend a social event in London, filled with dancing and conversation. They speak to several refined people such as Julia Eliot, a scholar called Mr. Salvin, and a wealthy woman called Lady Hibbert. The interactions do not seem very stimulating to Clara, but she grows excited when Jacob arrives. Jacob tells them that he is living in an apartment in London, and Clara wishes to converse with Jacob. However, the social currents of the party soon separate them as they are drawn into separate conversations.

In Chapter 8, Betty Flanders, still living in Scarborough, writes a letter to Jacob. She wishes to tell him to come back to Scarborough, but instead she simply writes of the various mundane occurrences of the town. Jacob receives the letter, but before he can read it, Florinda arrives, kisses him, and brings him into the bedroom. The narration contemplates the nature of letters and other forms of communication in the modern world. The narration conjectures that the fast-paced bustle of modern life, especially in the city, decreases the attention to—and value of—communications such as letters and phone calls. The narrative then elaborates upon this sense of alienation, describing



Jacob sitting alone in his room, reading, attempting to find some sort of connection with humanity and history while cloistered in his small private apartment.

Analysis

The brief episode concerning Jacob and Timothy in Chapter 6 further illustrates Jacob's transition from boyhood to adulthood. The scene is quite merry and wild, the two boys up late, likely somewhat drunk from Guy Fawkes Day celebrations. However, they choose to celebrate by shouting quotations from Aeschylus and Sophocles, who are renowned figures of ancient Greek literature. This incongruity between Jacob and Timothy's boyish antics and their fascination with respected literature demonstrates the slow transition from boyhood to an interest in pursuits that are supposedly more serious and adult. However, Jacob's established unworldliness still appears to be present, as the narration makes a point of commenting upon Jacob's lack of knowledge with regards to Greek language and history. This develops a recurring theme of tension between Jacob's isolated rural upbringing and his increasing fascination with markers of erudition and worldliness. Jacob shall later be driven by a desire to refine himself and rise above the routines of modern life.

Florinda is a significant character in this section in terms of how she both affects and contrasts with Jacob. In terms of personality, Jacob is generally reserved and well comported, but Florinda's personality is often quite dramatic, swinging between extremes of sadness, anger, happiness, and romantic passion. In terms of upbringing, she seems to have spent most of her life in or near London, growing up in urban settings, unlike the rural Scarborough childhood that Jacob experienced. Oddly, Jacob appears to envy Florinda's life, seeing it as free and unanchored; he seems to view his own life as generally tied down and cloistered, as he spends much of his time locked away in his room, reading. Like Richard Bonamy, Florinda represents an outside force that serves to open Jacob up to the world around him. Despite the fact that Jacob thinks Florinda to be somewhat stupid, he sees her as beautiful and free-spirited, fulfilling a need for excitement that he cannot seem to fulfill on his own.

In Chapter 8, the narrative paints quite a melancholy picture of Betty Flanders, seemingly cut off from her son by both distance and the excitement of his new life in London. Betty Flanders appears to miss Jacob deeply, but her attempts to contact him are meager and insufficient. She is hampered not only by her own inability to express her truest feelings, but also by the ineffectiveness of her mode of communication. Jacob is distracted from his mother's letters by Florinda and his other social obligations in the city. This illustrates the barrier between Jacob and Betty as one of differing experiences. Betty has never lived outside of rural Scarborough, but Jacob has now apparently grown accustomed to city life. The narrative thus implies that Jacob has grown distant from his mother in part because he wishes to distance himself from his old life in Scarborough.



Discussion Question 1

In what ways does Florinda differ from other characters in terms of background and personality? How do these differences affect her role in Jacob's life and in the narrative?

Discussion Question 2

Compare Jacob and Clara's interaction in Chapter 7 with their earlier interactions? In what ways have they changed over the years? How is their relationship significant in terms of themes and narrative?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the portrayal of Betty Flanders in Chapter 8. How does her life contrast with Jacob's? What emotions does the scene invoke, and how does it relate to the larger narrative?

Vocabulary

taut, pierrot, surfeit, bestir, quaver, doleful, lament, sullen, disheveled, cherish, transmigration, omnibus, saunter, chastity, cloister, amorous, reputable, tumultuous, blatant, meritorious, insoluble, surmount, lavish, reprieve, sedulous, purlieu



Chapters 9 - 11

Summary

In Chapter 9, Jacob takes a vacation to Essex, where he stays in an inn, dines with wealthy society women, and takes horse rides across the nearby fields. Jacob is joined on this vacation by Bonamy, and Jacob and Bonamy discuss art and politics with the other residents of the inn. Jacob meets an attractive and intelligent young woman named Laurette. However, their vacations do not overlap for very long, and Jacob must return to London. There, he spends much time in the British Museum, which the narrative describes as “an enormous mind” (108) containing an incomprehensible amount of human thought and history. Jacob spends his time there reading old classics, such as Plato and Aristotle, as well as works of literary scholarship, such as essays on Shakespeare and Marlowe. Each day, Jacob sees different people in the museum, suggesting that he is one of the few people who visits very often and regularly. On a walk home from the British Museum one evening, Jacob takes in the sights of London with a special eye for the new versus the old. The old and storied structures of long-standing buildings and bridges appear to starkly contrast with sights such as new cars and people wearing the latest fashions.

In Chapter 10, a young woman by the name of Fanny Elmer, coming from Madame Tussaud’s wax museum, walks through a disused graveyard and happens to walk in sight of the window of Jacob’s apartment, although Jacob does not see her. Jacob is now in his mid-twenties. Fanny goes to the apartment of a painter named Nick Bramhan to sit as a model for one of his paintings. Fanny poses for Nick’s painting, but he becomes frustrated, saying that the painting has turned out poorly. Nick and Fanny decide to walk to Leicester Square together. There, they run into Jacob, with whom Nick is acquainted. Nick introduces Fanny to Jacob, and Fanny seems quite taken with Jacob. She thinks to herself that he is awkward but quite beautiful. They invite Jacob to a dance performance of Fanny’s, and Jacob agrees to attend. In the time following, Fanny’s relationship with Nick suffers, and it eventually ends after they have a fight. Fanny, in an attempt to be able to relate more to Jacob, begins to read an old novel called Tom Jones, which Nick has said he very much likes for its beautiful and antiquated prose. Later, Jacob decides that he wishes to travel to Greece and other parts of Continental Europe, and Fanny privately grows very upset at the prospect of his departure.

