

The Public Image Study Guide

The Public Image by Muriel Spark

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Public Image Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	4
Chapter 2.....	6
Chapter 3.....	8
Chapter 4.....	9
Chapter 5.....	10
Chapter 6.....	12
Chapter 7.....	14
Chapter 8.....	15
Characters.....	16
Objects/Places.....	19
Themes.....	20
Style.....	22
Quotes.....	25
Topics for Discussion.....	27



Plot Summary

Annabel Christopher has just moved to Rome with her husband Frederick and her baby Carl. Prior to her relocation to Rome, Annabel was an unremarkable British actress for about ten years, but in the two years leading to her move to Italy, her acting career took off. Her film success began with a film entitled *The House on the Piazza* in which she was portrayed as an "English Tiger-Lady." Since this initial success, her public image has become that of the English Tiger-Lady. In accordance with this public image, Annabel leads a reserved public life with her devoted husband while she presumably enjoys a passionate sex life with him in private.

Frederick, who always resented Annabel and her public image, tries to destroy his wife's career and reputation. He arranges for rowdy partygoers to convene at his home on the evening on which he plans to commit suicide. Prior to committing suicide, he writes five suicide letters to his wife Annabel, his son Carl, his mother, his friend Billy and his mistress Marina. He sends the letter to Marina, but he leaves the remaining four amongst his possessions in his home. In the letters, he claims that his marriage was intolerable and he falsely accuses Annabel of being a wild party girl.

Frederick's suicide and the party to which Annabel reluctantly plays hostess could potentially ruin Annabel's reputation. The suicide indicates that Frederick was unhappy in his marriage to Annabel. Moreover, if the public discovers that Annabel hosted a rowdy party, she can no longer portray herself as an English lady who leads a composed and reserved life outside her marriage bed.

After Frederick's suicide, Annabel expends a great deal of energy trying to salvage her public image by suppressing news that he took his own life and by denying that she hosted a rowdy party in her home. Unfortunately, Frederick's friend Billy obtains copies of the four suicide letters that were left in the Christopher residence and he attempts to blackmail Annabel.

At a public inquest into the circumstances of Frederick's death, Annabel foils Billy's attempt to blackmail her by unexpectedly exposing the suicide letters herself. In doing so, she effectively allows her public image to be destroyed according to Frederick's plan. She gives up her acting career and her life in the public eye. Instead, she chooses a life of anonymity. She begins her new life by moving with her baby, Carl, to Greece where she is unrecognized and hopes to remain so.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section opens with a description of Annabel Christopher and her family's relocation to Rome. The remaining three sections explain the events over the past twelve years leading up to the Christopher's move to Rome.

In the first section, we discover that Annabel Christopher, a British actress, has just moved to a flat in Rome. She is accompanied by her baby, Carl and her husband, Frederick. In the scene in question, Annabel is in the flat while her baby is sleeping in the next room. Her husband's oldest friend Billy lets himself into the flat and it is clear that Annabel is not particularly fond of Billy. Nonetheless, he behaves as though he is within his rights to come and go from the Christopher's residence as he pleases.

In the second section, Annabel, Frederick and Billy's history is explained. Annabel, who is 32 years old at time that the novel is set, has been married to Frederick for twelve years. Frederick and Billy are old friends who attended drama school together. They were both trained as actors, but neither enjoyed much success in his acting career. Frederick became a screenwriter and Billy resorted to taking a variety of off-jobs including theatre critic and voice coach. In contrast, Annabel's acting career started off slowly. When she was in her twenties, she played many small parts in British films. When Annabel was 30 years old, her husband Frederick wrote the script for *The House on the Piazza*, in which she starred. While promoting this film, the producer Luigi Leopardi portrayed Annabel as an English Lady-Tiger and Annabel subsequently adopted this as her public image.

In the third section, we gain some insights into Annabel's and Frederick's marriage. We discover that Annabel had an affair with an American drama student in addition to the brief affair that she had with Billy. Annabel tells Frederick some humorous stories about the American student, but she discreetly neglects to mention that she was having an affair with him. Although Frederick and Annabel share some chuckles over the stories, he later comes to suspect that she was having an affair with the student. Nonetheless, the marriage survives.

In the fourth section, we discover the extent to which Frederick lacks respect for Annabel, thinking her shallow and stupid. He accuses her of being insignificant and he thinks that her success is based on deception. As such, he views his wife as a cheat of sorts. Moreover, we discover that he wants to leave her.



Chapter 1 Analysis

The first chapter serves three important purposes. First, we are introduced to Annabel and her life with Frederick. Second, we learn about her public image and how it was conceived. Finally, we discover that Annabel has been displaced from Britain to Italy.

In the discussion about Annabel and her history with Frederick, we gain some small insights to the true Annabel. It is suggested that Annabel is not serious, that she is insignificant and that she is superficial. Early in her career, Annabel always played small bit parts that any woman could have played. This suggests that she is in fact a very ordinary woman and that there is nothing special about her. Indeed, Frederick voices this opinion about his own wife. In addition to the suggestion that he has a low opinion of his wife, there is evidence that their marriage is unstable. Early in their marriage, Annabel has an affair with Frederick's friend Billy and later, she has another affair with an American drama student. Frederick suspects that she has been unfaithful, but this suspicion doesn't compel him to leave her. Rather, his lack of respect for her leads him to find life with her barely tolerable and it is revealed that he wishes to end his marriage with Annabel.

