

# **The Little Paris Bookshop Study Guide**

## **The Little Paris Bookshop by Nina George**

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# Plot Summary

"The Little Paris Bookshop" is a fictional novel written by Nina George. The novel focuses on the story of Jean Perdu, a man who had allowed his life to end with the death of his true love, Manon. After finally reading a letter Manon had left him 21 years prior, Jean decided he had to leave his life of loneliness and reconnect once again with his lost love. Along the way, Jean connected with others in search of the same thing: love and completeness. On their journey, Jean and his newfound family connect and come to realize the freedom that comes with facing one's past and learning to feel again.

In the beginning of the novel, Jean worked as a Parisian book salesman, having lived the past 21 years in solitude, too afraid to face the loss of Manon. This shop was unique in that it served as a "Literary Apothecary" and he as a literary pharmacist. With an innate ability to read people, Jean was able to tell, after only brief conversation, exactly what ailed a customer's soul. Upon determining this, Jean would prescribe a work of literature that could heal the illnesses of the customer's heart. The only person Jean found he could not cure was himself.

Although Jean connected with people through literature, he was sure to avoid any connection that might spur memories of Manon. Although his customers and neighbors tried to connect with him on a personal level, Jean rejected their advances. He feared any emotional connection would bring him too close to the painful memory of Manon. When a new neighbor and recent divorcee, Catherine arrived, however, Jean felt for the first time a deep desire for romantic connection. Realizing he could not connect with Catherine fully until facing the ghosts of his past, Jean set out on a journey to reconnect with the lost Manon and thus reconnect with his sense of self.

When Jean decided to leave for his journey, he undocked his "Literary Apothecary" and began to sail away alone. Against Jean's wishes, Max Jordan, a young author and neighbor climbed aboard. Max Jordan had come to Paris to escape the notoriety his successful novel had brought him. Max had always taken a special interest in Jean, although Jean had previously rejected his attempts at friendship. Max shared that he had lost his muse. After writing his first novel, he had lost the will to write, which had previously been his source of life.

Along the way, Jean and Max met up with Cuneo, an Italian chef who had lost the love of his life after only one night. As the three men journeyed on, they connected through their losses and formed a pseudo-family to replace their mutual loneliness. In doing so, they were able to support one another and allow each other to be open and honest when facing pain.

As the men finally came to terms with their losses, they were able to experience all of the loss, pain, and eventual freedom that comes with revisiting one's past. In allowing themselves to come to terms with the pains of their past, they came to realize the

positive influence love has on a life, even if that love is eventually lost. In this realization, the men allowed themselves to become whole once again.



# Chapters 1-8

## Summary

“Little Paris Bookshop” tells the story of Jean Perdu, a self-proclaimed “literary apothecary” who owns a floating bookshop and prescribes novels to alleviate all of life’s emotional burdens. The only person Jean cannot seem to help is himself. Every since his true love left him 21 years prior, Jean has closed himself off to the world, dying with his lost love. Upon finding out that his lover, Manon, had died shortly after leaving him, Jean sets out of a journey to find the man he once was.

Chapter 1 began with the owners of Jean Perdu’s residence, 27 Rue Montagnard, convincing him to give a table to a new tenant who was recently left by her husband. Perdu agreed, although he would much rather have offered a book.

Perdu returned to his residence to retrieve the table and a book for the grieving divorcee. He stumbled upon *When the Clock Struck Thirteen*, a novel about time travel. He interpreted this as an omen as he contemplated entering the room with the table, a room of his home he had not entered in 21 years. The last time he been in the room was with a lost love. Now, at 50 years old, he could not even bring himself to think her name.

As he entered the room, he was overcome by pleasant smells he tried to ignore. He retrieved the table and brought it to his new neighbor’s home. She was crying in a way she wanted no one to hear.

Chapter 2 opened with Perdu’s conversation with a neighbor, Madame Bernard, regarding the new neighbor. Her name was Catherine, Bernard revealed, and she had been left with nothing when her husband left her.

Living alone, Perdu spent most of his time listening to his neighbors but only interacting with them on occasion and mainly in his shop. One neighbor, Max Jordan, a young author, showed particular interest in Perdu, which Perdu found unsettling as he wished to remain the neighborhood observer.

When Perdu arrived at Catherine’s apartment with the table and a consoling book, he found that she was still crying. She told him she would drown if she stopped. He left the table and told her he would return with a book for crying.

In Chapter 3, a lady entered The Literary Apothecary and wished to purchase Max Jordan’s *Night*. Perdu told her that the book would not help her and offered instead to sell her a book that would cure her heartache. Shocked and discomfited by Perdu’s ability to read her, she left the shop purchasing nothing.

In *Night*, Max Jordan, Perdu’s young neighbor had won critical acclaim by exposing the truth of male emotion. Perdu wondered silently about his young neighbor.



In Chapter 4, Perdu helped a mother purchase encyclopedias for her daughter as her aging mother waited outside. Perdu went outside to speak with the older lady as her family shopped. She reminded Perdu of his own mother. In their conversation, Perdu revealed his idea for an encyclopedia of common human emotions, the ailments overlooked by doctors which he sought to heal through literature. As Perdu reentered the bookshop, he felt the warm touch of the cats he looked after. This soothing warmth was the only physical contact he had allowed in the past twenty years.

In Chapter 5, Perdu realized that Max Jordan had been hiding in the store all day. Yearning for familiarity with Perdu, he asked if Perdu would call him by his first name. Perdu refused as this would mean having Max address Perdu by his own first name. The last one to call him that was his still unnamed lost lover.

When Max revealed he had been in the store when Perdu had refused to sell his book, Perdu explained the way he prescribed books as a type of medicine. He respected Max's work yet did not think it would have helped that customer.

Max told Perdu that he was feeling lost and could not find the inspiration to continue writing. Perdu gave him Sanary's Southern Lights, which Perdu himself found was the only book that could "pierce without hurting." Perdu thought that if he had had a son with his former love, he would have wanted him to be like Max. At the end of the chapter, the heartbroken customer returned for the books that Perdu had promised would cure her ailing soul.

Chapter 6 began with Perdu speaking with the returned woman, whose name was Anna. He asked her a series of semi-personal questions in order to get to know her a little better. Perdu liked to form a connection with those he prescribed readings to. As he spoke to Anna and watched her begin to read, he witnessed her unraveling. The stresses and angers she held dissolved as she was cured by his literary prescription.

As Chapter 7 began, Perdu wondered about how Catherine must feel in the new city as a recent divorcee. He examined many façades of Parisian living. Everyone around him seemed to be hiding secret selves and it was only through observation and innate perception that he could see through their guises.

Perdu sat down for lunch and was offered a drink. He declined, as he had not had a drink for the past twenty years. He wished to deliver the crying books to Catherine that afternoon.

As he was returning from lunch, Perdu ran into Madame Gulliver, a neighbor who always asked him to accompany her on adventures. He refused, as usual. She told him that he never did anything and he could not disagree. He felt himself aging and thought about how Madame Gulliver was the only woman to show interest in him in a long while.

As Perdu walked to Catherine's apartment, he thought about Clara, a young pianist of the second floor. He arrived at Clara's house to find her waiting for him. She had found a letter in his table.



Chapter 8 began with Perdu's refusal of the letter. He knew it was his as his name was written on the envelope in the handwriting of his lost love. Memories from before she had left him came flooding back. He remembered how they had loved in secret. Her name was revealed to be Manon. He thought of how she had made him promise to die before her as she did not want him to go on alone. He regretted never having said he loved her. He thought of how she had always lived completely in the moment and had left unexpectedly. When she sent the letter shortly after, he could not open it, mainly out of pride. Perdu recalled that Manon had wanted him to meet her husband and he had refused.

Perdu then thought of the time directly after she left. He had hated life without her and destroyed everything in his home that had reminded him of her. The only things he could not bring himself to destroy were the books he had read her. He went on hating everything and avoiding life. He had stowed the letter away, meaning to read it in a year or two, not twenty. He returned to Catherine's later and left a note apologizing for his behavior. He could not bring himself to sign his first name. He simply signed, J. Perdu.

## Analysis

In the opening of the novel, Jean Perdu's feelings toward books are presented in his feeling that a book is the most practical gift one can give despite his landlord's wish for a table. In this scene, Perdu is characterized as fully invested in his way of life, genuinely believe in the power of literature.

As Perdu entered the room to retrieve the table, he tried his best to ignore the pleasant aroma he was overcome by. This mirrored the way he had been avoiding all pleasantries for the past 21 years with the hopes of avoiding all memories of his lost love. The memories would cause a yearning he could not face. He considered the impossibility of avoiding one's memories. They could not simply be locked away.

In Chapter 2, Perdu's conversation with Bernard, coupled with his account of the lives of his neighbors, revealed the decadence of their Parisian village. The disintegration of love between couples saddened Perdu as he observed their lives from a distance. Witnessing their lives distracted Jean from his ever-present loneliness. When his neighbor's came to his shop, he offered advice in the form of books.

Although Perdu was undoubtedly lonely, he did not wish for this loneliness to be broken, as facing any emotional connection would cause memories of his past to resurface.

When Catherine shared that she would drown if she stopped crying, Perdu understood. This hinted at the emotional loss he had suffered in the past. He felt that mourning was a necessary part of loss and knew of books that would help the process along. He was ready to help Catherine face her loss but was not yet ready to face his own. He wondered how it was he could offer console to all but himself.

In Chapter 3, Perdu's keen ability to read people is revealed as he denied the request of the lady wishing to purchase *Night*, instead offering a novel that would better aid in the



heartache he knew she had suffered. The woman's shock in his inane understanding drew attention to lack of reasoning behind Perdu's ability to read others. Not even Perdu understood his ability. He only knew that by nature he had been granted the gift of intuition, which he used to prescribe healing novels.

In the description of Max Jordan's novel and rise to fame, Jordan is characterized as a young and highly emotional artist. Perdu wonders how it would be to feel so intensely and survive. Since his loss, Perdu has allowed his soul to die and has continued through life without connection.

In Chapter 4, Perdu's idea for an encyclopedia of emotions is first revealed. In describing this idea, Perdu explains the driving force behind his literary apothecary: to heal the wounds of the heart in a way only literature can.

In Chapter 5, Perdu's resistance to reveal his first name showed just how extreme his desire to avoid the past was. In an attempt to completely banish the memories of his past, he had given up his own first name and thus, his identity.

In describing his literature prescription process to Max, Perdu explained how he wished to free those people who were not the main characters in their own life stories from whatever forces were holding them back. Through literature, he aimed to make others whole and to conquer whatever had made them less than that.

