

# **The Rocks Study Guide**

## **The Rocks by Peter Nichols**

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# Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Nichols, Peter. *The Rocks*. Heron Books, 2015.

*The Rocks* is a fictional novel taking place from the 1940s until 2005. The novel tells the story of three generations of people living on a small island off the western coast of Spain, and how the series of events in their lives define their relationships and behaviors.

Lulu and Gerald are at the forefront of the story that, with the exception of the first and final sections, is told going back in time. However, it begins with their death. Lulu and Gerald met by chance on the road and Gerald, as always, asked her to develop the film. Lulu, who by her ninth decade was still healthy except for the constant cursing resulting from a stroke. The two exchanged accusatory words and then grabbed one another, pushing and rolling, over the grass and off the cliff, to their death.

Lulu and Gerald met after World War II, and fell in love dramatically, quickly. But a tragic event on the shores off of Greece after they were married set the course for their lives moving forward. They divorced shortly after this life altering event. Though Gerald tried to explain and apologize for his absence after the trauma, Lulu was determined to have nothing to do with Gerald.

This planned proved impossible however, since both Gerald and Lulu settled on the island of Mallorca, Lulu running the inn at *The Rocks*, and Gerald, only a few miles away, lived on an olive grove he purchased. Though they saw one another only a few times for the remainder of their lives, their children's lives were intertwined. In addition, Gerald brought up the mysterious role of film each time the two did meet, begging Lulu to develop it and reminding her that he "lured them away" (6). Lulu always ignored Gerald's annoying reminders, determined not to revisit that day in any way.

Gerald's daughter Aegina, and Lulu's son Luc were friends since childhood. Luc realized at a young age that he loved Aegina, but every time he wanted to act on his feelings, either a misunderstanding or a missed opportunity kept it from happening. The first time this happened was when Aegina was stoned, mourning the loss of her mother. She was 14. She offered herself to Luc, claiming she was a virgin and wanting to know if he was, too. But Luc, recognizing this as taking advantage, told Aegina no. Had he said yes, even know it was wrong, Aegina might not have been raped by Dominick. As young adults, Luc accompanied Aegina to Morocco on a mission to buy cotton shirts at cost. There, he told Aegina how much he loved her, only to mess things up the next day by having sex with a tourist they met on their journey. It is this action that hurt Aegina to her core.

When Luc and Aegina were caught riding in a car smuggling drugs, Gerald and Lulu came to bail them out of prison. One of the few times the two had seen one another,



their interaction remained cold, Lulu berating Gerald for being at the prison for a week and not successfully getting them out.

Luc and Aegina moved on in their lives. Aegina married a business man she never loved and Luc wrote screenplays for obscure movies. When Luc was aboard Szabo's yacht, he almost drowned. Before that, he agreed to changing his beloved screenplay, giving up the themes of the story he felt represented his best writing. He fell into the water when he encountered Aegina's husband having sex with a guest of Szabo's. Many hours later, Luc was saved by the most unlikely of people, Lulu. Lulu, who never told Luc she loved him, was always critical of his lack of a wife or children and his marginal success in the movie industry, Lulu who vowed she would never set foot on a boat, hired a captain and searched until she found him.

When Gerald heard that the book he published long ago, charting and photographing the journey of Homer's Odyssey, was considered for republishing, he was shocked. He thought nobody had ever heard of his book, and felt it to be irrelevant to most people. But Aegina convinced him to accept the offer. She accompanied him to London for the release party. There, Gerald became emotional while speaking, thinking back to the love of his life, and the tragedy that occurred in those very caves and waters his book showcased.

Toward the end of the story, both Aegina and Luc, independently of one another, took control of their lives. Aegina divorced Fergus, and focused more clearly on herself and her art. Luc enjoyed success on one of his screenplays, earning him a name in the movie industry, which he felt proud of, even at a later stage in his career. Both Luc and Aegina's lives finally improved, with the implication of their relationship at the end. They never realized the implications of the role of film, but knew it involved each of their parents.