Despite Annabel's ordinariness, she comes to occupy a special place in the public arena due to the efforts of an Italian filmmaker, Luigi Leopardi and his press secretary, Francesca. Thanks to Luigi and his handling of her image in the movie *The House on the Piazza*, Annabel quickly acquired the reputation of being an English Lady-Tiger, a reputation to which the public responded quite positively. It is suggested that this image is a manufactured and artificial one and that it has little to do with how Annabel actually leads her life. Although the details of what this image entails have yet to be revealed, we can anticipate that it will contrast greatly with the kind of woman she really is and with the kind of marriage in which she actually finds herself.

Annabel's move from Britain to Italy is a geographical detail that parallels the transition that she is making with respect to her identity. As such, Annabel doesn't really belong in Britain anymore. Moreover, since she hasn't fully completed her move into her new flat in Rome, she hasn't fully settled in Italy. This indicates that Annabel isn't strongly committed in any particular place geographically. Similarly, Annabel herself hasn't fully realized or established her own strong identity. The fact that she is willing to play a wide range of bit parts in British films prior to gaining her public image shows that she lacks a well-defined identity for herself. In short, she could be any woman. When she finally acquires a well-circumscribed public image, it is one that is manufactured by a film company and effectively imposed upon her. Annabel's story, which unravels in subsequent chapters, is a story about her relationship to her image and to her identity. Just as she lacks any strong geographical roots at the time of the story, she lacks a stable identity for herself.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

We learn that Luigi Leopardi's press secretary, Francesca, was responsible for arranging photo shoots and press interviews for Annabel while *The House on the Piazza* was being promoted. In effect, Francesca controlled the information to which the media had access and she greatly influenced how Annabel was portrayed to the public. Francesca was also largely responsible for implicating Frederick in Annabel's public image. She arranged for him to appear in photographs with his wife and to be interviewed together with Annabel. Annabel's public image became that of the happily married wife who is outwardly cool and reserved, but who privately shares a passionate sex life with her husband.

Although Frederick plays the role that Francesca imposes on him, he disapproves of the extent to which Annabel promotes her own public image. There is more evidence of Frederick's unhappiness in his marriage. He has indulged in extramarital affairs and he regularly considers divorcing Annabel. After he and Annabel relocate to Rome, he keeps a mistress named Marina who lives in the suburbs of Rome. He is very discreet about his affair with Marina and thus, his image as Annabel's faithful husband is never threatened.

Chapter 2 Analysis

In this chapter, we learn the extent to which Annabel's public image is a false representation of her actual life. Francesca's role in the development of Annabel's public image shows that Annabel's reputation did not originate with Annabel herself and that it was, in fact, imposed upon her. Lacking any strong sense of self, she easily adopted the public image that was assigned to her.

According to Annabel's public image, she leads a multidimensional life. Outwardly, she is calm, cool, composed and reserved, like any other typical English lady. However, the emphasis on her tiger-like eyes is meant to suggest that beneath her cool veneer lies wild passions. Moreover, since Francesca has arranged for Frederick to appear in photos and interviews alongside Annabel, it is suggested that he is complicit in her public image. In particular, he is depicted as the reserved Englishman who is devoted to his wife and who happily and adeptly satisfies all her needs, including those associated with her wild, passionate side. Together, Annabel and Frederick are depicted as a perfectly matched pair in an ideal marriage.

However, as suggested in Chapter 1 and re-emphasized in Chapter 2, Annabel and her married life could not be further from the way in which they are projected in her public image. As we will discover in later chapters, Annabel struggles to stay composed and reserved. Moreover, she herself admits, "But I'm not a tiger-lady." (pg. 37) In addition to



falsely representing Annabel as a woman, her public image gives a misleading impression of her marriage to Frederick. Contrary to what the public image suggests, Annabel and Frederick are not well-matched. She is stupid and superficial, but he is a serious intellectual. They are not faithfully devoted to each other. In fact, they can barely stand each other's presence. Both Annabel and Frederick have engaged in multiple extramarital affairs throughout the course of their marriage and Frederick regularly contemplates separating from Annabel.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

One Friday evening, Annabel and the baby are in their new flat in Rome when the doorbell rings. When Annabel answers the door, she is confronted with a group of partygoers. Unbeknownst to Annabel, Frederick has invited a group to his flat for a party. Since Frederick is not home and since she has no idea what he's been up to, Annabel doesn't know what to do besides allow these strangers into her home. It quickly becomes apparent that the partygoers have been consuming drugs and they entertain themselves in Annabel's home by drinking as much alcohol as possible. One girl passes out in the bathroom. Billy also makes an appearance with a German journalist, Kurt. However, Frederick never shows up and Annabel doesn't know how to get rid of her unwelcome guests. In the end, Billy manages to clear out the unwanted guests.

Shortly after the guests leave, Annabel receives a visit from her family physician, Dr. Tommasi and his family. Dr. Tommasi has come to report that Frederick has been found dead in the Church of St. John and St. Paul. While Annabel was playing hostess to a group of unwanted guests, Frederick jumped to his death.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Frederick has effectively planned an assault on Annabel's public image. He has arranged for a scandalous party to take place at his apartment and he has done so in a way that leaves Annabel no choice but to play a reluctant impromptu hostess to this party. While the party is raging in his flat, he commits suicide in a church that is reputedly founded on the martyrdom of two saints.