In his conversation with Jordan and his accompanying thoughts, Perdu revealed much about his circumstance. In saying that he could help nearly everyone through literature, he referenced his inability to help himself. When Jordan shared that he was struggling with writer's block, Perdu shared that when he could not go on he did nothing. In saying this, he referenced the menial tasks that had filled the last 21 years of his life as his identity and vitality slipped away.

In relating Max Jordan to a son, Perdu began to come closer to the young man than before. He was finally allowing himself some level of emotional closeness, regardless of the pangs of lost love that came with it.

In Chapter 6, Perdu helped Anna find the literature that would help ease her worried soul. As he spoke to her, he exemplified his genuine belief in the power of literature. Although he can find a cure for nearly any customer, he cannot seem to heal himself. As he watched Anna find herself in the literature, he was at once joyful and somber as he felt his cure may never come.

In Chapter 7, Perdu's reasoning for refusing a drink revealed more about the troubles of his past. He related alcohol to smashing furniture, signaling that his emotional disarray had at one time brought him to a dark place. This offered further evidence for why he did not want to revisit the pains of his past.

Perdu's interaction with Madam Gulliver showed that he was fully aware and at least somewhat regretful about the manner in which he had been spending the past twenty





years of his life. He had let his youth and his personality slip away from him. Now, he did not know if he would ever be able to return to the self he once was.

He thought about Clara, a young pianist on the second floor. She was one of the world's five best pianists but received little notoriety as she could not perform in front of crowds. This symbolized the unused livelihood that lay dormant without Perdu as he was afraid to allow himself to live.

In Chapter 8, Perdu's memories of his lost lover bring to light many of the details of his past. It is revealed that he was left by Manon, who was married at the time of their affair. Perdu had hated life after she left yet refused to read her letter out of pride. She had brought life to his life and without her he refused to be truly alive. Manon's insistence that Perdu die before her signified that she saw his dependence on her and loved him enough not to want to leave him. Perdu's life had revolved purely around Manon and without her he could not find his place.

## Discussion Question 1

Examine the ways in which Jean Perdu surrendered his identity and livelihood to avoid his past. How does the author use symbolism to emphasize this?

## Discussion Question 2

Explain what Jean Perdu means when asking, "Is he or she the main character in his or her life?" How does this quote relate to Jean Perdu's own life story?

## Discussion Question 3

Should Perdu have read Manon's letter? Was it right to make this decision out of pride?

## Vocabulary

erstwhile, pontificated, tinnitus, relished, elicit, gangway, loris, bastion, patriarchy, transposed, parlance, precocious, audacious, façade, chiroprapist, spinster, registrar, vigneron, brasserie



## Chapters 9-14

### Summary

The next day, Perdu went to his letterbox to find a letter from Catherine. She addressed him as J. and told him to come over for dinner that evening. He would read the letter, she said, or she would not give it to him.

After reading the note, Perdu made his way through the neighborhood, contemplating the life stories of all of the neighbors who lived there. He had learned a lot through listening over the years. He stopped at a wine store, where he met his father. They talked about his mother and about women. It saddened Perdu that his parent's divorce continued despite their unending care for one another.

In Chapter 10, Perdu arrived at Catherine's apartment for his first date in 21 years. Although the two had only just met, they spoke like old friends. Catherine told him about how she had grown up craving attention solely from egotists and was now finally trying to find herself. Perdu told her about his Literary Apothecary. He finally revealed his first name, Jean, for the first time in 21 years. He told her about Manon and about the origin of the letter. The two embraced and were equally startled by how good touch felt.

In Chapter 11, Jean Perdu and Catherine continued touching one another, feeling closer as they continued. Jean finally felt like a man again. He truly desired Catherine. However, when he thought of kissing her, she closed her eyes. Through this action, Jean felt the looming presence of their ex-lovers and could not kiss her.

After this realization, Catherine broke down in tears. Jean knew then that he had to break down as well. He walked into the living room and began reading Manon's letter.

Chapter 12 began with Manon's letter, in which she revealed that she was dying. Jean was sickened by his own pride. He explained what he had read to Catherine, although he knew he was hurting her by doing so. He embraced her awkwardly and left.

Chapter 13 began with Jean contemplating suicide. Feeling as if he had betrayed Manon in the worst possible way, he felt as though he deserved to die. Instead, he decided to escape. He boarded the Literary Apothecary, which he had kept in running condition solely out of habit, and pulled away. As he was leaving, Max Jordan hopped aboard with his luggage, despite Jean's protest and the loss of his wallet in the ocean.

Chapter 14 began Jean and Max's journey south toward Manon's homeland. Max was surprised that Jean would leave so abruptly for a woman because he saw him as a man completely in control. Max told Jean that he wanted to travel for inspiration. He had lost his will to write. At the end of the chapter, Jean quoted Sanary, saying one must travel South for the answers to his or her dreams. He then muttered to himself, "I'm coming Manon."



At the end of the chapter, a passage from Manon's travel diary was included. The diary began when Manon left Avignon, her country home, for the first time to come to Paris. She described the people of the country as soulful and those of the city as cold. Her family was scared she would lose her future to a second love, as she was already engaged to Luc, a vineyard worker. She did not think this likely. She also could not imagine she would miss Luc, as she never had before. She recalled meeting Jean for the first time, on the train to Paris. She compared him to a white raven, reading all of her thoughts. She immediately desired to kiss him.

## Analysis

In Chapter 9, Catherine's addressing Perdu by J. showed her insistence of breaking down the boundaries he had crafted over the years. This action foreshadowed the role she would play in his life.

As Perdu walked through town, he considered the old widow living in apartment 5. She had spent the last 69 years of her life alone, the widow of a German soldier. When they were young, she had wanted to make love to him but had been too ashamed of her body to do so. This mirrored Perdu's embarrassment when contemplating revealing his love to Manon. Both he and the widow were now left alone and lifeless with the results of their mistakes. He thought of how he missed Manon and himself. He felt as if he had grown old in a single night without her.

When Perdu met up with his father, Joaquin, he asked mainly of Perdu's mother. Perdu thought about how they had married when they were young and in love and had never stopped caring, even in their divorce. His father compared women to horses, saying they loved in a more intelligent way. Women, he said, did not love men for their looks but for their entire being.

As the two continued to talk about life, Perdu thought of how he had failed to form friendships for fear of being left. His father asked him to tell his mother there was no one like her. It hit him then that true love really had no end.

In Chapter 10, Catherine was introduced in greater depth. The author drew parallels between her and Perdu as both had neglected to develop their own sense of selves in their devotion to their lovers. They also found in common their shared love of literature.

When Jean described the Literary Apothecary he compared it silently to an "arrested adventure." The floating bookshop, full of stories and adventures yet forever moored was symbolic of Perdu himself. He was fully prepared for an adventure yet refused to embark.

As Perdu and Catherine's conversation grew more intimate, Perdu was finally forced to face the past. In revealing his first name, he began to relinquish the hold his past had upon him. He allowed himself to be touched by another. In doing so, he and Catherine realized they no longer had to be alone and were shocked at how amazing it felt to be intimate with another.



In Chapter 11, As Jean and Catherine touched, Jean felt as though he could read her thoughts, signaling their high level of intimacy. When Catherine closed her eyes, Jean felt as though she had closed herself off from him. At that moment, rather than kissing her, he said, “We’re not alone anymore,” signally the presence of the ghosts of their pasts. Feeling the same, Catherine broke down in tears and told Jean about how she had lost her sense of self in her marriage. Jean knew then that this was the time. He finally had to let himself break down as well. He began reading Manon’s letter, knowing it would break him completely, yet knowing at the same time that it had to be done. The pain he had avoided for 21 years was finally going to surface and he was ready to face it.

In Chapter 12, Jean read Manon’s letter and found that she had left him out of love, as she was dying and knew how much it would hurt him. She had requested in the letter that he come see her. Now it was too late. He felt completely sickened that his pride had kept him from her in her time of need. After all these years of feeling as if he had been wronged, he now felt as though he had betrayed his love.

When explaining the letter to Catherine, Jean knew he was hurting her but could not help but share. Catherine told him that she wished her husband had left out of love as it was the best way to be left. With his rising guilt, Jean was not so sure. He hugged her awkwardly and left. He had finally allowed himself to be broken completely.

Chapter 13 showed Jean at his lowest possible point. Rather than dying, he felt he had to escape his life.

The conversation between Max and Jean in Chapter 14 revealed that both men were embarking on a journey of self-discovery. Max’s view of Jean as a man completely in control was juxtaposed to the complete breakdown he was feeling inside. In quoting Sanary at the end of the chapter, Jean emphasized the importance of the journey for both men. In embarking on the journey, they were both allowing themselves to truly experience the world, with all its wonders and pains, for the first time.

The first entry of Manon’s Travel Diary was titled, “On My Way into Life, Between Avignon and Lyons.” This title was significant as it showed that Manon did not consider herself to be truly alive until embarking on her travels to Paris, where she met Jean. Likewise, Jean acquired his livelihood from her.

Manon’s description of her family and the world around her allowed the reader a deeper understanding of her character. In this way, Manon was represented on her own terms, from her own point of view.

She admired her father for his self-controlled and tolerant persona. He was a soulful countryman. Yet, he did not understand what she could get out of the city. He also would not have understood the open marriage she and Luc had agreed to. She thought of how her cousin had told her she would miss Luc, as if he had dropped his anchor within her and was forever calling her back. She could not imagine missing Luc. She craved adventure he could not provide.



In her first description of Jean, her fascination with him was clear. She described him as a white raven. She felt that he could see straight through to her soul. She wanted to kiss him. In her description, it was made clear that the infatuation the two had with one another was mutual.

## Discussion Question 1

Compare Jean Perdu and Catherine. What are some of the factors that drew the two together?

## Discussion Question 2

Did Jean really betray Manon? Was it unreasonable for him not to have read the letter considering the circumstance?

## Discussion Question 3

Describe Manon. How does her journal entry add to her characterization?

## Vocabulary

regiment, muscatel, snippet, falteringly, embankment, shelved, astern, twiddled, wry, throttle, malleable, strata, contours, cynical, humanism, mistral, pinning



# Chapters 15-20

## Summary

In Chapter 15, Max and Jean continued on their journey. For every request Max had, Jean sent him to a book. As the two sailed on, Jean was overcome by nature. As they sailed through Camargue, Jean recalled the summer he and Manon had spent there. It was the last time he had felt the wild freedom by which he was now overcome.

In Chapter 16, Max came upon a flag when rifling through the books on board. Jean recalled the conversation he and Manon had had as she sewed the flag years earlier. Jean told Max to fly the flag, and in doing so embraced the memory of Manon. As he was doing so, the police approached.