There are a variety of scenes towards the end of the novel that fill in the missing parts of each person's story. A beautiful scene from Luc and Aegina's childhood described them playing together in the waves. The innocent and playful laughter from both children as the water rolled over them was the last time their interconnectedness was uncomplicated. Finally, Lulu and Gerald's death is reexamined. Gerald held Lulu in the water, just as he did when she fell off the rock cliff. He spoke to her in her unconsciousness, promising to keep her safe, the one thing she never asked of Gerald, which he failed to do until that moment.



# “2005 Together Again” “1995 Golden Oldies” (pages 1-74)

## Summary

The Rocks is a novel set on the imposing cliffs of Mallorca, on the Mediterranean Sea. The story relays a family's generational adventures, mysteries and love, all under the backdrop of a beautiful Spanish setting. The novel moves backwards through time. This is evident by virtue of the first chapter, “2005 Together Again,” which ends with the death of the two main characters.

In “2005 Together Again,” Lulu and Gerald met in the small town of Cala Marsopa. Neither Lulu nor Gerald ever left the island of Mallorca, even after they ended their short marriage in 1949. Now both 80 years old, Lulu and Gerald's mysterious past resurfaced in this, their final encounter with one another, and with life itself.

Lulu looked much younger than her age. Her vibrant personality and carefree nature kept her youthful looking, and she never put much stock into healthy habits or beauty products. However, Lulu had changed in one noticeable way; after suffering a stroke, Lulu no longer communicated with the charm and grace that her many friends and Villa guests were used to. Her vocabulary was littered with curse words and expletives that made people blush. Regardless, she still gardened and ran Villa Los Roques, or “The Rocks,” as everyone called her seaside hotel.

Gerald on the other hand, did look like an 80-year-old man. His smoking habit led to emphysema and his body was wracked with arthritic pain. He and Lulu never ran into one another since their divorce in 1949, even on their small island. However, this day provided the exception.

Gerald and Lulu exchanged perfunctory greetings, Lulu's peppered with curse words, insults. In her mind, she imagined Gerald dying that very moment. Gerald's anger with Lulu's behavior led him to squeeze the yogurt he had bought until it exploded. As he followed Lulu home from her trip to the market, he did so with significant struggle, but also with determination. His body could not keep up with his pace, and he breathed heavily and sweated profusely. Gerald's urgent need to speak more intimately with Lulu pushed him to continue on.

At the cliff's edge, Gerald reached Lulu and grabbed her arm. Lulu, outraged, wasted no time barreling once again into a mean-spirited diatribe against him. Gerald's response to Lulu was accusatory. He screamed at her for never developing the film, reminding her that “I lured them away! Do you understand? I got them away!” (6). The two continued their physical confrontation through a series of arm grabbing and pulling, until they both fell to the ground, Lulu hitting her head. They rolled together, writhing and struggling, over the cliff and into the sea.



The second chapter, "1995 Golden Oldies," focuses on two major events in the lives of Gerald and Lulu. Gerald received unexpected news that a book he wrote many years prior, was discovered by a publishing house that wished to reprint it. *The Way to Ithaca* described the geography of Homer's *Odyssey* through Gerald's description and black and white photographs. Gerald's own copy of the book was found by his daughter Aegina after his death, with an inscription dedicated to Lulu.

Aegina, named for the Aegean Sea, was Gerald's daughter from a subsequent marriage. She and her teenage son Charlie also lived on the island of Mallorca. Aegina was a talented but only a marginally successful painter. Though married in the 1970s, Aegina was single and raising her son Charlie, trying to make something of herself as an artist, and instead accompanying her father on his late life resurgence into the literary world.

Though Gerald was not excited for the travel to London or the party, Aegina convinced him of the party's importance. Surprisingly, Gerald spoke both humorously as well as emotionally about his book and the personal nature of his own odyssey alongside that of Homer's. At the end of his speech, Gerald described the process of his travels from Troy to Ithaca. He explained that he did not do all of the traveling at once; rather, over a number of years, he traveled to different areas in his yacht. As his memory traveled elsewhere, he finished by saying, "I was going to do it..." (53). At this point, Gerald stopped and began to weep.