Frederick's actions have potentially dire consequences for Annabel's public image as the English Lady-Tiger. If the public caught wind of his suicide, it would be natural for them to infer that Frederick was not as happily married as Annabel's public image has been suggesting all along. Moreover, if it was discovered that Annabel was hosting a scandalous party at her home while her husband committed suicide, Annabel could no longer sustain a reputation as a reserved and devoted English wife. Instead, she would seem to be an irresponsible party girl.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

After identifying Frederick's corpse, Annabel proceeds to salvage as much of her public image as possible in the aftermath of his suicide. Although it is 2 a.m. by the time she returns to her flat, she is determined to hold a press conference because she wants to speak to them before any damaging information leaks out. She insists on being accompanied by all of her neighbors so that members of the press would be deterred from asking any awkward questions.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The events that are described in this chapter show how well Annabel can appreciate the importance of damage control. The party has occurred and Frederick is dead. These are facts, but if Annabel can put the right kind of spin on these facts, she can still manage to save her public image. Indeed, she spends most of her time and effort doing precisely this.

Upon returning to her flat, Annabel makes two important decisions that will affect how the recent scandalous events are handled by the press. First, she insists on holding a press conference despite the late hour. Dr. Tommasi's wife, who is present in the flat, protests that this is highly inappropriate. Nonetheless, Annabel declares that she has a public image to consider and that she needs to speak to the press before any damaging information finds its way into the morning papers. Second, Annabel convinces her neighbors to accompany her in her home. Although she gives the impression that her neighbors' presence is meant to comfort her in a difficult time, it later becomes apparent that this maneuver was meant to prevent members of the press from asking any awkward questions of her.

As Annabel prepares for the press conference, we get some glimpses of her true nature. In particular, Dr. Tommasi's daughter, Gelda, who is also present in the flat, speaks with brutal honesty on two occasions and provokes Annabel to respond angrily. On the first occasion, when the wisdom of holding a press conference at such a late hour is questioned, Annabel responds that Frederick would have wanted her to continue managing her career, but Gelda queries why Frederick would have killed himself to create a scandal if he really wanted her career to flourish. On the second occasion, when Annabel weeps in the presence of her neighbors, Gelda points out that actresses are trained to cry at will. On both occasions, Annabel loses her composure and snaps at the child. These episodes constitute evidence that Annabel is not the cool and composed English lady that her public image would suggest.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

On Saturday, the day after Frederick's suicide, Annabel awakens in a hotel room where she slept instead of in her flat. According to the newspapers, it seems that her public image is still intact. She is quoted in the press as saying that she would never believe that Frederick committed suicide. Moreover, there is no mention of a scandalous party at her home on the night of Frederick's death.

Billy lets himself into the apartment with a key that Frederick apparently gave him. Billy mentions to Annabel that Frederick has left four suicide notes amongst his possessions. Billy obtained the suicide letters before Italian police were able to find them. The Italian police will lead an investigation into the circumstances of Frederick's death, but Billy's intervention has ensured that the police lack these important pieces of evidence. Nonetheless, Annabel is deeply concerned about the news of the suicide notes. She persists in declaring that Frederick's death was not a suicide.

Chapter 5 Analysis

At the opening of the chapter, it seems that Annabel has successfully saved her public image for the time being. The morning papers do not mention any scandalous information concerning the events of the previous night. Frederick's death is not labeled a suicide. Moreover, no mention has been made of the scandalous party to which Annabel played hostess. However, before she can release a big sigh of relief, more threats to her public image emerge.

Billy mentions two things that could make trouble for Annabel's public image. First, he reports that there exist some suicide letters. Second, he mentions an investigation by the Italian police. Since suicide is a criminal offence, the Italian police must investigate the circumstances surrounding Frederick's death.

These letters are problematic for two reasons. First, if the fact that there are suicide notes becomes public, then it will be hard for Annabel to continue denying that Frederick committed suicide. Second, as we will learn later, the content of the suicide notes is designed to destroy Annabel's public image. Although Billy surrenders the letters to Annabel and assures her that he has not made copies, Billy's discovery puts her in a vulnerable position because he could blackmail her with information within the suicide notes.

The police investigation could make trouble for Annabel because any information that turns up will be made public. Thus, if the Italian police are able to uncover evidence that supports the hypothesis that Frederick committed suicide, Annabel cannot deny its truth. Moreover, if the police discover, in the course of their investigation, that Annabel hosted

a party on the night of his death, this information could also prove damaging to her reputation.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Later that day, Billy is still visiting with Annabel, but a young Italian doctor is also present. The young doctor treats Annabel for her fatigue. After the doctor leaves, Billy and Annabel continue their discussion of Frederick's suicide letters. Annabel suspects that Billy will try to blackmail her with the letters, but he denies that he plans any such thing. Billy offers her the letters and he assures her that he has not retained any copies.

Annabel proceeds to read the four suicide notes. The addressees of the letters are Frederick's mother, Annabel, Carl and Billy. In his letters, Frederick accuses Annabel of indulging in licentious behavior and of hosting orgies. He accuses her of being an alcoholic drug abuser. Moreover, he declares that their good reputation as a married couple is a lie. Finally, he claims that suicide is his only means of escaping such an intolerable situation.

In the meantime, the girl, Danya Luytens, who was passed out in Annabel's bathroom on Friday evening, is found and brought to the hospital for treatment.