In Chapter 17, Jean and Max were approached by the police. Jean stood firm while Max paced nervously. The police officer informed them that they did not have the proper paperwork necessary for operating their boat on French waters. They were also in need of life jackets. Jean considered how adventure novels neglected to include such technicalities. They were able to pay the officer partially in books and Jordan's autograph, but realized that they were running dangerously low on funds at this point.

After the police officer had left, Max opened up to Jean about his abusive father. Jean assured him that the abuse was not his fault and that his father was not a good person. He comforted him as he broke down in tears. Just as Max was perking up, the two men realized they had lost control of the ship.

In Chapter 18, Jean regained control of the ship and moored in Saint-Mammes, where the two scrounged together the last of the money in the tip car to pay the mooring fee. Jean considered all the life Max had ahead of him and contemplated whether he would start again given the chance. He thought about how old he had let himself become in the past twenty years. He thought about his old friend, Vijaya, who had found love just as Jean had lost it. He thought of how different his life could have been had he not listened to fear. The best advice he could offer Max was to never listen to fear.

In Chapter 19, Jean and Max reached the end of their ever-swindling funds and found themselves in a predicament when they could not find a restaurant that would accept books as a form of payment. Max quickly found a group of ladies and asked if they could join them for lunch. Jean felt ashamed to ask women for a favor. Max did not share this sentiment.

As they talked with the ladies, they found that they too had come of a journey after heartbreak. Jean, looking up at the stars, remembered the intensity with which he viewed the universe when Manon was in his life. The woman they were dining with, Ida, shared that her husband had left her because they were the "small loves" of each other's lives and he had found his "big love." She said that "small love" was enough for her but



not for him. Jean hoped that she would find her big love one day. He then thought about Manon, and how he had let himself die with her. Manon would not have wanted that, he thought.

Chapter 20 began with Jean's dreaming that he could breath underwater. When he awoke, he picked up the copy of Southern Lights Max was reading and found that he had underlined some of the same quotes Jean would have. He thought about the ability books had to change people and the world.

Hungry, Jean entered a bakery and was able to pay the young lady working their in books. He observed how completely content she seemed in her lifestyle and wondered if her role in life could be enough to fill a person.

Returning to the ship, Jean began to think about Catherine. He realized that he had left her out of cowardice. He was scared to need someone again.

When he told Max about his dream, Max revealed that its meaning was that Jean was no longer choked by his own emotions. He remembered Manon in his dream and considered the power of dreams to bridge the gap between life and death. He had decided he was not returning to Paris.

## Analysis

In Chapter 15, Jean's referencing books for Max's every request emphasized his reliance on literature for all practical concerns. In his 21 years of solitude, he had learned to rely on books completely for all of his needs.

As Jean sailed, he compared his decision to journey on or to stop to his decision to move on from Manon or to remain stagnant in heartache. In finally unmooring the Literary Apothecary, Jean had decided to finally take an active role in his own life and to leave the past behind in search of a future.

As he sailed further South, he felt himself overcome by nature. He recalled Forster novels depicting futuristic societies in which people living their lives without nature die when they are suddenly exposed. Having been in the city, deprived of the natural for so long, Jean related to those characters. In this way, the country and the city are juxtaposed, furthering the comparison Manon had mentioned in her journal.

As they sailed past Camargue, Jean recalled the romantic love affair he had with Manon there. It was clear in his description that he had loved her passionately and deeply. The wild abandon with which the two loved that summer was juxtaposed to the controlled and unfeeling man Jean had become without Manon. In revisiting his past, he was beginning to allow himself to reconnect with his former self. This was the first time Jean realized he could do this without breaking down.

In Chapter 16, Manon's flag drew back memories of their relationship. Jean remembered how Manon had described Luc as her best friend. He was willing to give



her a freedom Jean could not. He feared their relationship was only about sex to her. He then corrected himself as more memories came flooding back. Their relationship was a celebration of life. In deciding to fly Manon's flag, Jean had decided to again embrace life.

In Chapter 17, Max told the officer he was Jean's son in order to preserve his identity. This emphasized the growing closeness between the men. Not only was Jean beginning to see Max as a son; Max was beginning to see Jean as a father figure. This is further emphasized in Max's revelation of his father's abuse to Jean. As Jean comforted Max, the two shared the closet thing either would have to a father-son relationship.

After sharing his feelings, Max felt ready to experience love. This feeling mirrored the way Jean had sought to take on life after he allowed himself to break down. Through acknowledgement of their emotions, the men allowed themselves catharsis in the form of love and support from another.

As Jean contemplated the way his life had turned out in Chapter 18, he found that his biggest regret was fear. Seeing all the life Max had ahead of him, he hoped that he would not live in fear. He thought of the way that fear had transformed his life. Realizing the error of his ways, Jean had brought himself a step closer to regaining the self he had left behind through fear.

In Chapter 19, Jean reflected on his life with Manon. He recalled the intensity with which she caused him to feel life. He missed this vitality just as he missed her. In letting his soul die with Manon, he had failed to carry on her life for her. He thought of how this would upset her. In realizing this, Jean became closer to allowing himself to come back to life, carrying the spirit of his lost love with him.

In Chapter 20, Jean's dream symbolized his finally coming to terms with his emotions toward Manon. He was no longer scared to love her or to need another. He had come to the conclusion that to live would be the best way to face his past and carry on her memory.

The girl Jean encountered in the bakery was symbolic of his former self. Seeming completely content in her menial job, she believed books had the power to make people impudent. Jean recalled the way he had lived vicariously through books for the past 21 years of his life. Although he agreed with the girl on the power of books, he could not help but feel this life may not be enough for her. Just as he had recently journeyed into life, he thought she may desire to do the same.

## Discussion Question 1

Examine the role fear has played in Jean's life. What aspects of his life may have been different had he not listened to fear?





## Discussion Question 2

Analyze the symbolic role of the girl in the bakery in the novel.

## Discussion Question 3

Consider the role of nature and urbanism in the novel. What symbolic role does each play

## Vocabulary

castrated, stern, deltoid, eddies, quay, phlegmatic, excavator, ensign, filigree, fervent, effeminate, aspersions, ignoramus, reedy, emphatically, interspersed, shrill, tacitly, pontoon, inept, reconnaissance, lobotomy, wangle, chasm, unencumbered, profuse, gavotte, bandonion, ensconced, polestar, foresworn, evoked, meandered, paddocks, impudent, compendium, berated



# Chapters 21-25

## Summary

In Chapter 21, Jean and Max stopped in Montargis to see author P.D. Olson. Although Jean had never met Olson, he believed that he might be Sanary. When they arrived at his open, Olson invited them in and they began to talk. Olson complimented Max's writing and Jean felt oddly jealous. Jean told Olson about his shop and that he liked to prescribe his books for "retired husband syndrome." This pleased Olson.

After their conversation, Olson led Jean and Max to a secret tango hall. They observed the dancers, who seemed to be "dancing for their lives."

Chapter 21 also included Manon's second journal entry, written eight months after she had met Jean. He described how surprised she was to find she could be truly in love with two people simultaneously. She was happy to have Jean in her life but frustrated that she could tell no one of him.

Chapter 22 began with Jean explain the partnering process of tango to Max. Max assumed he knew about tango through literature. Jean told him this was not the case.

As Jean and Max stood in the hall, they were introduced to Cuneo, a Neapolitan bartender. A catlike girl caught Jean's eye, signaling that she wanted to share a dance. He returned her gaze.

Olson described Cuneo as a "great literary figure" as he had been searching for twenty years for a woman he spent one romantic night on the beach with. He also told Jean he had dreamed of him, John Lost. Jean asked him if he had written Southern Lights. He did not reply.

Jean went on to dance with the cat girl. He felt her desires as they moved. He was reminded of Manon and how she had freed him through dance. As their third song began, angry men busted in to the dance hall.

In Chapter 23, the angry men burst into the dance hall, some carrying weapons, and all aimed at destruction. The dancers began to flee. Max, Jean, Cueno, Olson, and the cat woman got into Cueno's car and drove away from the scene. Jean again asked Olson if he was Sanary. He said that he was not and suggested the author might be a woman. Cuneo had decided to accompany Jean and Max on their travels to Cuisery, which Jean told them was paradise. As they prepared to leave, the cat woman gave Jean his first kiss in over twenty years. It was intoxicating.

In Chapter 24, the men continued their journey, now accompanied by Cuneo. Cuneo loved to cook and the scents he used brought back many memories for Jean. When they stopped in Briare, Max suggest they sell books for money. This way, they were able to earn enough to eat and supply their ship.



The men stayed in Briare for a few days as their book sales were going well. The men bonded and spoke about life and women. Jean wrote letters to Catherine, although he knew she could not respond. He stared out into the night sky and thought of how small the world really was.

At the beginning of Chapter 25, the men were told that they would not be able to remain docked in Briare without paying a fee. With that, their journey South began again.

As they sailed southward, Max produced a joint he had received from a Dutchman in exchange for a novel earlier. The men began smoking and recounting their follies with love. Cuneo recounted his one night with his mysterious lover, Vivette. Max was jealous of the intensity with which both Jean and Cuneo recounted their ephemeral love affairs, even so many years later. The older men assured him he would find his great love in time.

## Analysis

In Chapter 21, Jean's jealousy when Olson complemented Max's work emphasized his own frustration with his inability to follow through on writing his encyclopedia of emotions.

In Manon's journal entry, she described the difficulty of loving Jean in secrecy. She described her "ninth face," which she described as both sensual and self-controlled, the way she was forced to be in her relationship with Jean. She loved him truly but could never give herself completely to him in order to preserve her life with Luc. She felt this was the price she had to pay for her freedom.

She wondered if it was fair what she put Jean through. Still, she could not live without him. She wanted Jean all to herself but could not give up Luc for him. Jean filled her the way books did. In this parallel, Jean became books personified. In his keen ability to read and cure the ailments of the heart, Jean himself was literature.

She recounted her frustration with Jean when they began to tango. He thought too much, rather than simply feeling. She recalled slapping him for his awkwardness. She had taught him how to feel without thinking through the tango.

When contemplating her relationships, she wrote that she was less desperate with Luc but also less free. She could be her whole self with Jean. He was the male version of herself. She thought about how she longed for Jean when they were apart in a way she never longed for Luc. Manon's descriptions of Jean paralleled his descriptions of her. They gave each other life yet let fear separate them.

At the end of her journal entry, Manon revealed that doctors had found a lump in her armpit. She hoped she was not dying.



In Chapter 22, when Jean told Max that he knew about tango from experience, not from literature, Max was introduced to Jean's former self for the first time. Somewhere inside the controlled adult he saw was a romantic young man dancing the tango.

When describing the tango to Max, Jean said that the tango does not commit. In saying this, he drew a parallel between the tango and his love affair with Manon. Both were a celebration of life, done in secrecy and without commitment.