In Chapter 11, at age 26, Jacob travels to Paris, France, where he spends time with a lively painter by the name of Edward Cruttendon. Jacob and Cruttendon discuss the virtues of Shakespeare, calling him the greatest English writer in history. Jacob and Cruttendon travel to Versailles, where they tour the architecture with a young woman named Jinny Carslake. Back in Scarborough, Mrs. Flanders reads mournfully over Jacob’s letters, missing him still but at least glad that Jacob is having a good time. Mrs. Flanders and Mrs. Jarvis discuss the letters and then walk out on the moors together, walking by the old graveyard. Mrs. Flanders contemplates death and loss. She thinks of



an old garnet brooch she once owned, which she lost on a walk one day. She looks about for it sometimes when on a walk, but she has never recovered it.

Analysis

Jacob's trip to Essex, though only briefly discussed in Chapter 9, functions as a counterpoint to the previously established routines and habits of Jacob's life in London. Firstly, while Jacob's life in London is generally spent shut away in his apartment, his trip to Essex represents a pastoral escape, much in the way that Cornwall has represented and escape from Cambridge and Scarborough. Secondly, Jacob actively seeks out the company of the other residents of the inn, many of whom are women from wealthy and genteel backgrounds. This appears to be an attempt by Jacob to improve his social habits and identity by engaging more fully in the companionship the high-society civilians. This is emphasized by the presence of Richard Bonamy, who has always been an effective catalyst for breaking Jacob out of his self-imposed habits of isolation and introspection.

However, once Jacob returns to London, he seems to return to his old habits, with certain significant exceptions. Back in London, Jacob returns to his regimen of self-education, but with more apparent zeal and self-direction. Jacob's favorite place to visit is now the British Museum, where he can access important writings from throughout history. He seems to esteem classic writers more than ever before, viewing them as a window into some substantial truth or beauty. He dedicates himself to these studies with great dedication and organization. Jacob's belief in the great writings of the past is further emphasized with the introduction of Tom Jones as one of his favorite novels. Jacob describes the novel as possessing "perfect prose" (122) and a certain beauty not found in modern novels. Thus, Jacob's increased dedication to classic literature appears to function as an expression of his increased alienation from modern life.

The novel appears to develop this alienation further in the way in increasingly contrasts the signifiers of modern life with the signifiers of older cultures. As stated above, Jacob looks for meaning and beauty in classic works of literature like Tom Jones or ancient Greek writers. This obsession with old classics begins to color the way Jacob sees the world, as conveyed by the narration. Jacob's interest on his walk home from the museum is drawn by the oldest buildings and structures, with signifiers of modernity such as cars or modern fashions standing out garishly. As someone who has been out of school for a substantial amount of time and appears to have found no steady occupation, Jacob likely feels alienated from modern life and has been trained by his scholarship to value classic literature as one of the few bastions of true beauty remaining in an ever-changing world.

Jacob's alienation from modernity and his obsession with the classics is critiqued by the narrative through the perspective of Fanny Elmer and Mrs. Flanders. Fanny Elmer is very much in love with Jacob, although she cannot bring herself to make this known, and Jacob is unable to see it. Fanny tries to grow closer to Jacob by sharing his love for Tom Jones, but the novel becomes a symbol of the arbitrary distinctions that seem to be



keeping her and Jacob apart. Jacob, now apparently separate from Florinda, is interested in his independent studies, and Fanny is unable to break through Jacob's isolation even by way of his own interests. Mrs. Flanders, meanwhile, continues to sit in lonely isolation from her sons while Jacob pursues his adventures and obsession in London and then abroad, traveling to the Continent in search for truth and beauty after books seem to have failed to satisfy him.

Discussion Question 1

Consider Jacob's time in Essex and his visits to the British Museum. What do these episodes imply about Jacob as a character? Do they represent a change in Jacob's life and values, or are they consistent with his personality earlier in the novel?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Fanny Elmer's relationship with Jacob and her role in the narrative. In what ways is she similar and/or different from other characters? How does her perspective shape the themes of the novel?

Discussion Question 3

Chapter 11 juxtaposes Jacob's time in Paris with his mother's continuing life in Scarborough. What similarities or differences does this juxtaposition evoke, and how does the juxtaposition relate to the narrative in general?

Vocabulary

resilient, jocose, sexton, deference, postpone, contemptible, mastiff, ordure, claret, chilblain, abhor, blasphemous, sensibility, assiduous, conglomeration, incessant, perturb, vociferate, voluminous, oblong, ruminant, aloof, tremulous, plait, impertinence



Chapters 12 - 14

Summary

In Chapter 12, Jacob travels from France to Greece, where he revels in thoughts about the Greek civilization. He thinks of the ancient Greeks in idyllic terms, imagining their civilization and their art to be far superior to those of modern day. In the dining room of his hotel in Patras, Greece, he finds a copy of *The Daily Mail*, which is a London newspaper. He thinks somewhat bitterly upon his acquaintances back in London, who seemed to have nothing meaningful to say when he told them about his intended trip to Greece. He thinks about social life in London, where he now concludes that people mindlessly follow the fashions of the day and share no truly meaningful communications with one another. However, he does think fondly on Bonamy, “who couldn't love a woman and never read a foolish book” (140).

After Patras, Jacob travels to Olympia to view the mountains and the ancient ruins. There, he meets several other travelers from England, including Evan Williams and his wife, Sandra Wentworth Williams. Evan and Sandra Williams are first introduced to the reader in a restaurant in Olympia, before they meet Jacob. Sandra declares that she is “full of love for every one” (141), having surveyed the local peasants and beggars with compassion. She is quite a cheerful and intelligent woman, although somewhat vain. Her husband, Evan Williams, seems gruff and slightly discontent with their trip to Greece. Jacob writes to Bonamy, “I intend to come to Greece every year as long as I live...It is the only chance I can see of protecting oneself from civilization” (146). Jacob meets Sandra and Evan Williams on a hike up the nearby mountain. They make plans to meet again later, and Jacob finds himself falling in love with Sandra Williams, whom he finds very beautiful. A jealous tension grows beneath the surface of Jacob and Evan's rapport. Jacob travels to Athens to view ancient ruins such as the Acropolis and the Parthenon, but he finds himself slightly distracted with thoughts of Sandra Williams.