On Sunday morning, Luigi Leopardi visits Annabel in her hotel room to discuss their strategy for saving her public image. There are two problems to be addressed. First, Danya's presence in Annabel's home and her condition make it difficult to deny the occurrence of a party at the flat. Second, if information about Frederick's letters is leaked to the press, it will be even harder to deny that Annabel is a party girl herself. Luigi suggests that Annabel consider a new public image, namely that of a fun-loving party girl. However, she refuses to take his advice. She insists on retaining her public image as the widowed English Lady-Tiger. She plans to flatly deny that a party took place in her home and to blame Frederick's death on his numerous mistresses.

Chapter 6 Analysis

This chapter serves three important purposes. First, we discover more evidence of the disparity between Annabel's public image and her true self. Second, we learn that Frederick's attitude towards one's having a public image is a complicated one. Third, we learn the extent to which Annabel clings to the public image that was imposed upon her two years ago.

The chapter opens with Billy and an Italian doctor attending to Annabel in her hotel room. The young doctor is there on the pretense of treating her fatigue although it is clear that he is treating her for her nervousness and anxiety surrounding the events of the previous evening. Again, Annabel's fragile nerves and her struggle to cope with the recent events are inconsistent with her image as the cool and composed English lady.



Later in the chapter, we learn more information concerning Frederick's suicide letters. One of the letters is addressed to his mother who died a few years prior to his suicide. Moreover, in this letter, Frederick addresses his mother as "Mamma", which, according to Annabel, he never did. These facts suggest that he was using the letters to promote a certain image of himself while at the same time using them to damage Annabel's public image. Frederick's choice to address his mother in terms that are more affectionate than those in which he actually addressed her suggest that Frederick took a keen interest in how he was perceived, even after his death. Furthermore, he clearly intended for these letters to be discovered and for their content to be publicized because in them he accuses his wife of wild orgiastic behavior that made their marriage intolerable for him. These accusations are false, but Frederick planned a scandalous party at his flat on the night of his suicide in order to manufacture supporting evidence for the claims in his suicide notes. Although Frederick often expressed disapproval of Annabel's concern for her own public image, his last acts indicate that he placed enough importance on public image that he was careful to manage his own image even as he attacked his wife's.

Finally, in her meeting with Luigi, Annabel demonstrates how committed she is to maintaining the public image that she already has. Luigi suggests that, in the face of the suicide notes and the discovery of a party girl in Annabel's flat, Annabel's wisest course of action may be to shed her old public image as the English Lady-Tiger and adopt a new one as a fun-loving party girl. However, Annabel displays surprising resolve and insists that she retain her old public image.

Annabel's reaction to Luigi's suggestion marks some evolution in her character. When her public image was first born, it was imposed upon her by Luigi and Francesca and she played along complacently because she didn't yet have much of an identity. Now, two years later, Annabel has become attached to her public image and has, perhaps, mistaken it for her real identity. She is no longer willing to play along with whatever public image Luigi suggests, but rather, she shows that she is capable of taking some initiative, at least insofar as she is prepared to fight for the survival of her current public image.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

By Sunday afternoon, Annabel has arranged, with the help of Francesca, a visit to Danya in her hospital room. Danya is portrayed as one of Frederick's mistresses who relentlessly pursued him. During her visit, Annabel publicly announces that she has come to forgive Danya for driving Frederick to his death. Annabel misleads the press into believing that Frederick kept many mistresses who pursued him with such zeal that he could no longer cope and that these crazed mistresses drove him to suicide.

When Annabel returns to her hotel room, Frederick's actual mistress, Marina, is there waiting for her. Marina shows Annabel a suicide letter that she received from Frederick. Marina is convinced that he was mad. She has come to ask Annabel for forgiveness and to surrender Frederick's letter to her.

Later that day, Luigi arrives to discuss how they will handle the police investigation into Frederick's death. There is supposed to be a public inquest on Monday. Annabel has successfully suppressed the story concerning that scandalous party at her home on Friday night and the public seems to be buying her claim that Frederick was pursued to his death by women with amorous intentions. Annabel assures Luigi that she has obtained all of the suicide letters from Billy and Marina and she reports that both of them deny having made copies of the letters. Thus, it seems that Annabel is in a good position to avoid embarrassment at the public inquest.

Chapter 7 Analysis

In this chapter, we come to appreciate how Danya is effectively a pawn in the game being played by Frederick and Annabel. Frederick is the first to use Danya, amongst others, because he invites her and others to his apartment for a party in order to set Annabel up for scandal. After the party is dissolved and Frederick's death has become public, Annabel uses Danya in order to explain away his suicide in a manner that best serves her own public image. Annabel's treatment of Danya is further evidence that Annabel is willing to go to great lengths to save her reputation because it effectively shows that she is prepared to slander others for her own preservation.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

On Monday morning, Annabel's lawyer, Tom, meets her at the hotel, but he has bad news. Despite his previous denials to the contrary, Billy did retain copies of Frederick's letters. He is threatening to make the letters public if Annabel doesn't pay him an exorbitant amount of money. Tom advises Annabel to pay Billy off in order to save her public image.

At the inquest, Annabel surprises everyone by disclosing the existence of Frederick's suicide letters. In doing so, she effectively destroys her public image and her acting career. She slips into a new life of anonymity and leaves with Carl for Greece.