When Olson called attention to the meaning of Jean's name, John Lost, he drew attention to the symbolic nature of the character's title. For the past 21 years of his past, Jean had lost his sense of self. Now, as he finally confronted his past, he was losing himself once again. This time, however, he lost himself to his emotions in order to find himself again. As he danced with the cat girl, he remembered how Manon had allowed him to lose his inhibitions and to feel without thinking. In facing these memories, he gained this ability once again.

In Chapter 24, the smells of Cuneo's cooking urge Jean to again consider beginning his encyclopedia of emotions. As much as he knew he should begin, he was still afraid to begin for it would mean truly immersing himself with the emotions of his past. Although he had become more comfortable confronting these feelings, he was not yet ready to fully submerge himself in them. Again, he was prohibited by fear.

As Jean contemplated beginning his masterpiece, Cuneo displayed a collection of pebbles he had collected throughout his travels. Rubbing the smooth edges of the pebbles, he used them as a metaphor for time's ability to rub smooth the rough edges of our lives. In this way, Cuneo was able to sense the heartbreak Jean had undertaken and offered his understanding through use of this analogy.

Later as the men ate, Cuneo described in detail the long lover he had been searching for all these years. Jean thought about how he could never describe Manon in that way as it would mean sharing her with others. This emphasized the fatal flaw of the lovers' relationship: In an attempt to hold onto the love of the other, each hid the other away from the world. In the end, this caused them both to lose the very thing they tried so hard to preserve. In hiding her true circumstance from Jean, Manon lost him in the time she needed him most. In refusing to acknowledge and share the memory of Manon after she had left, Jean lost the life and vitality she had given to him.

As the men continued to talk, Cuneo shared that he preferred to read the work of female writers as they gave greater insight into the world. This foreshadowed the feminine identity of Sanary, whose story offered an excellent representation of life.

In Chapter 25, as the Jean and Cuneo talked about their deep love for the women they had lost, Max was jealous. His realization that Jean did in fact bear strong and intense romantic feelings starkly contrasted his previous assumption that Jean was serious and controlled. In fact, he was the opposite. He loved wildly and felt without thinking. Jean, in his truest form, was quite far from the man Max had met in the Parisian bookshop.



When the men imagined paying for words, they all agreed that “I love you” would cost the most. This emphasized the importance the phrase had, even when it was most difficult to say. It also symbolized the inability of Jean to tell Manon of his love all those years ago as to say so bore too great of a cost emotionally.

When Max and Jean agreed to be friends formally, Max said, “I’ll try to be a good one.” This added to Max’s characterization as a man lacking self-confidence, overly cognizant of his own small failures.

At the end of the chapter, Jean looked into the night sky as he had with Manon. He apologized to her for having lost their star for all those years. He knew he was only nights away from allowing her reentry into his life. In this way, Jean’s journey was coming full circle. He knew he was close to allowing his lost self to live again.

## Discussion Question 1

Do you predict Jean will overcome fear and finally write his Encyclopedia of Emotions? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Manon describes Jean as the male version of herself. Analyze this quote. In what ways do the characters mirror one another?

## Discussion Question 3

Is Cuneo a relatable character? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

towpath, Charolaise, vying, bulrushes, inquisitively, waterborne, rotund, voracious, transience, jostle, simpletons, minutiae, rein, virility, shunted, vex, gallant, briar, pluckily, incantations, subjugate, betide, plexus, impetus, idyll, nags, lascivious, evaded, roguish, impetuous, agnosticism, redolent, resin, elderberries, ospreys, berths



# Chapters 26-31

## Summary

Chapter 26 began with the men approaching another lock on their journey South. As they went through, Jean pondered the effects of habit on one's livelihood. As they sailed on, Max spotted a deer struggling in the water. It could not swim and was splashing violently in distress. All three of the men tried to save the deer with buoys. When their efforts failed, Cuneo and Max entered the water in a final attempt to save the animal. Refusing to trust them, the deer struggled to its death. The men were deeply saddened by the death and did their best to avoid one another for the remainder of the day in an attempt to mask their feelings.

In Chapter 27, the men remained silent all day as they headed towards Cuisery, the town of books. They stopped in Apremont-sur-Allier, where Cuneo knew a sculptor named Javier.

When they arrived at Javier's home, they were greeted by a naked young girl painting in the living room. She called Max "pretty mouth" and asked if he would play piano as she painted. She told him her name was Elaia. She had one breast and had lost the other to cancer.

Shortly after the interaction, Zelda and Javier, Elaia's parents, came downstairs to greet the men. Zelda called her family "The Flinstones." When Jean tried to introduce himself, she said names were unnecessary. They called people by what they did. Cuneo became the stone stroker and Jean the soul reader.

As Cuneo spoke with his old friends and Jean walked through the garden, Max and Elaia went off to make love. He cautioned Max against failing for a dying woman. He then remembered the deer and began to break down.

In Chapter 28, Jean came to dinner and immediately announced what he had been holding back for so long. He told the party Manon was dead. Max told him that he had known for a while. He had found Manon's death announcement in a book.

Cuneo then told the group he had something to share as well. He had found Vivette 15 years ago. She was married, had children, and looked dramatically different then when he had last seen her. When he spoke to her, she mistook him for three men before realizing his identity. He continued searching afterwards because he was unable to face that this woman was the Vivette he had once loved so dearly.

Javier then began yelling at Cuneo, saying he had lied and used his family generosity unjustly. His wife tried to calm him, saying he was taking his anxiety over Lupo out on Cuneo. Javier could not be calmed. Cuneo, Max, and Jean left the residence.



At the end of the chapter, the men returned to the ship. Cuneo told the men that he wished love was a choice. He wanted to stop loving Vivette but found he was unable to let go of her. Jean, who would have agreed with Cuneo previously, now understood why love was not a choice. It was the job of the ones left behind to carry the spirit of their loved ones on eternally.

In Chapter 29, Jean recalled a conversation he had had with his father about parenthood. He thought about his relationship with Max and felt glad he had room in his heart to love again. For the first time in many years, Jean was delighted to be alive.

As Jean pondered, he saw a woman jump into the sea. He watched as she was pulled violently by the waves. He called the other men. Cuneo saved the woman. Bringing her on board, he asked Jean not to call a doctor. He said she was fine. Jean trusted his judgment and agreed.

The woman told the crew that her name was Samantha. She had not jumped in an attempt to harm herself. Rather, she had thought the whirling waves would allow her greater insight into what she should do with her life. She had had a revelation while in the water. She wanted to kiss a man again, properly. Cuneo offered his services.

In Chapter 30, the crew sailed toward Cuisery, the city of books. The group spoke about the Library of Destiny that was rumored to be held there. The legendary book was said to hold the life story of all people, including those events that had not yet happened. Max said that he would not want to know how or when he would die, as he did not want to live his life in fear.

Early the next morning, Samantha had mysteriously disappeared. Cuneo felt as if history was repeating itself. As they walked through the town, they observed that a literary convention was taking place. As they walked, Cuneo took note of recipes printed on bistro menus. Jean walked towards the home of Samy L Trequesser, the chairman of the Cuisery guild and supporter's association. Jean supposed he must know who wrote Sanary. When they reached the home, they were surprised to learn that Samy was not a Chairman, but a Chairwoman.

In Chapter 31, the men were shocked to realize Samy was not only a woman, but Samantha from the night before. Disregarding the purpose of the meeting Cuneo, quickly took the opportunity to invite her to dinner. Max asked her about the hobbit feet she was wearing. Jean, frustrated, tried to ask about the identity of Sanary. Eventually, she was able to hear him. She told him he was the first person to ever ask the right questions about Southern Lights.

As they continued talking, Samy suggested that Max make up his own language. He then felt inspired to write again. Samy asked the men if she could join them in their southbound adventure. She had lived in Cuisery for the past ten years and was ready for the next adventure. That evening, as the group lounged in the ship, Max presenting the words he had dreamt up to Samy. She was impressed.



## Analysis

In Chapter 26, the struggle of the deer was symbolic of both Manon and Jean in their relation to one another. As Manon was dying, she hid herself from Jean, closing herself off and denying him the opportunity to help her. After Manon's death, Jean blocked himself off from the world, refusing anyone who attempted to draw him back into livelihood. In both cases, the lovers faced death alone, unwilling to allow the help of another. The death of the deer touched the men so deeply as they could all relate to the deer in their prior unwillingness to open themselves to others.

In Chapter 27, Max's connection with Elaia reminded him of his own with Manon. He thought of the pain and suffering that came with falling for a dying woman. He thought of the deer, suffering alone with no one to save it. For the first time, he let himself break down completely. All the emotions he had been withholding came to surface. He finally faced the past.

When Jean asked Zelda about her daughter's condition, she shared that Elaia had named the cancer Lupo. She thought of it as a dog living within her. Sometimes it needed more attention. Yet, it would never destroy her as it needed her to survive. This way of thinking made it easier to cope with the condition and to believe in survival.

In Chapter 28, by announcing that Manon was dead, Jean finally came to terms with the reality of the death and all that it meant. He finally accepted his solitude rather than ignoring it. He was ready to face reality and to be alive on his own. He soon realized, however, that he did not have to be alone. In embarking on his journey and allowing himself to be loved by others, he had abandoned the solitude that had haunted him for all those years. He had allowed himself to love and he was loved in return.

In revealing that he had discovered the truth about Vivette many years ago, Cuneo drew a parallel between himself and Jean. Both men knew the truth about their loved ones but could not face it as they could not accept it. Vivette was symbolic of the juxtaposition between reality and fantasy that sometimes occurs in love. She personified the difference between and romantic and realist point of views. In understanding Cuneo's dishonesty, Jean and Max represented intensity with which they experienced the world through romanticism. In berating Cuneo, Javier represented the lack of understanding and emotional depth that often comes with drawing conclusions solely based on logic without regard for emotional circumstance.

When Jean explained to Cuneo why love could not be a choice, he spoke from the wisdom he had acquired in his emotional journey and his final breakdown. Finally coming to terms with his emotions, Jean was able to understand Manon's place in his life. Her impact had changed him and in carrying on this influence, he carried her memory within him. It is through the living that the dead live on. It was Jean and Cuneo's duty to live in their memory. In living, they could love again while still carrying the love of the lost.





In Chapter 29, Jean considered the way his finally mourning Manon had affected him. Releasing the tears had made room inside him for love. Although he had never had a son, he had found Max, who he loved as a father would. Facing his past and all the emotions that came with it had allowed him to finally find peace of mind and the love again.

When Samantha revealed she had jumped in the after to learn more about herself, her actions mirrored the emotional journey the men had taken throughout the novel. It was only through facing their fears and breaking down that they had found the answers they had spent life searching for. In a dramatized way, Samantha's action symbolized the journey of the self the men had undergone.