In Chapter 13, Jacob returns to London from his trip abroad. Bonamy asks him about Greece, and Jacob answers reverently but somewhat distractedly. Bonamy realizes that Jacob is in love. The narrative then moves about to check in Jacob's four love interests. First it shows Clara Durrant, walking about town with a suitor by the name of Mr. Bowley. However, Clara is distracted by thoughts of Jacob, whom she has just heard has returned from Greece. The narrative then shifts to Florinda, who sits in a restaurant awaiting someone's arrival. Nick Bramhan enters, and it appears that she and Florinda have begun a relationship. Next is Sandra Williams, who thinks upon Jacob and compares him to the severe character Alceste from the play “*The Misanthrope*” by Moliere. Lastly, there is Fanny Elmer, whose thoughts of Jacob have grown idealized in his prolonged absence. Unfortunately, the narrative seems to imply a shift within Jacob that causes him to leave London, his destination not given by the narration.

In Chapter 14, In the final chapter of the novel, which is very brief, it becomes apparent that Jacob enlisted in the British army and died in combat during World War One. Mrs.



Flanders and Bonamy go into Jacob's apartment in London to gather his things. They find old papers, including letters from Sandra Williams. Mrs. Flanders cries out "Such confusion everywhere!" (146), apparently both in reference to the state of Jacob's room and the state of the world. The novel concludes when Mrs. Flanders finds an old pair of Jacob's shoes, holds them up to Bonamy, and cries, "What am I to do with these, Mr. Bonamy?" (146).

Analysis

In Chapter 12, Jacob's thoughts on modernity versus antiquity are highlighted even more starkly, thus highlighting even more problems with Jacob's perspective. Jacob thinks of the occurrences of daily life in very condescending terms, seeing the conversations of London social life as meaningless prattle. Jacob prefers instead the idyllic image of ancient Greece that he has conjured in his imagination. However, this stark contrast in his thoughts on London versus ancient Greece actually serves to critique Jacob's perspective. Jacob views ancient Greece as a time of great beauty and meaning because his experience of it is filtered through select works of literature and specific experiences. Meanwhile, his view of modernity is characterized by his own humdrum, everyday experiences. This prevents Jacob from realizing that everyday life in ancient Greece likely felt very commonplace to those who lived through it. Thus, Jacob's increasingly ardent obsession with antiquity actually serves only to make himself more miserable and alienated. Jacob begins to see modern life as something that must be escaped from, which only serves to make his enjoyment of life more difficult. Even as Jacob is in Greece among the art and artifacts of the civilization, he cannot fully enjoy the experience because he is still caught up in his ill feelings towards his own life.

Jacob's alienation is further developed when he meets Sandra Williams. Although several female characters have developed some sense of love for Jacob up to this point, Sandra is the first character for which Jacob seems to form his own sense of unqualified love. Unfortunately, Sandra is married, and it may in fact be the case that the inaccessibility is part of Jacob's attraction. Because she is inaccessible, Jacob seems to idealize her just like he idealizes the idea of the ancient Greeks. In addition, the very fact of his love seems to represent something undesirable to Jacob, as Sandra is a very modern woman. Despite Sandra's beauty and intelligence, Jacob sees love as something to distract him from his intellectual and artistic interests. This tension serves as yet another example in which Jacob causes profound unhappiness within himself by desiring something inaccessible and alienating himself from any actionable path towards happiness.

Jacob's ultimate fate makes several powerful and somber statements regarding his character arc and the arc of the overall narrative. The novel comes to a rather abrupt and unforeseen conclusion when Jacob dies in combat during World War One. The fact and circumstances of his death (like many things in the novel) are never stated directly but rather implied. However, the novel's setting and the actions of Mrs. Flanders in the final chapter leave the reader with few other possible conclusions. This then leads the



reader to several questions, including that of why Jacob would enlist in the army in the first place. In a historical context, it would have been considered somewhat cowardly and patriotic not to do so, but Jacob seems to have other possible motives. For example, his general sense of alienation and lack of purpose may very well have lead him to see military service as a perfect vessel for gaining a sense of direction and meaning. However, the narrative does not glorify or even depict war, only the tragedy that follows it. In this way, the novel appears to be criticizing war in general, as well as the desperation for a sense of purpose that seems to have become instilled in Jacob. Instead of looking for beauty in the world around him, Jacob searched for purpose in conflict, and this lead only to tragedy.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Jacob's time in Greece. What seems to motivate the trip? How does Jacob feel about the trip both during and after? How do these things relate to the larger themes?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the significance Jacob's relationship with Sandra Williams. How do each of them truly feel about one another? What characteristics of the relationship are stated explicitly, and what appears to be implied?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the ending of the novel. What events are implied to have transpired between Chapter 13 and Chapter 14? How do these events and the novel's conclusion affect the narrative and themes?

Vocabulary

sublime, pompous, sepulchral, ramshackle, imperious, immerse, forbear, jubilation, predicament, gesticulate, intemperate, deliberation, dalliance, mollify, indemnify, cyclamen, doldrums, monograph, incongruous, pediment, frieze, diligent, morose, demure, peevish



Characters

Jacob Flanders

Jacob Flanders is the son of Betty Flanders, who comes from a wealthy family in England. Jacob is the title character of the novel, and while one may argue that he is the central character of the narrative, he is given less narrative attention than is conventional in a novel. The novel is structured around Jacob's life, from his early childhood to his death during World War One in his mid-twenties. He attends the University of Cambridge and studies literature. His occupation after attending university is never distinctly given, and it is quite possible that he simply lives off of an allowance from his mother. He is very interested in literature and finds himself rather at odds with the ideas and aesthetics of the modern time in which he lives. As an escape from modernity, he travels to Europe, taking special delight in visiting Greece and seeing the sites of ancient structures there. Out of a sense of duty, he enlists in the British military during World War One and is killed in combat.