Chapter 8 Analysis

In this chapter, Annabel's hand is forced by Billy and she must make a crucial decision concerning her public image. Billy's threat of blackmail forces her to evaluate her public image and to decide whether it's worth continuing the fight for it. Ultimately, she decides that it is not worth fighting for her public image. At the police inquest, she surrenders the suicide notes voluntarily. In doing so, she has effectively renounced her public image and the acting career that depended so heavily upon it.

After Annabel abandons her public life, she retreats to a life of anonymity and she starts this new life by moving to Greece where no one is likely to recognize her. Annabel's change in geographical location again parallels the events concerning her image and identity. In Italy, where Annabel is well-known and has a reputation, she never really settles. Her move to Rome remains incomplete. After shedding her public image, she migrates yet again, but this time, she heads to a place where she isn't known. This is appropriate since she has effectively given up on public life and chosen an anonymous one.



Characters

Annabel Christopher

Annabel Christopher is the principal character in *The Public Image*. Annabel is a 32-year-old British actress who has just moved to Rome with her husband, Frederick and their baby boy, Carl. In her early twenties, she played many small parts in English films. After about a decade of playing such insignificant parts, Luigi Leopardi, an Italian filmmaker, "transformed" her eyes into those of a "Cat-Tiger" in a film entitled *The House on the Piazza*, which became her first major film success. In the publicity for *The House on the Piazza*, Luigi's press secretary described Annabel as The Cat-Tiger, but Luigi later had this changed to "English Lady-Tiger."

Since the release of *The House on the Piazza*, Annabel has been very much concerned with maintaining her public image as the English Lady-Tiger. Her public image was largely the product of Luigi's press secretary, Francesca. Francesca arranged for photo shoots and issued stories about Annabel and Frederick. Under the guidance of Francesca, Annabel came to have the reputation of being cool and composed in public, but being passionate and tiger-like in private, particularly in the bedroom. Although Annabel's reputed passion was never shown in publicly available photos, it was always suggested in the way in which her eyes were photographed.

Despite Annabel's fame and success in the film industry, her husband Frederick considers her shallow and even stupid. Annabel's superficiality becomes apparent shortly after she and her family move to Rome. At this time Frederick commits suicide under scandalous circumstances and Annabel's primary concern in the aftermath of this tragedy is the preservation of her own public image.

Frederick Christopher

Frederick Christopher is Annabel's husband of 12 years. Before they were married, Frederick attended drama school. He considered himself to be a serious actor and he sought only serious parts in plays by the likes of Ibsen and Chekhov. However, Frederick's acting career never took off because he was not considered for the parts which most interested him. By the time he was 29 years old, Frederick's acting career had effectively expired and he began writing scripts.

When Annabel was about 30 years old, Frederick wrote the script for *The House on the Piazza*, which starred Annabel and would become her first big film success. The script was set in Rome and Annabel was to play an English governess who was employed by an American diplomat living in Rome.

When Francesca crafted Annabel's public image as the English Lady-Tiger, she was careful to include Frederick in it. He was often photographed with Annabel and he, too, came to have a public image that complemented Annabel's. He was portrayed publicly



as a serious, cultured man who was both studious and athletic and it was suggested that beneath his typically English reserve was "a foundry of smoldering sex."

Frederick and Annabel had a troubled marriage and Frederick often considered divorcing Annabel. It seems that they only stayed together for the purposes of maintaining Annabel's public image. When the Christophers moved to Italy, Frederick kept a mistress, Marina, who lived in the suburbs of Rome, but he was very discreet so that his infidelities did not affect Annabel's public image. Although Frederick had a supporting role in Annabel's public image, he secretly resented it. He had nothing but disdain for her career as a film actress and he was particularly disgusted by the importance of her public image. Instead of divorcing her, he commits suicide under circumstances that would destroy her good public reputation.

Billy O'Brien

Billy is an old friend of Frederick. Billy and Frederick attended drama school together. Billy's acting career suffered the same fate as Frederick's. Instead of working as an actor, Billy is forced to take odd jobs as a film and drama critic and as a voice coach. Because he does not have any stable employment, he must often ask the Christophers for loans and Annabel resents him for this.

Although Annabel and Billy do not presently get along, they did have a brief affair shortly after Annabel married Frederick. Since Billy remains Frederick's best friend, it seems that Frederick either never learned of the affair or never cared.

After Frederick's suicide, Billy discovers four suicide letters. These letters contain accusations that would ruin Annabel's public image. Billy attempts to blackmail Annabel by threatening to publicize the contents of the letters.

Luigi Leopardi

Luigi is an Italian filmmaker who is responsible for Annabel's first film success and for the development of her public image as the English Lady-Tiger. He produced the film *The House on the Piazza* and he is also involved in the project for which Annabel is presently preparing.

After Frederick's suicide, Luigi advises Annabel on how best to manage her public image. Annabel wishes to preserve as much of her reputation as the English Lady-Tiger as possible. However, when it becomes apparent that rumors about Frederick's suicide and the circumstances surrounding it may spread, Luigi tries to convince Annabel that she should transform her public image in accordance with the rumors. That is, she should shed her image as the reserved English woman who is privately a tigress for another image as a party girl. Ultimately, Annabel resists Luigi's advice.



Francesca

Francesca is Luigi's press secretary. Although Luigi is largely responsible for conceiving the ideas that shape Annabel's public image, Francesca is responsible for controlling the information available to photographers and journalists on a day-to-day basis. Indeed, it was Francesca who arranged to have Frederick posing with Annabel in photographs and to have him interviewed alongside Annabel.