In Chapter 30, the men's surprise in learning that the Chairman was a woman again foreshadowed the possibility of Sanary being a female author.

In Chapter 31, Samy told Jean he was the first person to ask the right questions about Southern Lights. She seemed to know the identity of the author and let Jean question her until he was able to guess the author's identity correctly. In her deep understanding of not only the novel, but its author, Samy foreshadowed her eventual revelation of herself as Sanary.

## Discussion Question 1

Why were the men so reluctant to share their emotions with one another after witnessing the death of the deer?

## Discussion Question 2

What does Vivette symbolize?

## Discussion Question 3

Explain the role of Lupo. How does this symbol tie into the novel as whole?

## Vocabulary

suppurating, unerringly, bollard, careened, buffeted, tributary, ravening, anorak, pseudonyms, waggle, flotsam, coalesced



# Chapters 32-37

## Summary

In chapter 32, Cuneo fawned over Samy although they had not yet kissed. Jean continued to ask her questions regarding the identity of Sanary. In discussing the author, the two began opening up about themselves. Samy revealed that she was born with the inability to lie and that she had never been loved. Taking these things into account, Jean asked her if she had written *Southern Lights*.

In Chapter 33, Samy told Jean that she had written *Southern Lights* in the hopes of finding love. She had hoped that someone would understand her writing and he would be the one for her. Instead, Jean had understood her work and brought her Cuneo to love.

At the end of the chapter, the author included a passage from Manon's travel diary. In this passage, Manon explained that she was no longer ashamed of her affair with Jean as she had been previously. She had counted the days they had spent together, 169, but felt that her endless longing for him when they were apart should count as well. She had decided she needed both Jean and Luc to be whole. She knew at this point that she was dying but could not tell Jean. She wanted him to save her but knew he could not. She also revealed that she was pregnant and had refused chemotherapy in order to save the child.

In Chapter 34, the crew reached Avignon. Samy shared repeatedly how happy she was. Jean did not like the city, but did not share this sentiment. Max had decided to write children's books and shared his idea with Jean.

Sitting in the Literary Apothecary, Jean considered how this barge had become his life over the course of the past 21 years. He decided that to move on, he would have to let it go.

In Chapter 35, Samy bought mobile phones for the crew so that they could stay in touch as they went their separate ways. Jean told Samy and Cuneo that he wanted to leave the Literary Apothecary with them. Although they resisted at first, they finally accepted Jean's gift.

As Jean and Max drove through Avignon, Jean considered the lack of beauty the land had for him. In stark contrast, Max was mesmerized by the countryside. Seeing what appeared to be a man on a tractor, the two stopped to ask for directions to the room they had rented from Brigitte Bonnet. The "man" revealed himself to be a young woman. Max was mesmerized by her beauty. Jean smiled and knew Max had found something special.

When the men reached the property, they were greeted by Brigitte Bonnet, who showed them to their room and brought them a bottle of wine called "Manon." To his horror, Jean



found Manon's face printed on the bottle staring back at him. It was then that he knew he was not yet ready to face his past.

In Chapter 36, Jean decided he must leave for the sea. There, he could finally heal. As he drove away, he listened to a radio program in which callers described the moment in their life that had changed them.

Feeling hungry, he stopped along the seaside to eat. He stared into the ocean and considered the liveliness of those around him. He watched the young people celebrating life and freedom and felt somewhat better.

After dinner, he got into the car and began driving southward. He felt as if he should stop but kept driving. Finally, the car broke down, forcing him to stall his journey. He got out of his car and found he was in Sanary.

In Chapter 37, Jean wrote his first letter to Catherine from his new semi-permanent address in Sanary. In the letter he detailed the beauty of the sea and the healing process he was finally allowing himself to undergo. He told her that he missed her and that he would like to cook for her again.

## Analysis

In Chapter 32, As Jean continued to question Samy of the author of *Southern Lights*, the two shared in an intimate conversation on life. When he asked if Sanry had been happy when she wrote the novel, Samy thought for a while. The two discussed the brevity of happiness and the irony of one's realizing his or her own happiness only after it has passed.

In Chapter 33, Samy's longing for love is compared to that of Jean and Cuneo. All of the characters on board the *Literary Apothecary* desired a great love. This is the force that drove the group together. The ability of *Southern Lights* to bring Samy love emphasized the power of literature to draw people together and heal lost souls.

Jean and Samy considered how they had both had to suffer loss in order to become whole. This relates back to the quote from *Southern Lights* Jean had shared with Max on the beginning of their journey: "He says too that you find yourself again there, but only if you get lost on the way- completely lost." In this way, Samy's work had come full circle in the way it had effected both she and Jean. In the end of the chapter, both characters were finally able to feel truly alive. The journey was nearly over. They had been healed by love.

In Manon's travel diary, she revealed much about her feelings for Jean. She had longed for him in a way she did not long for Luc. Although she needed both men, it was Jean she pined for her. Her love for him was so intense yet even that could not save her from her fate. She considered their sexual relationship an expression of their truest and deepest love, mirroring Jean's notion that their physical love was a celebration of life.



This passage made very clear that Jean and Manon had felt for one another in the same way, emphasizing Manon's description of Jean as the male version of herself.

In Chapter 34, Samy was surprised and excited about how truly happy she finally was. In her love for Cuneo, he was finally alive. For the first time in her life, she was truly happy.

In deciding to let go of the book barge, Jean was symbolically parting from his former identity. He was no longer the "John Lost." He had found himself and did not need to hide in his shop, living vicariously through others. He was finally ready to heal himself. He had to disconnect from his former identity completely to do so.

As Jean sat in the Literary Apothecary, contemplating his good bye, he thought of the healing power of cats. Although cats never held back in their love for humans, they were quick to leave when their work was done. This explained why Jean had referred to Manon as cat girl. She had made him whole and then left without the slightest notice.

In Chapter 35, Cuneo and Samy at first did not want to accept the book barge from Jean. Only knowing Jean through his identity as a book salesman, they could not separate him from his occupation. This was the very reason Jean needed to leave the store behind. He needed to separate himself from this identity to truly find himself.

Jean's lack of understanding for the beauty of Avignon stemmed from the pain he still felt in Manon's double life. Although Manon had found beauty in Avignon, Jean could not accept that she had found beauty without him. As he only felt complete with Manon, it pained him that she could have loved in this place so far from him. When Jean saw Manon's face on the wine bottle, the pain resurfaced more intensely. Although he had felt that he was ready to finally meet Luc and thus face his past, he knew in that moment he was not. The pain was still there. He was not yet healed.

In Chapter 36, Jean followed the advice of Sanary and drove towards the sea for healing. The novel that had spoken to his soul would know where he could find healing. As he listened to the radio, he thought of the influence Manon had had on his life. He was comforted to know he was not the only one grieving. He was finally ready to enter the grieving stage of his loss, the stage he had been too afraid to enter until now. He thought of how Manon was never scared to feel. He knew he had to be like Manon to heal.

As he ate on the beachfront, Jean felt himself becoming more complete. He was coming closer to where he needed to be. As he drove on after dinner, he thought he should stop. When his car broke down, Jean was forced to stop and face the emotions the ocean brought to the surface. Symbolically, the car had forced Jean to stop avoiding his grieving stage and to finally heal. When Jean realized he was in Sanary, he knew he had stopped there for a reason. He was finally in a place where he could heal.

In Chapter 37, Jean's letter to Catherine signaled a new step in his healing process. Unlike his other letters, this one included a semi-permanent address, signaling that he wanted Catherine to know where he was and perhaps to be with him physically. He told



her of the beauty of Sanary and explained the hurting period he was going through. He longed for a response from Catherine. He wanted her to understand. He hoped that she would and that she could relate to the hurting he experienced.

## Discussion Question 1

Examine *Southern Lights* as a metaphor for the healing journey described throughout the novel.

## Discussion Question 2

Explain Manon's description of Jean as the male version of herself. In what ways are the characters the same?

## Discussion Question 3

Does Jean love Catherine? Use evidence from the novel to support your argument.

## Vocabulary

catacombs, flux, chortle, besotted, wallowing, belatedly, berating, salvage, gouges, candelabras, pirouette, papal, dais, reticence, imperious, languidly, dovecote, parasol, bulbous, sheepishly, gait



# Chapters 38-Epilogue

## Summary

Chapter 38 described Jean's "hurting time" in Sanary, which lasted through all of July and August. During this time, he worked at a local bookstore and allowed himself to feel pain. He allowed all of his feelings for Manon to surface, holding back nothing and finally allowing himself to grieve her loss.

One day, on the beach, Jean let the waves overcome him as he slipped into a daydream. He pictured Manon there with him. He apologized for abandoning her. He then saw himself at all stages of his life. He then realized how he had isolated himself and allowed his soul to die. When he awoke from his daydream, he was no longer sad, but angry. He screamed into the ocean, asking why Manon had to be taken from him.

Shortly after, he decided to call Catherine. He had to let her know how he felt. When he called, he was glad to hear she had been thinking of him as well.

Chapter 39 began in the end of August, when Jean was beginning to realize the positive effects a summer of grieving had had on him. He realized that for the first time in 21 years, he felt truly alive. He now wanted to sleep with a woman for the first time since Manon. Upon realizing his soul was healed, he wrote Catherine again. This time, he asked her to come to him.

In Chapter 40, Jean spoke with his father, Joaquin on the phone. Joaquin told his son that he and his mother were dating again, something Jean had wished for all his life. He called his mother afterward, who confirmed the relationship and told Jean she loved him. That evening, Jean went to work at the bookshop. To his delight, he saw Catherine walk through the doors. The two embraced and Catherine told him she had been waiting for his invitation to Sanary. That night the two made love and discussed the healing they had both experienced since the last time they touched. They shared the rest of September in Sanary. Then, Jean felt he was ready to return to Bonnieux and finally complete his healing process.

In Chapter 41, Jean and Catherine journeyed back to Bonnieux so that Jean could finally fulfill Manon's dying wish. He first visited Max, who was by now deeply in love with the girl from the red tractor. While Jean and Max were speaking, Madame Bonnet came upstairs, warning them that the mistral was coming. This storm was known to create arguments between friends.

After some pressing from Jean, Max shared that Luc had married again after Manon. He also said that there was something else he needed to share.

In Chapter 42, Jean, Max, and Catherine set out to Manon's old home. When they arrived, they were greeted by Victoria, the girl from the tractor. She was Manon's daughter. Max told Jean he would marry her, even if she turned out to be his daughter.



Jean introduced himself as Jean Perdu, the bookseller from Paris. She went to find and tell Luc he had arrived. As Jean listened to his footsteps coming closer, he realized he had not considered what he might say to Luc.