Betty Flanders

Elizabeth "Betty" Flanders is the mother of Archer, Jacob, and John (in descending order of age.) She comes from a wealthy family in Scarborough, England and marries a man named Seabrook Flanders. Seabrook dies before the action of the novel, leaving Betty a widow in her mid-forties. After Seabrook's death, Betty brings her sons to Cornwall for a vacation. They then return to Scarborough, where Betty receives a marriage proposal from a young clergyman named Andrew Floyd. Betty, though flattered, finds that she cannot accept the marriage proposal. Betty never does remarry, as she remains in love with her husband. Betty lives in Scarborough for her whole life, and through her thoughts, the narrative examines themes of motherhood and domestic life.

Seabrook Flanders

Seabrook Flanders is the dead husband of Betty Flanders and the father of Jacob, Archer, and John. Seabrook did not appear to come from a wealthy family, as he enjoyed manual labor. He did not need to work, as his wife Betty was from a wealthy family, but he did so nonetheless, occupying himself with farming and office work. Not much about his life or personality are described in the narrative, but he was likely a kind father and good husband, as Betty misses him greatly and ultimately chooses not to remarry.



Mrs. Jarvis

Mrs. Jarvis is Betty's neighbor and closest friend. She is the husband of Mr. Jarvis, a clergyman. Mrs. Jarvis is rather romantic and needy. She finds herself somewhat restless and lonely despite being married, and she takes comfort in Betty Flanders' companionship. Mrs. Jarvis' thoughts provide an outsider's perspective on Jacob's boyhood and coming-of-age process.

Captain Barfoot

Captain Barfoot is a ship captain who makes regular visits to Betty Flanders. Captain Barfoot is married, but he feels alienated from his wife. His wife is also crippled and may soon be killed by her ailment. Captain Barfoot appears to be attempting to woo Betty Flanders, and while she enjoys his visits, she does not wish to think of Barfoot as a suitor as he is married.

Timothy Durrant

Timothy Durrant is one of Jacob's closest friends during their first year at the University of Cambridge. During a school vacation, they sail around the coast of Cornwall and dock near the Durrant family home. Jacob is introduced to Timothy's wealthy and erudite family, all of whom take a liking to Jacob. Through the eyes of Timothy and the Durrant family, the reader is given a more detailed view of Jacob's character and others' impressions of him.

Clara Durrant

Clara Durrant is the sister of Timothy Durrant. She is educated and very interested in the arts, especially music. She is a talented singer and piano player. She is described as quite pretty, and she finds that she is very much in love Jacob. However, while Clara and Jacob maintain a friendship for many years, Jacob never feels a similar attraction to Clara.

Fanny Elmer

Fanny Elmer is a resident of London and a former student of the Slade School of Fine Art. Fanny resides in London and dances with a professional performance company. She engages regularly in London social life, and yet she finds herself quite alienated from it, unable to make any connections that she finds truly meaningful. She is close to Jacob's age and finds herself falling deeply in love with him. She attempts to take an interest in literature as a means of forming a bond with him, but she is unable to form the romantic bond with Jacob that she desires.



Richard Bonamy

Richard Bonamy is one of Jacob's best fiends from university. His last name is a homophone for "bonhomie," which means cheerfulness or geniality; as a person Richard is aptly cheerful. He acts as a foil to the rather serious and introspective nature of Jacob, choosing instead to enjoy life with joy and a certain sense of being generally carefree. The narrative also implies that Richard may have a romantic interest in Jacob.

Sandra Williams

Sandra Williams is a flirtatious Englishwoman whom Jacob meets during his trip to Greece. Jacob falls very much in love with Sandra, but she is married to the jealous and suspicious Evan Williams. Sandra is the only character for whom Jacob develops a romantic attraction, but she remains inaccessible to him. This contrasts with characters like Clara and Fanny, who are both in love with Jacob and accessible to him.



Symbols and Symbolism

Sheep Skull

The sheep skull that Jacob finds in Cornwall symbolizes death, specifically that of Jacob's father. Jacob's father Seabrook dies when Jacob is quite young. Shortly after Seabrook's death, Jacob's mother takes Jacob and his brothers to Cornwall for a vacation. Jacob finds a sheep skull lying in the dirt of a field, and he insists on keeping it in his bedroom. The possession of the skull represents Jacob's grieving process and his lasting attachment to his recently deceased father.

Perambulator

The recurring image of the perambulator represents Jacob's childhood. A perambulator is another word for a baby stroller. Jacob's mother and governess use a perambulator to transport Jacob and his brothers when they are little. Later in the novel, when Jacob is grown, the image of the perambulator returns briefly during a scene of his mother back in Cornwall. This evokes a comparison between Jacob as a child and all the ways he has changed throughout his life.

Time

Time, in conjunction with how it is treated in the novel, symbolizes the transience and ever-changing nature of life and individual people. The novel, though relatively short, covers almost 20 years in Jacob's life, often taken sudden, large leaps forward in time. This makes the changes in the characters' lives very pronounced. It emphasizes the abrupt and premature nature of Jacob's death, as he is killed in combat at a young age.

City and Country

The interplay between urban and rural life in the novel symbolizes the bifurcated nature of Jacob's life, with his early years spent mostly in insular rural areas, and the later years spent in the city and abroad. His childhood is very simple and generally unreflective, but the cosmopolitan nature of his life in the city and on Continental Europe appear to alter both his personality and worldview. Thus, Jacob's surroundings are analogous to the major eras in his life.

The British Museum

The British Museum symbolizes all of human knowledge and history. While the British Museum does not actually contain all records of history, it does contain a vast repository of books. Jacob wonders to himself about the idea of sitting down and reading every



book in the British Museum, as if this were a way to personally accrue all human knowledge. This line of inquiry represents Jacob's desire to find a deeper meaning in life, believing it to have already been discovered and recorded in old books.

Jacob's Room

While the concepts of Jacob's room can literally refer to multiple rooms in the novel, the concept itself symbolizes Jacob's evolving quest for meaning and introspection. Jacob's room can refer to a number of explicitly mentioned rooms, such as his room in the boarding house at Cornwall, his dormitory at Cambridge, and his apartment in London. Each room serves as a hub of operations as Jacob searches for meaning and fulfillment in different places, going out to experience life, then returning to his room to read, study, and contemplate.