Lulu threw herself a seventieth birthday party. A woman who always knew what she wanted, she got herself her own presents, and planned the party exactly as she wanted it. The music was organized by Charlie, the grandson of Lulu's ex-husband Gerald. Charlie, a 15-year-old boy with dark Spanish features like his mother's, spent a lot of time at the Rocks with his friends. Aegina and Gerald both questioned Charlie's invitation to DJ the party. Charlie assured them that Lulu knew everyone, that she knew perfectly well who Charlie was, and that she asked him because he knows her taste in music.

Also attending Lulu's party was her son Luc, a screenplay writer whose limited success in the movie industry proved a constant source of disappointment from his mother. Luc attended the party with his current girlfriend, a 20-something American actress named April. Though they had not been dating long, April's lack of intelligence and personality already bored Luc.

Luc, the son of Lulu was a struggling screenplay writer, living a romantic sounding life working on movies that nobody had ever heard of or seen. He was in his forties and had never had a serious relationship. His underachievement professionally was a source of shame to his mother. Luc's measure of comparison in his career was *Lawrence of Arabia*, which he considered the best movie of all time. This movie, depicting one man's incredible journey, begins with his death and then goes on to tell of his inner struggles, passions, war experiences, divided allegiances, and tragic fall.



Not long into the party, Luc's eyes fell upon a woman setting the tables. Montserrat was born and raised on the island to a family whose ancestry could be traced back hundreds of years to the area. She attracted Luc's attention at first because she was odd looking. Once Luc spoke with her however, he was mesmerized. Montserrat's intelligence and mystery changed Luc's opinion of her appearance. He realized that she was actually beautiful. Later, when Luc left the party for a walk, he ran into Montserrat and she told him that she used to be infatuated with him when she was a girl. Luc had no memory of her before, but she explained that she watched him all the time, with his friends, on his motorcycle, in town. Luc resisted the impulse to kiss her.

On his way back to his room, Luc stopped by the window of the room where Aegina stayed. He knew the daughter of his mother's ex-husband must be there, since her son Charlie was as well. Without further explanation, Luc called up to the window and apologizes to her. Upon his return to his own room, Luc had a telling conversation with April about how she was considering going back to her old boyfriend. Luc did not object.

On his way to Lulu's party, Charlie met up with his childhood friend, and now girlfriend, Bianca. They spent some time kissing beside a tree, not far from The Rocks. They had an unstated agreement not to have sex, which was testament to their longtime friendship and respect for one another. Charlie arrived at The Rocks and was given an old black shirt by Lulu, who wanted him to wear it at the party. Charlie put it on, and began his job spinning records on a turntable, according to Lulu's specific instructions.

At the end of the party, Lulu asked Charlie to rub some lotion onto her sore back and neck. She took off her shirt, and Charlie became aroused as he rubbed the warming lotion into her skin. Lulu, enjoying this, asked Charlie if he wanted to hug her, which he did. Lulu asked Charlie if he was a virgin, to which he answered affirmatively. She asked if "this was alright," and he said yes, not wanting to hurt her feelings (68).

A few days later, Charlie's mother Aegina recognized that something was bothering him. Charlie told her that he had sex with someone, without mentioning Lulu's name. Aegina explained that she understood his feelings and decision, but that he must use protection. She promised she would get it for him. She also asked him what would happen with Bianca, to which Charlie said he did not know yet. Aegina asked Charlie where he got the black shirt he was wearing. Charlie just explained that it was from Morocco, and that it was old.

## Analysis

The Rocks begins with a poem called "Ithaka," by C.P. Cavafy. The poem speaks of the journey to Ithaca as a long one, full of adventure and discovery. It encourages the traveler not to hurry the journey, but rather to appreciate it, and to gather wealth and wisdom from it. This epigraph provides not only a direct reference to Gerald's lifework, but also a metaphor for his and Lulu's mysterious past.