In Chapter 43, Jean finally encountered Luc. He knew at first glance why Manon had loved him. He was solid and trustworthy. He was natural. Luc told Jean that he already knew who he was as Manon had told him. He asked for Luc's forgiveness for not coming to see Manon. When Jean explained his reasoning to Luc, he seemed shocked and forgiving. Jean could not believe the empathy the man possessed. Jean wished he had known him earlier.

Luc showed Jean to the room in which Manon had died. He gave Jean Manon's travel diary, as she had wanted him to have it. Despite his kindness, he punched Jean at the end of their encounter. He explained that it was not for sleeping with his wife but for refusing to come to her in her time of need.

In Manon's travel diary entry, she detailed the events leading up to her death of Christmas Eve. She had named her daughter Victoria to commemorate her victory over death. She felt that Jean had not come out of the pain it would bring him. She thought that he had the cancer of life. She knew he was a wreck as she had been in contact with his neighbor, Madame Rosalette.

In Chapter 44, Jean finally visited the site of Manon's grave. He saw many decorations on the site, one of which contained a quote from her diary: "Death doesn't matter. We will always be what we once were." This quote described her deep love for Jean. Strangely, however, Jean could not feel her at the gravesite. As hard as he tried, he could not feel her presence.

He took a drink from the bottle of Manon wine he had brought with him and thought about how her diary had healed him. He could finally read the thoughts that she could not share in her life. As the sun set, the brilliance of the light overcame Jean. He finally felt Manon. She was there in the light, ever present in her undying love for him.

In the Epilogue, Jean and Catherine joined Jean's parents, Max, Victoria, and her parents in Christmas dinner. Jean's parents were still together. Jean and Catherine were as in love as ever. Max and Victoria were engaged and Max's children's books were thriving. Luc and his wife had accepted Jean's makeshift family into their own. They were all united in their love of Manon.

## Analysis

Chapter 38 captured a pivotal time in Jean's healing process. In finally allowing himself to grieve after so many years of holding back his feelings, Jean was able to release the sadness, anger and frustration he felt for Manon. In doing so, he was able to make room in his soul for new love and to return to the person he was before becoming filled with her loss.



In Chapter 39, Jean's boss at the bookshop, approached him, asking about his personable taste in literature. She was deeply impressed by his ability to read people and assign them the literature he knew would heal them. She asked him which novel was his salvation. Before his journey, Jean had not known the answer to this question. Prior to finding himself, Jean had thought salvation impossible. After a summer of allowing himself to grieve, he knew the answer. He answered, saying he had to experience his book, *Southern Lights*.

After this realization, Jean was able to feel alive again. He was astounded by his own ability to again feel the beauty of the world around him. He was again passionate and free. He desired to have Catherine near him. He was finally finished grieving. He was ready to love again.

In Chapter 40, Jean had completed his grieving process and was finally able to love again. When Catherine came to him, he knew he was now ready to give her the love he had wanted to upon meeting her. His ability to love Catherine and to share his healing process with another assured him that he was ready for the final step in the process. He had to go back to Manon's home as she had wanted him to so many years ago.

In the opening of Chapter 41, the narrator described the way in which Jean and Catherine gave one another life in their ability to love again. Once they arrived in Bonnieux, the symbol of the mistral was introduced. The mistral was known to drive everyone crazy for a few days and then disappear. This foreshadowed the chaos that lay ahead as Jean prepared to visit Manon's home.

In the beginning of Chapter 42, Jean considered how Manon had wanted Jean to die before her as she did not want him to have to visit her alone. He pondered the irony of the situation, as at this point, visiting her grave was the only thing that could make his mourning process complete.

Upon seeing Victoria for the first time since he had learned of her relation to Manon, he could not help but see the resemblance. He was reminded of Manon as a young girl, making the reality of his coming encounter with her husband all the more real.

In Chapter 43, Jean met Luc for the first time. He was astounded by the man's kind and forgiving nature. He wished he had known him earlier, as the two could have healed together. Jean's positive feelings for Luc emphasized the similarities between him and Manon. As much as he thought he would hate, he could not hate the man. His twin soul, Manon, had loved him and thus he did as well.

Luc was characterized as selfless in his interactions with Jean. He did not hate Jean, as he had brought joy to Manon's life. The only grudge he held was for Jean refusing to come to Manon in her time of need as he had witnessed the pain this brought her. His only concern was Manon, never himself.

In Manon's travel diary, she too is seen as selfless in her love for her daughter. She gave her own life and watched herself wear away so that her daughter could be born strong.





In saying that Jean had the cancer of life, he drew attention to the symbolic death Jean had faced when losing Manon. Even though he did not physically die, he was not alive. He had let his soul die in an effort to avoid facing the truth about Manon.

Her travel diary also included the many phrases Jean had heard flashing through his mind on the night of her death. Jean now knew he had felt it when she passed. He had been with her, even in her death.

In Chapter 44, Jean considered the impact Manon's diary had had on him. Finally seeing her love for him verified, he knew she had felt as deeply as he. He now knew their love was true; so true, in fact, that it surpassed death.

In the final sunset at Manon's grave site, Jean finally felt his lost love. He now understood her presence in his life. She was always there, the light of his life, guiding him and allowing him to drink in its wonders to the fullest. He finished his glass of Manon wine, symbolically drinking in the life she gave him and putting behind the pain of the past forever. He was finally whole.

The Epilogue of the novel tied the story together and allowed the reader insight into the future lives of the characters. Having healed themselves of heartache, the characters had all joined together in love. In contrast to the brokenness of these characters at the beginning of the novel, their joining in a holiday meal emphasized the healing they had experienced together in their love and acceptance for one another.

## Discussion Question 1

Explain how Jean had experienced Southern Lights throughout the novel.

## Discussion Question 2

How were Jean and Luc similar? How were they different?

## Discussion Question 3

Examine the metaphor of Manon as light. How does this symbol reflect her character?

## Vocabulary

virility, vintner, convulsions, trifling, divan, inquisitive, genial, rutted, penitent, summit, sarcophagus, parapet, sumptuous, jocular, atelier, languidness, bequests, facsimile



# Characters

## Jean Perdu

Jean Perdu was the novel's protagonist. Jean had lived in Paris all his life. He owned a book barge, which he called the Literary Apothecary. As the owner of this book shop, he prescribed books that would cure the many ailments of the soul. He had an innate ability for reading people. He could tell what a person was struggling with upon meeting him or her. He always knew the very piece of literature that would heal a person. The only person Jean could not heal was himself.

At the start of the novel, Jean was lost and very much alone. Having been left by his one true love, Manon, he had spent the past 21 years of his life in solitude, completely broken by his lost love. Although he was friendly with his neighbors, he always kept them at a distance. He avoided feeling any positive emotions as they might remind him of Manon. The pain her memory brought him was too much to bear. Refusing to acknowledge her memory, Jean had undergone a symbolic death with the loss of his lover.

After meeting Catherine, a recent divorcee who he was beginning to have feeling for, Jean decided he had to finally face his past. He finally opened the letter Manon had written him 21 years ago, explaining the reason she had left him behind. After reading the letter and learning that his love had died, Jean embarked on a journey to heal his soul and thus allow himself to live again.

Throughout the journey, Jean learned to live again through coming to terms with his loss. In acknowledging his undying love for Manon, Jean was able to carry her memory with him into a new life. Throughout his healing process, Jean was able to again realize the power of love to transform and heal the human soul.

## Manon

Manon was Jean's lover 21 years prior to the start of the novel. Manon had met Jean during her first trip away from her home in Provence. She had come to Paris, despite the doubts of her parents, for adventure that her home could not offer.

Manon was characterized as being one who was fully alive. She always lived in the moment and was committed to getting the most out of life and love. Manon was married to a man name Luc from Provence. The two had an open marriage as Luc understood the freedom Manon required. She had met Jean of her way to Paris and had been drawn to the man instantly. Although Manon needed the love of both men, she felt as though Jean was her twin soul and pined for him when they were separated.

Throughout the novel, sections of Manon's travel diary are interspersed between chapters. These entries give insight in Manon's character and her feelings for Jean.



Manon's relationship with Jean was described throughout the novel as a "celebration of life." Jean and Manon allowed one another to be fully alive in their love. They were only whole in their relationship with one another.

Throughout their love affair, Manon was battling cancer without Jean's knowledge. After Manon's death, Jean allowed his soul to die with her. Throughout Jean's healing process, he came to realize that not even death could break their love. Manon was ever present in the memory Jean carried with him.

## Max Jordan

Max Jordan was a young author who lived in the same apartment building as Jean Perdu in Paris. He had written a best selling novel in which he revealed the emotional capabilities of men. After writing the novel, Max had lost his muse. He was hiding in Paris as he hated the fame his novel brought with it.

Since he moved into Paris, he showed a special interest in Jean. When Jean embarked on his journey to find himself, Max climbed aboard and joined him. Along the journey, the men came to love one another as father and son as they both faced their past and gained the ability to live and love after loss.

## Catherine

Catherine was a recent divorcee who moved into Jean Perdu's apartment building. Understanding the feeling of loss she was experiencing, Jean brought her literature that would help in the healing process. After meeting for the first time, Jean started to develop feelings for Catherine.

On their first date, Jean and Catherine were both too broken to act on their mutual desire for one another. After realizing he needed to heal his soul, Jean left Paris and Catherine behind. Throughout the novel, Jean wrote often to Catherine. In the end, the two were able come together and love one another after facing the pains of their pasts.

## Cuneo

Cuneo joined Jean and Max on board the Literary Apothecary after they had met him at P.D. Olson's tango hall. Cuneo had spent the last 20 years of his life searching for a woman he had spent one romantic night on the beach with.

Cuneo later revealed to the men that he had found his lover 15 years ago but could not accept reality as she had changed and no longer remembered him. She was not the image of perfection he had remembered. He, like Jean, had to come to his lost love and face reality in order to learn to love again.



## Samy

Samy is the Chairman of the Cuisery guild and supporter's association. She is also Sanary, the author of *Southern Lights*. In her novel, she had spoken about how one must travel South by the sea in order to find oneself. In doing this, he or she had to face loss and sadness in order to be whole. In this way, her novel represented the voyage Jean, Max, and Cuneo took during the novel. In coming to terms with the sadness of their pasts, the men were able to heal their souls and love again.

When Jean correctly guessed Samy's identity as Sanary, she felt he was the first person to truly understand her. She told him that she had written the novel to find love. Jean had understood her and brought Cuneo's love into her life. In this way, her novel also represented the ability of literature to bring people together.