Dr. Tommasi

Dr. Tommasi is the Christopher's family physician in Rome. He is called to the Church of St. John and St. Paul to attend to Frederick after he jumps to his death. He, then, travels with his wife and daughter to the Christopher residence to report to Annabel the fate of her husband. As Annabel struggles to cope in the aftermath of Frederick's suicide, Dr. Tommasi assists her.

Marina

Marina is Frederick's mistress in Rome. She is originally from the Italian countryside, but currently lives in the Roman suburbs.



Objects/Places

Rome

Rome plays an important role in Annabel's career and her public image. Annabel's first film success, *The House on the Piazza*, was set in Rome. Since Annabel's public image as the English Lady-Tiger originates with this film, her reputation is also linked to Rome. Shortly after Annabel and her family move there, her film career and public image are in danger of disintegrating because her husband commits suicide under scandalous circumstances. Thus, Rome is the site of both the birth and death of her acting career and public image.

Church of St. John and St. Paul

The Church of St. John and St. Paul is a church in Rome. It is the site of Frederick's suicide. Under the church, there are caves and between the church and the caves, there are planks where men are working on excavations. Frederick jumps from the planks to the foundations where the martyrdom of St. Paul is located.

It is significant that Frederick chooses to use this church as the site of his suicide. Because it is the site of the martyrdom of St. Paul, Frederick views his own death as a kind of martyrdom. However, it's not entirely clear what Frederick's cause is supposed to be. He arranges for a scandalous party at his home to take place while he commits suicide and his suicide letters are all designed to ruin Annabel's public image. Thus, it seems that his suicide was a protest against Annabel's obsession with her public image. It seems that Frederick did not know how to pry himself and Annabel away from her public image without sacrificing himself.

Suicide Letters

Before he commits suicide, Frederick writes five letters. One of them is sent to his mistress, Marina. The remaining four are left amongst his possessions. The information contained in the letters is meant to create a scandal for Annabel and to ruin her public image. Frederick clearly intends for the letters to be found and publicized. Sure enough, his friend Billy finds the letters and in the aftermath of Frederick's suicide, Billy attempts to blackmail Annabel with copies of the scandalous suicide letters.



Themes

Public Image

As the title of this novel suggests, Annabel's public image is one of the important subjects of this book. Annabel's career is founded on her public image as the English Lady-Tiger. Her first major film success, *The House on the Piazza*, was promoted by appealing to her image as the English Lady-Tiger. Subsequently, this public image was cultivated further due to the efforts of Luigi Leopardi's press secretary, Francesca.

Annabel becomes attached to her public image as the English Lady-Tiger because her career revolves around this image. This image originated with her first film success and all of her subsequent film roles exploited this image. Annabel recognizes the importance of her public image to her career and she is prepared to do everything in her power to preserve it.

After her husband Frederick commits suicide, Annabel realizes that her public image is in jeopardy. All of her actions in response to his death are calculated to salvage her public image. She is willing to lie about her own activities and to slander her dead husband just to save her public image.

Annabel's attachment to her public image and her commitment to saving it at all costs indicate that she is unable to distinguish between her true identity and her public image. She behaves as though the destruction of her public image is tantamount to her own death.

English Lady-Tiger

The English Lady-Tiger is a description that has been applied to Annabel Christopher. While her film *The House on the Piazza* was being promoted, the film's producer Luigi Leopardi and his press secretary Francesca conspired to portray Annabel Christopher as an English Lady-Tiger. In the media, she was depicted as a woman with a dual nature. Outwardly, she appeared as a typical English lady who conducts herself and her life in a cool and composed manner, but it was also suggested that she is a deeply passionate "tigress", especially in the bedroom.

Although Annabel's reputation as the English Lady-Tiger originated with *The House on the Piazza*, this image was cultivated in subsequent films including *Minerva Arrived at Platform 10* and *The Lady-Tiger*. Indeed, it is suggested that Annabel is type cast in her role as the English Lady-Tiger because, since she became known as the English Lady-Tiger, her film roles were consistent only with this image.

Deception

Annabel's public image does not reflect the truth about her and her marriage. According to her public image, she enjoyed an ideal marriage. She and Frederick are depicted as well-matched both intellectually and socially. Moreover, it is suggested that they share a passionate sex life. However, this public image couldn't be further from the truth. Annabel is actually shallow while Frederick is very serious. While Frederick is a well-read intellectual, it is suggested that Annabel is quite stupid. Furthermore, Annabel's and Frederick's marriage was never happy or stable. Both Annabel and Frederick indulged in infidelities. Frederick spent increasingly more time away from his wife and Annabel rarely knew what he was up to. He disapproved of Annabel's career and her public image. He was so unhappy in their marriage that he often considered divorcing her or committing suicide.

Manipulation

In addition to being deceptive, Annabel's public image is the product of carefully calculated manipulation. Initially, her reputation as the English Tiger-Lady was created by Luigi and cultivated by Francesca. Francesca arranged for photo shoots that depicted Annabel and Frederick in a way that promoted the English Tiger-Lady image. She planned all of Annabel's interviews with the press and she even wrote some of the articles herself. Although Annabel's public image was shaped largely by Francesca in these early stages, Annabel takes a more active role in the manipulation of her own public image after Frederick's suicide. She takes great pains to avoid exposure of any potentially damaging information regarding Frederick's death. She expresses a willingness to lie about the party that she hosted on the night of his suicide. Moreover, she is determined to deny that his death was a suicide despite evidence to the contrary.