Even within the first two sections of the novel, journeys are a recurring theme. Gerald is hesitant to make the journey to London to celebrate the new release of his old book. Reluctantly, he makes the trip, only to falter at the end of his speech, emotional and unable to finish his thoughts regarding the journey he took while writing it.

Gerald's final journey, that of his encounter with Lulu at the Rocks, speaks to the epigraphic poem as well. When Gerald wishes to discuss something important with Lulu, and reminds her that he "lured them away" (6) and yells at her for not developing the film, he is confronting the "Laestrygonians, Cyclops and angry Poseidon," the monsters mentioned in the poem. Gerald is trying, as the poem suggests, not to succumb to the monsters along the way that will try to keep him from his destination. Ironically, Gerald and Lulu's life ends in the same sea from which these monsters live, the same sea where Lulu devoted her life's work as well.

Though we do not yet know the details of Gerald's life, we do know that it revolved around Homer's *The Odyssey*. Gerald also references his process of writing *Ithaca* while speaking at the publisher's party. His reference intimates at something more than boarding his yacht time after time, something more than traveling familiar and beautiful waters in search of Homer's settings. We are given hints that Gerald's journey has much more than failed marriages and an out of print book he thought would gather dust until his death.

For Charlie, this section of the novel is a coming-of-age story. A confident, respected and independent young man, Charlie, at 15, is learning what it means to grow up. His girlfriend, also a childhood friend, is someone he respects and enjoys. Their unstated agreement that they will not have sex reveals Charlie's ultimate care for her as a friend and person. However, Charlie wants to be involved in Lulu's party, is willing to wear the ancient shirt she gives him, and play even more ancient music in order to please Lulu. She knows that Charlie is Gerald's grandson, and that 45 years separate them. Charlie, who "doesn't want to disappoint her," (68) knows that what he is doing is not right. However, there is a part of him that is relieved in telling his mother he had sex. He has the sense that now that he has done it, a weight is lifted, though ultimately he knows life will become more complicated as well.

Finally, there is Lulu. A study in opposites, Lulu's pre-stroke and post-stroke behaviors are telling. Her inappropriate and constant cursing post-stroke is embarrassing and uncontrollable. However, this erratic behavior sheds light on Lulu's true self, and the way she lived her entire life. She is a woman who wants what she wants, exactly the way she wants it. Lulu runs an inn, and must play the role of hostess and owner to her clientele. She must act the professional, keeping her villa clean and functioning. Behind the scenes, her advances on Charlie, a teenager, represent the opposite of appropriate behavior. This dichotomy speaks to more secrets and adventures yet to be uncovered in the novel, as Lulu's life becomes more transparent.





## Discussion Question 1

Lulu has a son, Luc, and Gerald has a daughter, Aegina. Their children are from different marriages, so are not related. How are Luc and Aegina similar to one another? How are they different?

## Discussion Question 2

What important role does the setting play in the story thus far? How is the setting crucial to Lulu's story? Gerald's?

## Discussion Question 3

From the first time he spoke to her, Luc considered Montserrat much more than a worker at his mother's party. What does Montserrat represent to Luc?

## Vocabulary

erratic, limning, ululate, irresolutely, dotard, pedantry, larder, vertiginous, virulent, fitful, tenuous, chimerical, ethereal, liminal, cogitative, dross, dissolute, implacable, fulsome, vernacular, foundling, amphorae, augment, plangent, viscous, idly



## "1983 In Turnaround" (page 75-181)

### Summary

Aegina, her husband Fergus and their three-year-old son Charlie were visiting Mallorca for the summer. Fergus, along with his friend and business partner Francois, had enjoyed significant success in previous development projects nearby. The two men took Gerald on a boat ride around the island in order to propose a business deal. They explained that their plan was to buy a portion of Gerald's land and build cottages. Their plan was to give Gerald a percentage upon the sale, and subsequently, he would receive percentages of the eventual profits. Gerald was skeptical, not only of the plans, but also of the thought of bulldozers destroying his olive trees. Nevertheless, he agreed. Fergus assumed that Gerald would be hard-put to agree to his offer, but Gerald did so though without excitement.