Literature

Literature symbolizes Jacob's search for knowledge and meaning. From the time that Jacob studies literature at university, he comes to view it as a medium by which he may divine truth and beauty. He reveres Shakespeare and the classic Greek writers, seeing them as having contributed things of great substance and beauty to the world. Jacob spends much of his free time reading, but he has a special affinity for old literature, as he believes that the classics of English and Greek literature are the best places to look for meaning.

Tom Jones

The novel *Tom Jones* symbolizes refinement and education, or possibly only the affectation thereof. Fanny Elmer, a dancer who falls in love with Jacob, begins reading *Tom Jones* after he says that it is one of his favorite books. It is an old and rather difficult book, but Fanny reads it both in an effort to achieve some type of refinement and to be able to relate to Jacob. Due to this narrative function of "*Tom Jones*," it may also arguably symbolize unrequited love.

Garnet Brooch

Betty Flanders' garnet brooch symbolizes loss. In the fields by her home in Scarborough, Betty Flanders loses a garnet brooch of both sentimental and monetary value. She occasionally looks for it when out on a walk, but she is never able to find it. Because the loss of the brooch is mentioned fairly close to the end of the novel, it seems to be closely juxtaposed with Jacob's death. Thus, the emotional distress of the loss of Betty's brooch is compared to the much deeper distress of the loss of her son.



Modernity

In the novel, the concept of modernity represents vulgarity, confusion, and alienation. Jacob finds himself somewhat adrift in modern life. Free from the need to work, he has no prescribed distraction from general rumination and leisure. He thus seems to decide that modern life is largely devoid of true meaning and beauty, and he seeks beauty in works of the past instead.

Antiquity

To Jacob, antiquity symbolizes lost truth and beauty. Because Jacob decides that truth and beauty are scarce in modern life, he decides that the great works of the past must hold the key to true fulfillment. He reads Shakespeare and classic Greek writers in search of true beauty, and he is exhilarated by his trip to see the ruins of ancient Greece. He sees that trip as an escape from the humdrum rhythm of modern life. However, Jacob never seems to come to a satisfactory resolution to his question of just what answers or beauty the classic works offer.



Settings

Scarborough

Scarborough is a town on the North Sea coast of North Yorkshire, England. It is the childhood home of Betty Flanders and her sons. Betty Flanders has lived in Scarborough for her whole life. She meets and marries her husband there and is still living there at the end of the novel. Her son Jacob moves away from Scarborough to attend school in Cambridge and then to live in London. Throughout the course of the novel, the narrative repeatedly visits Scarborough to check in with Betty Flanders and her friends. Scarborough represents country life and domestic life, contrasting with the cosmopolitan life of Jacob, who lives in London and travels around Europe.

Cornwall

Cornwall is an area of the United Kingdom located at the end of England's southwestern peninsula. Cornwall is a generally rural and quiet area of England, close to the sea and distant from urban centers such as London. After the death of her husband, Betty Flanders takes a vacation to Cornwall with her three young sons. There, Betty grieves for her husband while contemplating the future life of herself and her sons. Later, when Jacob is attending university, he sails around the coast of Cornwall with his friend Timothy Durrant during a school vacation. Cornwall appears to represent a place of escape from normal life, as well as a place of transition and transformation.

Cambridge

Cambridge is a town in England located approximately 50 miles north of London. It is the location of the University of Cambridge, one of England's oldest and most prestigious universities. Jacob attends the University of Cambridge, where he studies literature and makes many erudite friends from wealthy families similar to his. Jacob moves to London fairly soon after graduating, but Cambridge represents a place of significant growth and change for him. His studies in literature shape his interests for the rest of his life. The acquaintances he makes in Cambridge mark the beginning of the wide-ranging, cosmopolitan life he later leads, contrasting with the fairly domestic and insular life he led as a boy in Scarborough.

London

London is England's capital and most populous city. Jacob moves there soon after graduating from the University of Cambridge. Jacob resides in a boarding house there, and while he appears to pursue no specific occupation, he occupies his time with reading, attending social events, and exploring nearby cultural landmarks like the British Museum. London represents a marked contrast to Jacob's life in rural Scarborough. In



London, Jacob is surrounded by people of many different backgrounds and origins, and his life there further develops his taste for the antique and the cosmopolitan.

Continental Europe

Continental Europe refers to all the European countries that are not the United Kingdom, as the United Kingdom is separated from the other European countries by bodies of water. Several years after moving to London, Jacob decides to take a tour of Continental Europe, most notably visiting France, Italy, and Greece. Jacob enjoys Greece the most, because to him, the ancient Greeks represent a form of culture much more powerful and important than any culture that modern life has to offer. Jacob immensely enjoys touring Continental Europe, but ironically, it is also the place where he tragically dies as a young man, killed in combat in France during World War One.



Themes and Motifs

Alienation

Much of the tragedy of the novel is derived from the characters' inability to communicate their true feelings to one another. The characters of the novel all have difficulty with forming meaningful connections with one another, and this is largely due to the characters' inability to express their true thoughts and feelings. One recurring instance of this is between Jacob and his mother. After Jacob moves away from Scarborough to attend university, he is never shown to return to Scarborough, and while he likely does see his mother again at various times, their relationship is portrayed as one of alienation and completely separate lives. Jacob's mother deeply wishes to tell Jacob how much she misses him, but she is never able to bring herself to write this in her letters to him. Instead, she is forced to a rather lonely life on the moors of Scarborough contemplating her isolation and her feeling that she lacks true control in her life.

Jacob, meanwhile, suffers chronic isolation due to his inability to see that true value of human relationships. Ever since he attends university, he becomes obsessed with classic art and literature and sees them as the true sources of meaning and purpose in life. However, Jacob's quest to find fulfillment in literature is constantly thwarted, much to his bafflement. He becomes so focused on this obsession that he is unable to give attention to all the people around him who care about him. Clara Durrant, Timothy Durrant, Richard Bonamy, Mrs. Flanders, Mrs. Durrant, Florinda, Fanny Elmer, and many other characters grow distant from Jacob as he continues to focus on his literary interests instead of nurturing his relationships with these people. Even when Jacob visits Greece and finds that he is distracted from his tourism by the beautiful Sandra Williams, he curses his attraction to her as nothing more than an unwanted diversion from his true purpose.