Style

Point of View

Although the novel is primarily a story about Annabel Christopher, it is not told from her point-of-view. Instead, Annabel's story is told in the third-person. This point-of-view serves two purposes. First, it underscores Annabel's lack of a robust sense of her own true identity and her over-reliance on a superficial public image. Second, it facilitates comparison between the person that is truly Annabel Christopher and the persona that is projected in Annabel's public image.

Throughout the novel, there is a great deal of discussion and development of Annabel's public image as the "English Tiger-Lady," but there is remarkably little to be said of her true identity. At times, Frederick's opinion of his wife is mentioned and through this discussion, we learn that Annabel is a shallow woman who isn't very serious or intelligent. However, we know little else about her true character. Instead, we learn much about her reputation as an actress who portrays a certain type of character on-screen. She is perceived by the public as a cool and reserved person who is a passionate tigress in the privacy of her own bedroom. Since Annabel herself hasn't any stable sense of her own identity, her public image is all that she has, but this public image was manufactured by the film company for which she worked. As such, it is questionable whether Annabel has any strong sense of self and hence, whether she has a voice from which she could tell her own story. Thus, it is appropriate that her story is not told from the first-person point-of-view since this point-of-view is notably missing Annabel's case.

Since there is a disconnection between Annabel's actual life and the way in which it is portrayed by her public image, the third-person point-of-view facilitates comparison between the former and the latter. When Annabel's story is told by the neutral observer, the reader can see that her public image has little to do with how she actually lives her life. From the neutral point-of-view, it is possible to paint a convincing picture of Annabel's troubled marriage, her superficiality and her neuroticism while at the same time displaying how she is publicly perceived as a cool and collected, happily married woman.

Setting

The novel is principally set in Rome. Rome has a special significance for Annabel, her film career and her public image. Annabel's first film success, *The House on the Piazza*, was set in Rome and in the publicity for this film, her public image as the English Tiger-Lady was born. Two years after this film was released, Annabel and her family moved to Rome. Shortly after relocating, Frederick commits suicide in a church. Because his death occurs under scandalous circumstances, Annabel's public image could be destroyed if the details are publicized. In the aftermath of his suicide, Annabel spends



all of her time manipulating the information that is available to the Italian press. Eventually, she gives up her public image and her acting career and she leaves Rome for Greece.

Although most of the novel is set in Rome, Annabel drifts from place to place within that city. She splits her time between her new flat and her hotel room. She visits a morgue to identify Frederick's body and a hospital to visit Danya, one of the unexpected guests who appeared at the flat on the evening of the suicide. Although Annabel officially has a flat, her move into her new home is incomplete. Most of the furniture has yet to arrive and thus, she hasn't really settled in her new apartment. Her situation in Rome suggests that she doesn't have a home base. That is, she is not rooted anywhere in particular. This is further underscored by the fact that she is a British actress who has immigrated to Italy.

Annabel's lack of grounding in any particular geographical location contributes to the instability and uncertainty of her identity. Annabel's identity is fluid and mobile because it depends so heavily on her rather fragile public image. Moreover, this novel marks a crucial transition period for Annabel's identity because she is forced to decide whether to save her public image, to replace it with another, or to abandon it altogether. Similarly, Annabel's move from Britain to Rome marks a geographical transition. Since she hasn't established a home base within Rome, it is suggested that perhaps her current stay in Rome will not be permanent and she may choose to stay or to move again.

Language and Meaning

Spark writes in a style that is simple and accessible. This is an appropriate style in which to tell Annabel's story. Annabel is depicted as intellectually unsophisticated. Indeed, her husband Frederick thinks her stupid. Thus, it is very fitting that her story is told in a style that is unembellished.

It is also important that the style in which Annabel's story is told is unpretentious. Annabel's story is one about a false public image. Annabel is portrayed as woman that is far removed from who she actually is. However, as the story unravels, it becomes clear how absurd are the desperate contortions to which she resorts in order to save her public image. Indeed, Annabel herself ultimately chooses to abandon the burden of sustaining her public image in favor of a much simplified life of anonymity. That is, she comes to appreciate the superiority of a true and simple life, one that is suggested by the unembellished style in which her story is narrated.

Structure

The Public Image is composed of eight chapters. Although the chapters generally present Annabel's story in chronological order, some chapters have subsections in which the author makes digressions in order to describe relevant past events. The digressions into Annabel's past are made primarily to inform the reader of the origins of



her public image and how it evolved prior to the main events around which the novel is organized.

The major events around which the novel is based occur over a weekend beginning on Friday morning and ending on Monday morning. Chapter 1 opens on Friday morning and there are three subsections devoted to Annabel's past. Chapter 2 is devoted entirely to events in Annabel's past that contributed to the development of her present public image. In Chapter 3, the fateful events on Friday evening are described, including the scandalous party at the Christopher residence and Frederick's death. In Chapter 4, Annabel's immediate reaction to Frederick's death is described and the relevant events span late Friday night and early Saturday morning. In Chapters 5 to 7, Annabel's efforts to salvage her public image are described. In these chapters, Annabel meets with Billy and Luigi over Saturday and Sunday. She spends her time planning how she will manipulate the information that she will make available to the press. In Chapter 8, the police inquest into Frederick's death takes place on Monday morning and at the inquest, Annabel surprisingly surrenders Frederick's suicide notes. The final subsection of Chapter 8 describes Annabel's new life, which begins at some unspecified time after the police inquest.