Later, at Lulu's, Fergus explained his building plan to Gabor Szabo, a movie producer with whom Luc was planning a future project. Gabor was interested in the plan and asked Fergus if the properties were already spoken for, and if he could see the sight. Lulu's friend Cassian also asked about the plan, and was immediately critical in that Fergus could have planned for an increasingly dense development, which might be more lucrative.

Luc and Aegina ran into one another in town, and Luc met Aegina's son Charlie. They exchanged short pleasantries and continued on their way. Shortly after, Luc and Szabo discussed Luc's newest screenplay idea in great length. Luc's story idea was deeply mysterious and sought to delve into the connections between strangers. Szabo loved the idea, though immediately began listing A-list stars to play the lead, and changed the entire concept to appeal to the masses. This was not Luc's purpose, though he went along with Szabo's ramblings. Together, on Szabo's yacht, the two worked for days on the screenplay. Luc grew increasingly frustrated with Szabo's changes, but continued to push on. He was grateful to work with an experienced producer, even if the bulk of Szabo's success came from Making Hungarian soft porn.

In an effort to impress Lulu, Szabo invited a group of people aboard his yacht for a daytime sail. Lulu told Luc she does not set foot on boats and that he should know that already. Lulu was becoming more skeptical not only of her son's talents, but of this producer's intentions. Regardless, she agreed to the trip for her son's sake, but against her better judgement.

Aegina meanwhile, was working on a painting of her father's land at the same time her husband's demolition crew was digging up another section of it. As she painted, she thought back to meeting her husband Fergus, and how he was the opposite of Luc. Fergus admired her paintings and asked to buy them. This led to dating and eventually, marriage. Aegina's memories continued with Fergus supporting her art further, his



impressive business success and their first intimacy. “He wasn’t Mr. Right. She knew that absolutely” (123), and Aegina’s thoughts drifted back to Luc, as they always did.

Many of the characters, including Fergus, Szabo’s friends, Luc and Lulu prepared for a day at sea in Szabo’s yacht. But when Lulu realized that the boat was not going to stay at shore, she marched to the edge, threw her purse to shore and jumped into the water. Everyone watched in shock as she swam back. After showering and changing, Lulu relaxed with her friend Cassian. Cassian told her about Fergus’s development plan, which Lulu found revolting. But Cassian explained that he planned to invest in it, and thought he could make a lot of money.

Gerald was preparing his olive oil when he heard engines in the distance. He walked out and found that the demolition crew had already begun work. As he watched his precious trees torn from their roots out of the ground, he realized he had made the biggest mistake of his life.

Luc quickly became bored on the yacht. He was not particularly interested in the passengers, and took a nap. Later, some passengers asked to return early to get back to their families. However, the yacht’s engine unexpectedly stopped. The small motorboat was not fit to get anyone home because of the distance, and the captains did not know how long it would take to fix the engine. To accommodate the annoyed passengers, wine and champagne bottles were opened.

Szabo made sure that all of his passengers were well fed and taken care of, as night set in. Luc, bored and lonely, wandered to the apex of the boat. There, he heard not only the light noise of the water hitting the side, but the noises of two people having sex. In an effort not to be seen or heard, his toe caught on something and he lost his balance and fell into the water. Despite his calls for help, the boat, which was on auto-pilot, was quickly too far away for him to be saved. Luc quickly realized he must save his energy and began to float. His mind drifted to many different thoughts. First, he imagined the other passengers realizing he was missing. Then, he tried to determine who the couple was, and quickly realized it was Fergus with another woman. He imagined Aegina going on in life, not knowing of her husband’s infidelity, and continuing in life without Luc there. He surmised that eventually Aegina would leave Fergus. As he floated, he repeatedly thought about how Aegina was the only person he ever loved, and nobody else could compare to her.