The novel emphasizes the characters' alienation through the presentation of their unexpressed thoughts, and the persistent alienation is presented as a tragedy, for these thoughts are never able to be expressed. Much of the interpersonal failures are presented as between Jacob and other characters, so because Jacob is killed at a young age in combat, these gulfs of communication and intimacy are never able to be crossed. The novel seems to use this tragedy as a type of warning to the reader, urging them to share their true feelings with those around them before it is too late. The characters of the novel often seem to think that it is too late to say what they really feel, but Jacob's death represents the one true end to the possibility of communication. This recontextualizes Jacob's life as a tragic series of unrecognized opportunities for intimacy and communication.



Modernity and Antiquity

The tragedy of Jacob's character arc often takes the form of his alienation from modern life and his obsession with the past. Jacob's personal interests lie mainly with old literature such as Shakespeare, classical Greek writers, and even the novel *Tom Jones*. Jacob seems to think that true beauty and meaning can only be found in works of the past, and that the routines and rhythms of modern life are completely devoid of fulfillment. The most recent piece of literature that Jacob is shown to enjoy is the novel *Tom Jones*, which was written almost 200 years prior to the time in which Jacob's Room takes place. Jacob repeatedly states that newer pieces of art and literature are inferior compared to older works, and this appears to be symptomatic of Jacob's alienation from his own time. He is unable to find meaning in the routines of his own life, so he idealizes the lives and works of those who lived in the distant past, from ancient Greece to England in the early 1700s.

Unfortunately for Jacob, his idealization of the past never seems to provide him with consistent happiness. For a while, Jacob seems generally content to spend his time in independent study after graduating from university, spending his days reading old texts and visiting places like the British Museum. However, Jacob still suffers from a lack of a sense of true fulfillment, and he eventually travels to Greece, likely believing that he will be able to more closely commune with the perfect civilization that he believes ancient Greece represents. However, his tour of Greece and Continental Europe provides him with only a temporary sense of fulfillment. In what is likely a desperate act of attempting to find purpose and meaning in his life, Jacob joins the British army and is tragically killed during World War One. At every stage in Jacob's life, Jacob looks to false sources of fulfillment and is unable to simply connect with the pleasures of his own everyday life.

Jacob's inability to find true happiness and meaning in his life seems largely due to the fact that his obsessions distract him from his interpersonal relationships and other accessible sources of fulfillment. As stated above, Jacob seems to idealize the past because he is unable to find meaning in modern life, but this obsession then distracts him from the true sources of meaning in modern life, thus creating an increasing cycle of alienation. Jacob is surrounded by characters who care for him and which to connect more meaningfully with him, but his single-minded focus on old art and literature prevents him from tending to these relationships and reaping the benefits. In addition, because Jacob appears to constantly be living in the past, he is unable to focus on the pleasures that his everyday life likely would present if he lived in the moment.

Love and Romance

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Family

The idea of family, while not the most prominent of the novel's themes, does linger persistently in the background of the novel, occasionally serving as the main focus of the narrative. However, the idea of family often serves its purpose in *Jacob's Room* in the very fact of its occasional obscurity. Jacob's immediate family consists of his mother, his deceased father, his older brother Archer, and his younger brother John. Very little is said in the novel regarding Jacob's relationship with his brothers, making the few details given all the more impactful for highlighting Jacob's relative isolation from his family. Chapters 1 and 2 help to give a clear picture of Jacob's family life as a child, existing quietly beside his rambunctious older brother and his impressionable younger one. However, very little is said of Archer and John after Jacob leaves Scarborough. Mrs. Flanders is shown to keep in touch with all of her sons, but Jacob does not seem to think of his brothers very much. This presents a parallel with Jacob's more generalized sense of alienation, although due to his blood relationship with John and Archer, Jacob's



lack of contact with his brothers seems even more significant than his lack of contact with his friends and acquaintances.

Jacob's alienation from his brothers presents a parallel with the unavoidable isolation from his father caused by his Seabrook's death during Jacob's early childhood. Jacob is never shown to truly grieve from his father apart from the possibly symbolic grieving presented by his attachment to the sheep skull he finds on the beach at Cornwall. While he is with his mother in Cornwall after the death of his father, he becomes attached to a sheep's skull and even puts it by his bed at night, possibly symbolizing his unresolved sense of loss for his father. As Seabrook's death is in many ways the initial dramatic event of the entire novel, Jacob's unresolved sense of loss for his father is presented as a possible factor for his self-imposed isolation from his mother and brothers. It also functions simply as a narrative emphasis in the need for close family relationships and Jacob's contradictory habit of ignoring them.

This isolation from the male relatives in Jacob's life also presents a parallel with his alienation from his mother, which the novel examines much more directly and uses as a demonstration of the ill effects of familial isolation. Although Jacob is portrayed as thinking little of his mother and spending his days among the numerous distractions of city life, Mrs. Flanders' generally isolated and sedentary life highlights her isolation from Jacob and her other sons. The sense of the novel regarding Mrs. Flanders living alone in Scarborough are described with highly melancholy language, especially in relation to her inability to communicate satisfactorily with her absent sons. This tragedy is emphasized in the final chapter, when a distraught Mrs. Flanders comes to terms with the finality of Jacob's death as she goes through the things in his apartment.

Purpose

Much of the sadness presented in the lives of the novel's characters is presented as a lack of purpose, direction, and occupation. The most prominent example of this is Jacob himself, as he has no apparent necessity to work and therefore finds himself in a rather aimless position for much of his life. Jacob comes from a wealthy family, likely with an established passive income that frees Mrs. Flanders and her sons from any pressing need to work. Thus, in absence of the financial incentive to pursue a profession, Jacob is tasked with creating his own purpose in life with no predetermined direction. At university, Jacob finds himself drawn to literature, and he thusly makes classic literature the focus of his life from that point onwards. However, Jacob does not pursue the subject in a specifically structured way such as entering academia, and he is left with a self-structured pursuit of literature that takes on a rather aimless quality. Jacob struggles to find long-lasting fulfillment in his independent studies, but he appears unable to do so, even when traveling abroad as an even more drastic measure of creating meaning and purpose for himself.