## Luc

Luc was Manon's husband. Manon described him as her best friend. He was a simple winemaker from Provence who worked with and appreciated nature. His country lifestyle was contrasted with Jean's city life in Paris. Although Jean always hated Luc for his love of Manon, he understood why she had stayed with him. Luc was loving and dependable. He had loved Manon and understood her, although he could not offer her the adventure she desired.

## Lirabelle Bernier

Lirabelle Bernier is Jean Perdu's mother. She was a witty professor from a well-educated family. Although she and his father had divorced when he was young, he always hoped they would find each other again. By the end of the novel, the two had gotten back together, proving that love was stronger than the petty differences between them.

## Joaquin Perdu

Joaquin Perdu is Jean Perdu's father. He and Jean's mother had divorced when Jean was young. Jean always hoped they would find each other again. By the end of the novel, the two had gotten back together, proving that love was stronger than the petty differences between them.

## Elaia

Elaia was the daughter of Cuneo's friends, Javier and Zelda. She suffered from breast cancer. When Jean and Max had visited her family with Cuneo, they had learned of her illness and the way she coped with it. She thought of her cancer as Lupo, a dog that

lived inside her but would never kill her, as it needed her to survive. Elaia was an inspiring character, symbolizing the strength and resilience of the sick. She mirrored Manon in her battle with cancer.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## The Name Jean Perdu

Jean Perdu's name translates to "John Lost." This name symbolized the way he had spent the last 21 years of his life. He had lost his identity with the loss of his love, Manon. After losing Manon, Jean had allowed his soul to die. He went through life as if on autopilot, not allowing himself to feel out of fear of reminding himself of Manon. Through disallowing himself to feel, he had lost the very essence of what made him human.

## The Literary Apothecary

Jean Perdu described his waterborne bookshop, The Literary Apothecary, as an arrested adventure. Although he had kept the floating bookstore in running condition for the 21 years following Manon's death, he was never able to leave the dock. For fear of facing the past, Jean remained a creature of habit, forever anchored in Paris. In living vicariously through literature rather than experiencing an adventure of his own, Jean's life as owner of the shop was an arrested adventure.

## White Raven

Upon first meeting Jean, Manon described him as a white raven as she felt he could see straight through to her soul. In this way, the white raven was symbolic of Jean's unique ability as a "soul reader."

In many cultures, ravens are believed to be the bridge between life and death. In loving Manon, even after her death, Jean was able to carry her life with him forever. In this way, he served as her white raven as he allowed her to bridge the gap between life and death.

## Manon's Flag

When Max found Manon's flag in the ship, Jean recalled the conversation he had with Manon on why she could not leave her husband, Luc. She had said Luc offered her freedom that Jean could not. Jean thought about the freedom Manon had embodied. Their entire relationship had been a celebration of life. In flying Manon's flag, Jean chose to embrace the spirit of life Manon had bestowed upon him. This symbolized a crucial step in Jean's process of reconciling his past.



## Tango

The tango symbolized the love between Jean and Manon. The tango was an extremely passionate form of dance in which the two dancers shared an intense bond with no promise of commitment. Likewise, Jean and Manon shared a fiery passion for one another but lacked commitment to one another. Through the tango, dancers celebrated life in secrecy, just as Jean and Manon had. Just as tango gave life to the dancers, their love affair gave life to Jean and Manon.

## Vivette

Cuneo's lost lover, Vivette, symbolized the contrast of reality and idealism ever present in the novel. Although Cuneo had found the real Vivette long ago, she no longer remembered him and had changed from the ideal image he had of her in her youth. Refusing to accept the reality of the situation, Cuneo went on searching for Vivette although he knew he would never find what he was looking for. Likewise Jean refused to accept Manon's death, avoiding anything that could bring back the memory of her. In their idealizing of the love they had with these women, the men were unable to accept the reality that came with loss.

## Lupo

Lupo was the name given to Elaia's cancer. Through this name the cancer came to symbolize a wolf that lived inside Elaia. Although it at times needed more attention, it would never destroy her as it needed her to survive. Through this metaphor, Elaia was able to make her condition more tolerable and maintain the will to keep fighting her disease.

## Sanary

Sanary was the pseudonym taken on by Samy when writing *Southern Lights*. It represented the French town of Sanary, which was known for housing refugees and authors who had lost their muse. In this town, artists were able to find themselves and recover from the losses they had faced. Under this pseudonym, Samy wrote *Southern Lights*, which was able to help Jean and Max embark on their journey to find themselves and to overcome the losses of their past. In the same way the town of Sanary gave artists another chance at life, Samy's novel was able to do this for its readers.

## Deer

The death of the deer that the men witnessed on their journey bore large symbolic meaning in the novel. The deer symbolized both Manon in her death and Jean in his symbolic death after losing Manon. As the deer struggled to its death, it would not



accept any help from the men. It did not trust the help of others and thus allowed itself to die rather than trust the ability of another for salvation. When Manon knew that she was facing death, she left Jean in silence rather than telling him what she was going through and allowing him to help. Likewise, in refusing chemotherapy, Manon struggled to her death alone rather than giving herself a chance at survival. When he saw the deer struggle alone to his death, Jean imagined Manon dying in his absence. In refusing to read Manon's letter, Jean too allowed himself to die without support or assistance. In an attempt to avoid bringing back painful memories of Manon, Jean secluded himself from all those who tried to help him. In doing so, he did not allow himself to experience life and thus suffered a symbolic death with Manon.

## Cat Girl

In Manon's letter, she mentioned that Jean had referred to her as his cat girl. In saying this, he had referred to the way cats have the ability to love someone and heal their soul when they were needed. When their work was done, however, cats would leave without warning. Cats loved completely but without commitment. In this way the nickname symbolized Manon's ability to complete Jean and leave without notice when her work was done.





# Settings

## Paris

Paris is the home of Jean in the beginning of the novel. It is the location of his Literary Apothecary and the place where his love affair with Manon took place. Paris is representative of the urban lifestyle and is often contrasted with the rustic Provence from which Manon hails. Paris represents Manon's second life, full of lust and livelihood.

## Provence

Provence is the home of Manon. Manon left Provence in search of adventure and found Jean in Paris. In Provence, Manon enjoyed a stable lifestyle with her husband, Luc, the winemaker. Although she loved Provence and her life there, she craved the adventure of her second life in Paris.

## The Literary Apothecary

The Literary Apothecary, Jean's boat made into a bookshop, is the location where a majority of the novel takes place. In the beginning of the novel, Jean described the ship as an "arrested adventure" as it stood moored to the dock for 21 years, casting aside its potential for travel. After reading Manon's letter, Jean embarked on a journey to find himself on the ship. He was accompanied by Max and later by Cuneo. As the men travelled on, the ship allowed them a domicile as they journeyed south to heal their aching souls. The ship represented the healing power of literature and the need for travel in order to find one's self.

## Camargue

Camargue is a French island where Jean and Manon enjoyed a particularly romantic summer during their five year love affair. In Camargue, the two made love and slept on the beach. They existed in a completely natural state, needing only one another and nature. Jean described the summer there as a celebration of life. This location symbolized the vitality and intensity of their love for one another.

## Cuisery

Cuisery, the town of books, was where Jean found Samy, the author of Southern Lights. Cuisery symbolized the ways in which literature had the power to draw people together. Southern Lights had allowed Jean to finally live again. It also brought Samy and Cuneo together, giving them a love that would make them whole again.



# Themes and Motifs

## Loss

Loss was a major theme throughout the novel. The protagonist, Jean Perdu had suffered the loss of his only love, Manon. In effect, he had allowed himself to suffer a symbolic death in his loss of her. This loss shaped him as a character. He had lost his liveliness and would not allow himself to partake in any joyous activity for fear of reminding himself of his lost love.

After realizing the truth about his lost love, Jean decided he had to finally overcome his loss and regain his sense of self. He went on a journey to find himself. Along the journey he connected with Max Jordan and Cuneo. Both of these men, in their own ways had experienced loss of themselves through their loss of those things or persons they held dear.

Max Jordan, a young writer, had lost his muse. Having written one groundbreaking novel to start his career, he had become quickly overwhelmed by the lack of privacy accompanying his newfound fame. In desiring to escape from the life writing had sprung upon him, he had lost his ability to write. Lacking the desire that had so filled his life to this point, Max felt as if he had lost an essential piece of himself.

Cuneo, a chef, had lost his perfect lover. After spending one romantic night on the beach with the woman of his dreams, Cuneo had been left by her. When she disappeared, she took with her his hope for an ideal love and the romance that would fill his soul. Without her, he was hopeless. He could not face reality knowing that his fantasy had been true and deserted him.

As the men journey on, they relate to one another in their losses and help each other overcome their disparities in order to heal their broken souls. Able to relate to each other in their mutual experience and through the bonds of literature, the men are able to aid one another in the healing process and to form lasting friendships along the way.

## Life and Death

The convergence of life and death was another major theme throughout the novel. When Jean lost the love of his life, Manon, to cancer, he was afraid to even speak her name in fear of bringing to surface painful memories of their love. He went on living but did not allow himself to be truly alive. In doing so, he suffered a symbolic death with Manon.

In living his life this way, however, Jean had forbidden himself from being whole. For 21 years, Jean had stayed in Paris, working in his bookshop, yet isolating himself from any meaningful relationships. He rejected anything that might spur feelings of Manon. In his



relationship with Manon, however, Jean found himself for the first time truly alive. Thus, by avoiding Manon's impact on him, he, in effect disallowed himself life.

When Jean finally read a letter Manon had left him 21 years prior, he learned for the first time that she had been dying when she left. In his tremendous guilt as this realization, Jean set out on a quest for Manon. He wanted to finally return to her and in doing so regain the life she had brought him.

As he journeyed South to find himself, he realized that it was only in carrying on the influence of Manon on his life that he could be whole again. Manon had become a part of him that he could not live without. In this way, through Jean, Manon was able to live on even after death. Their love was so strong that not even death had the power to separate them. Manon lived within Jean as his memory of her allowed him to be whole again. In this way, their love was an unbreakable bond which transcended life and death.

## Love

Love was a major theme in the novel. The central story of the novel concerned the love affair of Jean and Manon, who had met on a train to Paris as Manon was leaving home for the first time. Although Manon was already engaged at the time, she had been drawn to Jean from the moment she saw him. The two were deeply in love for six years until Manon left Jean unexpectedly. Although he did not know it, she was dying. Without her love, Jean could no longer live. He meandered through life half alive, completely lost without the love he had had.

When Jean met Catherine, a recent divorcee who he instantly felt attracted to, he knew what he had to do. He could no longer live a life without love. With the end goal of regaining his ability to love, Jean set out on a journey to find himself. Along the way, he met many others who had been in love and lost.