Quotes

"In those early days when she was working in small parts her stupidity started to melt; she had not in the least attempted to overcome her stupidity, but she now saw, with the confidence of practice in her film roles, that she had somehow circumvented it. She did not need to be clever, she only had to exist; she did not need to perform, she only had to be there in front of the cameras." Ch. 1, pg. 10

"But, in a way, he was hypnotized by a sense of the enormity of her deception, the more her reputation grew and she accepted it as part of her rightful earnings. Whenever any of his old friends began to suggest that her acting had some depth, or charm, or special merit, he silently nurtured the atrocity, reminding himself that nobody but he could know how shallow she really was." Ch. 1, pg. 18

"Well, in any event, Frederick found himself rooted deeply and with serious interest in a living part such as many multitudes believe exists: a cultured man without a temperament, studious, sportsmanlike, aristocratic and a fatherly son of Mother Earth, Annabel's husband. As for Annabel, she was portrayed as cool and equal to him in all these respects, except that she was a tiger-woman at heart and in 'the secret part of their lives.' This tiger was portrayed only by her eyes; it was an essential of the public image that the tiger quality was always restrained in public." Ch. 2, pg. 29

"But it was not that the baby fitted the public image, it was rather that the image served the child so well. She was enamored with this baby and was determined not to be left by Frederick in the first years of the child's life to look round for a new husband, a new type of film, form a new household, change her successful public image for another, or possible, no image at all." Ch. 2, pg. 34

"'Before I made of the Tiger-Lady, you didn't even look like a lady in public, never mind a tiger in private. It's what I began to make of you that you've partly become.'" Ch. 2, pg. 37

"Then Annabel got ready to go, possessed by a furious horror at the abomination Frederick had brought down upon her. He had sent that party, that intolerable party, to be blood on her hands, blood on her public image..." Ch. 3, pg. 65

"But she looked at her watch and said to the doctor, 'It's just past two. I must say something to the press now, or it will be too late for the morning papers. Things like this are easily misconstrued and I don't want the whole world to get the wrong story.'" Ch. 4, pg. 70

"Annabel lay on her sleepless bed now, thinking that Frederick would have to be warned not to speak of the party. It was important that for the next few days they should be careful what they said. Anyone who claimed to have been at the party would be disbelieved if both she and Frederick denied it. Then she shivered with the fugitive knowledge reaching her stunned brain that Frederick was dead and that soon, in the



next few days, there would have to be found an explanation of his suicide and that he, who was a necessary adjunct to all convincing explanations, had slunk off, as he was doing so much these days. She closed her eyes, thinking how vital it was that he should keep quiet about the party and then of his treachery in timing it to coincide with his suicide." Ch. 5, pg. 83

"After all, that image was not so far from the truth, she was a lady-like, genteel sort of tiger; but still, indeed, a tiger." Ch. 6, pg. 106

"That's my business,' she said, 'forgiving him. If you're going to forgive someone even when they're alive the worst thing you could say to them, somehow, is 'I forgive you.' It means you want that revenge of letting them know that you're superior. And it's the same when a person's dead-now Frederick's dead with all this hell in his death-if I tell myself 'I forgive him' I'll never forgive him really. The best thing is to just go on as usual from where he jumped off-that's forgiving, really. You just pick up the pieces and get on with it.'" Ch. 6, pg. 111

"And I won't live up to a bad name,' she said. 'Not for any movie career, I won't. It's the widowed Lady-Tiger whose husband was sent insane by other women chasing him-it's that or nothing..." Ch. 6, pg. 116

"...He told me briefly about the possibility of scandal-he was very careful not to go into details on the phone-but what he wanted me to impress on you was that there was nothing for you in the film business unless you come out of this with the right public image. You've been built up on that, so you can fall down on that..." Ch. 8, pg. 141



Topics for Discussion

Annabel and Luigi seem to think that maintaining the right kind of public image is in Annabel's best interests. How important is it to have a positive public image? Is it more important for celebrities than it is for ordinary people living outside the public limelight?

To what extent was Annabel's public image deceptive? Do you think that it is objectionable for celebrities to cultivate public images that are completely divorced from who they actually are?

Frederick was always critical of Annabel for being overly concerned with her public image. To what extent was Frederick implicated in her public image? Did Frederick benefit from his involvement in her public image? To what extent was Frederick concerned about his own public image? Was Frederick a hypocrite?

Luigi and Francesca are obvious contributors to Annabel's public image, but to what extent do you think that the media contributed to it? Do you think that the public has any role in the creation and maintenance of Annabel's public image?

In the end Annabel surrenders her public image and opts for a life of anonymity. Do you think that Annabel made the right decision? Is this a realistic ending? Is it possible for anyone to live a life without any concern whatsoever for others' perceptions?

Although *The Public Image* was first published in 1968, do you think that its portrayal of public images accurately applies to those of contemporary celebrities?

Frederick seemed to be using his suicide as a means of destroying Annabel's public image. Given his goal of ruining his wife's reputation, do you think that Frederick made a wise decision? Were there other, perhaps less extreme, courses of action available to him? Would divorcing Annabel have accomplished his goal just as effectively?