The supporting characters in the novel also seem to suffer from a lack of meaningful purpose and occupation. For the characters living in London, modern life seems to be rather pointless and uninspiring. Clara Durrant, for example, comes to London with her



mother so that Clara can mingle socially as an eligible young lady. However she quickly comes to see London society as shallow, boring, and rather pointless. The only person with whom she truly seems to want to socialize is Jacob, but Jacob leads a rather secluded life. Meanwhile, Fanny Elmer does in fact have an occupation as a trained dancer, but she still struggles with insecure thoughts that her direction in life may not be a truly valid one. She wishes to impress Jacob and rise to his level of supposed sophistication, fearing that her dance career may actually be an ignominious and isolating life to lead.

Even the characters in Scarborough suffer from a melancholy aimlessness and lack of purpose. The rural Scarborough does not provide as many distractions as life in London does, and the residents of Scarborough feel rather isolated by the remote location of the village. They even seem to feel hemmed in by the small, tightly knit community, as it highlights the lack of varied opportunities for socialization in the town. In Mrs. Flanders' case, these factors are compounded by her own lack of incentive to work. Her husband Seabrook attempted to find a suitable occupation when he was alive, although he never found anything consistently fulfilling. Similarly, Mrs. Flanders is never shown to pursue any long-term occupation, which only seems to exacerbate her feelings of melancholy and meaninglessness in her life.

Styles

Point of View

Although Jacob is the central character of the novel, the narrative is told from the perspectives of many different characters. The novel even tends to switch between many different perspectives within individual chapters. In the first two chapters, the narrative is told almost solely from Mrs. Flanders' perspective, as Jacob is still quite young, and the drama in the first two chapters pertains more chiefly to Mrs. Flanders. However, once Jacob leaves Scarborough, the narrative chiefly follows him and takes on the perspectives of the many people he meets in his independent life. It is also important to note that once Jacob leaves Scarborough, the focus of the novel is generally bifurcated into two areas: Jacob's life and his mother's. The novel regularly revisits Scarborough to check in with Mrs. Flanders and the other residents of the town, but when Scarborough is not the focus, the narrative focuses on the perspectives of Jacob and his acquaintances.

The narrator of the novel is omniscient in that the narration is able to convey the thoughts and actions of any character to the reader. Moreover, although the narrator is not a specific person or character, it does seem to have its own point of view and personality, often giving independent comments on the characters' thoughts and situations. The narration often serves simply to convey the characters' inner thoughts, as the characters generally find themselves unable to express their innermost thoughts to other characters. The narration then comments upon these characters' thoughts, as well as on the factors that prevent the characters from communicating. In this way, the novel is able to demonstrate alienation between characters while also presenting the characters' true thoughts and feelings in spite of the characters' inability to express themselves of their own volition. This also places a great emphasis on the thoughts and internal lives of the characters, thus affecting the structure of the novel and its plot. Instead of relying on dialogue and action to develop plot and themes, the story takes on a more contemplative and less plot-driven structure due to the function of the omniscient narrator.

Language and Meaning

The tone of the novel is very melancholy, yet understated. The novel deals with very somber themes such as alienation from others, alienation from society, and alienation from oneself, as each of the characters struggle with their lives and personal relationships. However, because the novel makes frequent use of implication and suggestion rather than explicit exposition, these melancholy themes lie just beneath the surface of very mundane details. The actual events and dialogue of the novel are fairly commonplace, and even the most tragic event in the novel—Jacob's death—is never explicitly addressed by either the narration or the characters. Therefore, the true tragedy of the characters' lives is slightly obscured by the details on which the novel focuses.



This often forces the reader to empathize more deeply with the characters' situations, as the reader must do the work of gleaning the true thoughts and feeling of the characters when those feelings are not explicitly stated.

The narration emphasizes the sad nature of these characters' existences through melancholy language, descriptions, and details. For example, whenever the narrative check back in with Mrs. Flanders, her dialogue and actions are generally reserved and quiet, but the narration contrasts this mundane life with very melancholy descriptions. These descriptions generally pertain to both thoughts and environment, meaning the presentation of Mrs. Flanders' surroundings and inner life are quite sad. Mrs. Flanders deeply misses her son, and this fact is conveyed to the reader via the narration, but Mrs. Flanders finds that she is never able to express this feeling in any of her letters to Jacob. This is a good representative of the block between characters' inner lives and external actions. With regards to Mrs. Flanders' surroundings, the narration usually describes the moors of Scarborough in very dour and depressing terms, often associating the moors with Mrs. Flanders' existential dread and her feeling that she lacks control in her life. This principle—the sad presentation of thoughts and circumstances—serves to emphasize the sadness that underlies the mundane life of the characters' lives.

Structure

Jacob's Room is structured in a linear fashion and is written in the past tense. The narrative spans about 20 years of Jacob's life. Due to the relatively short length of the novel, the stories of Jacob and those around him are told in brief snapshots at different points in the narrative timeline. The narrative begins during Jacob's early childhood in the 1890s and continues to shortly after his death in his mid-twenties during World War One. Because Jacob is the central character, most periods of the narrative timeline represent major changes in Jacob's life, such as the death of his father, his enrollment in Cambridge, his move to London, and his trip to Continental Europe. However, during each chapter, the focus of the narrative takes time to examine other characters' narratives in relation to Jacob's story arc. Thus, the narrative not only furthers Jacob's story by portraying his own thoughts and actions, but also the thoughts and actions of his family and acquaintances as relates to Jacob's narrative and the larger themes of the novel.

The narrative and themes are developed by multiple modes of storytelling, including dialogue, description of action, and even many instances in which characters' thought processes are conveyed and commented upon by the narration. The strong focus on the thoughts and internal lives of the characters allows the narrative to emphasize the profound alienation that builds between them as the story goes on. While dialogue remains rather civil and surface-level between characters throughout the story, the exploration of characters' true inner-lives allows the novel to demonstrate the significance of what the characters feel unable to communicate. Generally, the narrative's attention to thought and internal lives does not function to further the plot of the novel in any way, but rather simply to develop themes and present significant

contemplation, with the inner voice of the characters often blending with the comments and observations of the narration.