One of these characters was Cuneo, an Italian chef who had lost the woman of his dreams after just one romantic evening. Although their love had been short, he knew it to be true. He journeyed on with Jean, striving to come to terms with his loss and to eventually love again.

The men's journey brought Cuneo to Samy, the author of the the mystical "Southern Lights," a novel Jean had cherished all his life. When meeting Samy, Cuneo felt deeply enthralled by her from the start. When speaking with Jean, Samy revealed that she had written Southern Lights in hope that it would bring her love. In bringing she and Cuneo together, it had done just that.

By the end of the journey, then men found that love was essential to life. In regaining his ability to love, Jean was finally able to live again. In finding true love, Cuneo and Samy were able to live the full and complete lives they had always dreamed of. No longer alone, they were able to lead life together, completing one another.



## Literature

As the owner of a book shop, The Literary Apothecary, Jean was very much a literature enthusiast. He felt that books had the power to heal the soul and prescribed books to his customers based on the needs of their hearts.

As a self-proclaimed "literary pharmacist," Jean was able to read his customers on a very deep level. Through basic conversation, he was able to determine the ailments of a customer's heart and prescribe the perfect literary cure. Jean's only issue was that he found literature could not heal his own broken heart.

As Jean embarked on his journey to finally face his past and heal his broken heart, he found himself following the healing process detailed in one of his favorite novels, Sanary's Southern Lights. He had always felt that the novel had spoken to him directly and helped fill his emptiness. As Jean travelled southward by sea, he allowed himself to feel deeply any and all emotion that came to him. In losing himself finally to the power of emotion, Jean allowed himself to be whole again.

Throughout the novel, the journey that Jean went on mirrored the literary work of Sanary. Thus, Jean found that experiencing Southern Lights, rather than simply reading it, was what finally had the power to cure him. In the end, Jean found that what he had always believed to be true most certainly was: literature had the power to heal the soul.

## Fear

Fear played a large role in the novel. For many years after Manon's death, Jean did not allow himself to experience any of the emotions he associated with her for fear her memory would cause him too much pain. He was afraid to cry, afraid to grieve, afraid to ever feel again the way he had when Manon left him. Through this fear, Jean denied himself to right to a whole life. He forgot what it was to be himself.

For 21 years, Jean let fear rule his life. While operating his bookshop, he formed polite relationships with customers without ever harboring a true friendship. When acquaintances attempted to break down his walls, he rejected their attempts. He closed himself off to the world around him for fear that intense emotion would bring him too close to the pain of losing Manon.

When Jean finally decided he had to take his life back, he found that fear had defined him for the past 21 years since he lost Manon. The closer he came to healing, the more he realized how misguided his fear had been. Healing, he found, meant letting go of fear completely. His healing process tested his ability to face his fears and overcome them.

In overcoming his fears, Jean allowed himself to truly break down and come to terms with all of the emotions he had avoided throughout the years. In breaking down, Jean felt for the first time able to piece himself back together. In facing fear, Jean had come to

terms with his suffering. In doing so, he allowed himself to grow stronger and more complete. In confronting fear, Jean allowed himself to become whole once again.



# Styles

## Point of View

The novel was told from a third person omniscient point of view. In most circumstances, the narrator gave insight into Jean Perdu's feelings and emotions. The narration was also sprinkled with italicized sentences, which signaled that narration had changed from third person to Jean Perdu. These portions represented Jean's direct thought process, rather than a third person narrator's observation of his thoughts.

Some chapters also included entries in Manon's travel diary. These passages were told completely from Manon's point of view. They offered insight into Manon's character and her interpretation of her love affair with Jean Perdu.

## Language and Meaning

Through third person omniscient narration, the narrator was able to offer insight into the thoughts and emotions of the characters. As the novel mainly centered around the love story of Jean Perdu and Manon, the novel had a very emotional and romantic tone, which was reflected in the author's language.

As another central theme of the novel was literature, the characters spoke using diverse vocabulary and metaphors. Their connection with literature was clear in the way they interacted with one another. The characters spoke and experienced their lives with passion that was evidenced by the language used when describing their experiences.

## Structure

The novel contains 44 chapters and is interspersed with entries in Manon's Travel Diary, which are written from Manon's perspective. At the end of the novel, entries from Cuneo's cook book and Jean's "Encyclopedia of Emotions" are included. In this way the reader is able to see the works that are referenced by the characters throughout the novel.

The first chapters of the novel focus on giving background on Jean Perdu's character and the reason for his isolation. After he met Catherine, however, Jean began a journey to heal his soul and find himself once again. A majority of the novel centered around this journey. As Manon was not physically present of this journey, her diary entry provided evidence for her love of Jean and added to the emotional tone of the novel.



## Quotes

Perdu wondered how it must feel to experience things so intensely and yet survive.”  
-- Narrator (chapter 3 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** This quote was from the beginning of the novel represented Jean Perdu’s feelings toward Max Jordan as a novelist. Having allowed his soul to die after losing his love, Manon, Jean did not understand how one could go on with life after suffering heartbreak. After getting to know Max, however, Jean learned that the young man was just as lost as he was. Both men needed healing after losing the things that had made them feel so intensely.

I wanted to treat feelings that are not recognized as afflictions and are never diagnosed by doctors. All those little feelings and emotions no therapist is interested in, because they are apparently too minor and intangible.”  
-- Jean Perdu (chapter 4 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This quote explained the reasoning behind Jean Perdu’s “Encyclopedia of Emotions.” Jean explained this idea to an older lady whose daughter and granddaughter had stopped into his shop. After working as a “literary pharmacist” all his life, Jean wanted to share his prescriptions with the world in the form of a book. Once Jean was finally able to heal his own soul, he was finally able to put into writing the ideas that had helped so many throughout the years.

If someone left you, you had to answer with silence. You weren’t allowed to give the person leaving anything else; you had to shut off, just as the other person had closed her mind to your future together, Yes, he had decided that was the way it was.”  
-- Jean Perdu (chapter 8 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** This quote explains Jean Perdu’s logic in refusing to open the letter Manon had sent after leaving him. As Manon had left him alone without explanation, he did not want to give her the upper hand by letting her explain herself in the letter. In choosing not to read the letter, Jean chose pride over trying to understand the person he loved most.

Sanary says that you have to travel south by water to find the answers to your dreams. He says too that you find yourself again there, but only if you get lost on the way- completely lost. Through love. Through longing. Through fear. Down south they listen to the sea in order to understand that laughing and crying sometimes sound the same, and that the soul sometimes needs to cry to be happy.”  
-- Jean Perdu (chapter 14 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** As Jean Perdu and Max Jordan journeyed south, Jean shared this quote from Sanary’s Southern Lights with Max. The quote foreshadowed the events that would follow on their journey to find themselves. When the men finally reached Provence, they had finally found their dreams, but only after facing what they had lost on the way.



And women are the smart ones, because they didn't oppose feeling and thinking, and loved without limits – yes, he knew that in his gut.

-- Jean Perdu (chapter 15 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** In this quote, Jean Perdu described the difference he had experienced between men and women in his relationship with Manon. Manon had challenged him to think and feel on a deeper level than he ever had before. She was not afraid to be completely alive in her love, even if doing so caused her pain at times. Jean, on the other hand, was afraid to come to terms with his emotions for fear of the pain they might bring.

All of us preserve time. We preserve the old versions of people who have left us. And under our skin, under the layer of wrinkles and experience and laughter, we too, are old versions of ourselves. Directly below the surface, we are our former selves: the former child, the former lover, the former daughter.”

-- Jean Perdu (chapter 19 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** Jean Perdu reflected on this point on his journey after meeting a woman who was left by her husband. Jean thought about his love for Manon and how through his memories of her, he was able to preserve time. Although he not allowed himself to live for the best 21 years, he found that he was still quite alive somewhere within him. It was through memory of Manon that he was able to access his former self and allow him to live again.

To be free is to lose one's certainty.”

-- Manon (chapter 21 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** In her travel diary, Manon recounted how the freedom she possessed through her marriage to Luc called into question to ethics of her actions. She did not know if what she was doing to Luc and Jean was morally acceptable or even whether she deserved their love. Still, she needed the love of each man in a different way and knew that the uncertainty she faced was the price she had to pay for her freedom.

I need to be with Jean because he's the male part of me. We look at each other and see the same thing.”

-- Manon (chapter 21 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** In this quote, Manon verified the intense love she felt for Jean. As Jean had never been able to profess his love to Manon, he worried that the love was not completely returned. In this quote, Manon revealed the reason she needed Jean in her life. He was her twin soul. The two understood one another completely as they were one in the same. They needed each other and gained life through their love for one another.

Habit is a vain and treacherous goddess. She lets nothing disrupt her rule. She smothers one desire after another: the desire to travel, the desire for a better job or a new love. She stops us from living as we would like, because habit prevents us from





asking ourselves whether we continue to enjoy doing what we do.”  
-- Jean Perdu (chapter 26 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** In this quote, Jean referenced the habits that had kept him from living his life for the past 21 years. In an effort to avoid memories of Manon, he had spent his days engaging in purely menial activities for fear that emotions would bring back memories of her. A creature of habit, Jean Perdu had become a lifeless version of his former passionate self.

To carry them within us – that is our task. We carry them inside us, all our dead and shattered loves. Only they make us whole. If we begin to forget or cast aside those we’ve lost then...then we are no longer present either.”  
-- Jean Perdu (chapter 28 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** When Cuneo wished that he could forget his lost love, Jean shared this quote with him. After allowing himself to break down completely and face the ghosts of his past, Jean had finally come to realize the role Manon played in his life. It was through her memory that Jean was able to be whole and alive again. In facing his emotions, Jean had allowed himself to become whole through the memory of Manon.

It was said that their purring could patch a pile of broken bones back together and revive a fossilized soul; yet when their work was done, cats would go on their way without a backwards glance. They loved without reticence, no strings attached – but no promises either.”  
-- Jean Perdu (chapter 34 paragraph 6)

**Importance:** This quote explains why Jean had referred to Manon as cat girl. When they were together, Manon had been able to complete Jean. She had loved him completely yet shown no commitment to him. She had left him unexpectedly and without explanation. In this way, Manon was like a cat. She offered her love graciously but without promises or expectations.

Death doesn’t matter. We will always remain what we were to one another.”  
-- Manon (chapter 44 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Through third person omniscient narration, the narrator was able to offer insight into the thoughts and emotions of the characters. As the novel mainly centered around the love story of Jean Perdu and Manon, the novel had a very emotional and romantic tone, which was reflected in the author’s language. As another central theme of the novel was literature, the characters spoke using diverse vocabulary and metaphors. Their connection with literature was clear in the way they interacted with one another. The characters spoke and experienced their lives with passion that was evidenced by the language used when describing their experiences.