Quotes

Scarborough,' Mrs. Flanders wrote on the envelope...it was her native town; the hub of the universe."

-- Mrs. Flanders (chapter 1)

Importance: This quotation serves multiple narrative functions, including developing Betty Flanders' character and filling in some of her backstory. Betty Flanders, although wealthy, has been content to live a simple life, never relocating from the town of her birth. Betty's attitude conveyed in this quote also serves to contrast with the later development of Jacob's cosmopolitanism and desire to travel.

Mrs. Jarvis was just the sort of woman to lose her faith upon the moors—to confound her God with the universal that is—but she did not lose her faith, did not leave her husband.

-- Narration (chapter 2)

Importance: This quotation helps to develop Mrs. Jarvis' character while also developing the moor's a narrative symbol. Mrs. Jarvis has a rather romantic sensibility, and yet she feels restrained by her domestic obligations. The moors, meanwhile, are portrayed here as a catalyst of such romanticism and doubt. The moors of Scarborough serve throughout the novel to symbolize a certain sense of loss and alienation, especially for Betty Flanders and her Scarborough friends.

Why are we yet surprised in the window corner by a sudden vision that the young man in the chair is of all things in the world...the best known to us—why indeed? For the moment after we know nothing about him. Such is the manner of our seeing. Such the conditions of our love.

-- Narration (chapter 5)

Importance: This quotation is placed shortly after a series of contemplations by Clara Durrant regarding her love for Jacob Flanders. Clara feels a deep romantic attraction to Jacob and yet she recognizes a certain degree of distance between them. This quotation represents a pattern in the book in which characters such as Clara and Fanny experience love for Jacob and yet also feel that they can never truly know him. The quotation seems to universalize this feeling and apply it to many instances of love.

There is in the British Museum an enormous mind. Consider that Plato is there cheek by jowl with Aristotle; and Shakespeare with Marlowe. This great mind is hoarded beyond the power of any single mind to possess it.

-- Narration (chapter 9)

Importance: This quotation appears to reflect one of Jacob's ideas regarding both the British Museum and knowledge in general. Jacob spends much of his time at the British Museum, where he reads classic works by renowned thinkers of the age. Jacob seems



to be in search of some complete form of knowledge, but this quotation recognizes that type of knowledge unattainability.

Perfect prose, Jacob said. For he never read modern novels. He liked Tom Jones.
-- Narration (chapter 10)

Importance: This quotation regards Jacob's aversion to many aspects of modern life, preferring instead the ideas of thinkers and writers who are long dead. Jacob seems to disdain modern life as having lost some fundamental truth or beauty, and so he looks to old books like Tom Jones or the plays of Shakespeare as repositories for the truth and beauty which he feels have been lost.

He would go to Greece with a book in his pocket and forget her.
-- Narration (chapter 10)

Importance: This piece of narration reflects a thought and worry of Fanny Elmer. She views herself as unrefined and uneducated, and this quotation reveals her worry that this unrefinement makes Jacob unattainable to her. The sadness of this quotation seems to reflect a melancholy trait of society in which people feel alienated from one another due to arbitrary matters such as the specific subjects in which a person has been educated.

Flanders. An Englishman. Wealthy. Highly connected.
-- Edward Cruttendon (chapter 11)

Importance: While Cruttendon is a character with a penchant for jokes, this quotation does stand as a piece of evidence as to Jacob's social and economic standing. Jacob is never in need of a steady job in order to pay expenses, so Cruttendon's statement, even if partially joking, helps to illustrate the firm ground upon which Jacob stands in terms of money and social connections.

It would be foolish to vex the moor with questions—what? and why? The church clock, however, strikes twelve.
-- Mrs. Flanders (chapter 11)

Importance: This quotation represents the helplessness that Betty Flanders feels while staying in Scarborough as her sons go off into the world. In Scarborough, Betty is surrounded by the misty moors of the countryside, representing her relative isolation and lack of certainty in life. Here, Betty seems to resign herself to life's nature of unknowability.

At the age of twelve or so...France, but much more probably Italy, and India almost for a certainty, draws the superfluous imagination.
-- Narration (chapter 12)

Importance: This quotation represents the onrush of cosmopolitanism and wanderlust that becomes instilled in Jacob. Due to his experiences in Cambridge and London,



Jacob begins to grow curious about the world beyond England. Unlike his mother, he seems to have no affinity for his hometown, instead valuing the ability to travel about and attempt to increase one's knowledge of the world through direct experience.

I Intend to come to Greece every year so long as I live," Jacob wrote to Bonamy. 'It is the only chance I can see of protecting oneself from civilization.

-- Jacob (chapter 12)

Importance: This quotation reflects Jacob's disinterest in modern life and his belief that the key to beauty and meaning lies in the past. Jacob becomes very interested in the ancient art and architecture he finds in Greece, viewing them as surviving relics of a better and more beautiful time. Jacob's experience of modern life appears to be weighted down its the vulgar and humdrum exigencies.

It is thus that we live, they say, driven by an unseizable force.

-- Narration (chapter 12)

Importance: This quotation refers to Betty Flanders' feeling of lack of control in her life. While she remains in Scarborough, her sons pursue their interests elsewhere. Betty grows lonely and feels generally uncertain of how to proceed. She feels Scarborough is her one true home, and yet she must deal with the loss of her sons as they move away. In Jacob's case, the loss is permanent due to his death in World War One.

Such confusion everywhere!' exclaimed Betty Flanders, bursting open the bedroom door... 'What am I to do with these, Mr. Bonamy?' She held out a pair of Jacob's old shoes.

-- Mrs. Flanders (chapter 14)

Importance: This quotation reflects Betty Flanders inability to deal with Jacob's tragic death. Betty's feeling of fear and uncertainty through out the novel reach a climax in the form of Jacob's death, and Betty Flanders does not know how to proceed. IN this moment, the shoes symbolize the young Jacob, and thus subsequently symbolize the days when her boys were young, her husband was alive, and things felt certain.