Upon the yacht’s return the next morning, Lulu learned of Luc’s disappearance. She immediately took matters into her own hands, hiring a boat to search for him. Lulu of course, went on the search as well. Aegina was also visibly upset upon hearing the news. After zigzagging and looking for a while, Lulu and her crew found Luc. They did not understand how he managed to stay alive, and Luc could only explain by saying, “Dunno. Just hung about. I was on my back for a while” (177). He told his mother that when he realized she would come search for him, he “just kind of hung around” (177).

The chapter ends with Aegina, Fergus and Charlie leaving Mallorca at the end of the summer to return to London. Gerald loved this time of year because the island returned



to its quiet state. He was not surprised that the bulldozers had not returned all summer, since their first day of work. However, on this day, someone was there. Gerald ventured out, only to find different people ripping up his land. He soon realized that a new company was continuing the project, and that Fergus had sold Gerald out, without telling him.

## Analysis

Aegina's husband Fergus is everything Luc is not. Aegina is not in love with him, and Fergus's business is a heartless venture to make money, despite the consequences his deals have, even for people like Gerald, who are family. Fergus's desire to turn Gerald's passion, his olive grove, into a development, is made out of selfishness and for the sheer element of finishing the business deal. This paints Fergus as a cold, shallow person, though ironically Aegina tells Gerald that he makes her feel safe.

It is no coincidence that it is Fergus who is having sex with someone on the yacht, when Luc stumbles upon them. Luc later realizes as he lay floating on his back in the ocean, that he has never loved anyone the way he loves Aegina. Therefore, the fact that she married such an opportunist hurts Luc even more deeply.

As Luc floats and tries to avoid using too much energy, his mind focuses on the people that mean the most to him, Aegina and his mother, Lulu. What should by all means be Luc's final moments are dramatic and directly related to protecting the woman he loves. Luc had spent the previous weeks trying to convince a producer that his screenplay had a deep message that the connections between people are more complicated than perhaps we know. The producer however, had other ideas, constantly on a mission to make Luc's story into a James Bond-like adventure. So, the fact that Luc ends up having a Bond-like experience of his own is telling. But the fact that he uses the opportunity to think about the people who mean the most to him, shows that he is committed to Aegina in the most powerful way, even if he has never had the chance to act on it. It is not surprising then, to note that the two people most affected by Luc's disappearance are Lulu, who eventually hires a boat to find him, and Aegina.

Lulu's actions in this chapter are consistent with her character, though she deviates in one aspect. She expresses her policy of not setting foot on any boat, but decides to do so for her son. Despite her constant disappointment in Luc, Lulu is not heartless. She decides to go on the yacht because she is hopeful that connecting with Szabo will help Luc to secure his movie deal. Ultimately however, she cannot do it and when she jumps off the boat, it is not in anger. She is making her policy clear once and for all. But her actions are also a reminder that she has a complicated history with water or with boats, which the reader is not yet privy to. Later in the chapter, she once again boards a boat for the same reason. Without even considering her previous no boat policy, Lulu hires a boat to search for her son, and this time, she does not jump off until her mission is accomplished.



For Gerald, this chapter represents a sadness and loneliness that is palpable. Gerald's willingness to sell a parcel of the land he loves speaks to the recurring loss in his life. Some of these include his first failed marriage with a mysterious ending, the death of his second wife, and his obscure book about journeys past on waters he loved but does not get to travel anymore. The one source of comfort and pride consistent for him is his daughter, Aegina. Even when he learns that Fergus has sold the property without telling him, cutting him out of any future profits, Gerald curbs his anger for the sake of his daughter and her well-being.

The title of this chapter, "In Turnaround," refers to each of the main characters in some form. For Lulu, her turnaround is her repeated boarding of boats, despite a loathing of them. For Gerald, the turnaround is seen when he sells his most precious commodity without much consideration. He subsequently loses his investment when Fergus sells the land out from under him. Aegina's turnaround is subtle, as she begins to consider how important Luc is to her, now that he is missing in the sea.

Luc's turnaround is the focus of this chapter. It begins as he pitches his screenplay to Szabo, a rich Hungarian whose money comes from pornography and whose intentions revolve around money. Luc's screenplay is the type that pushes its audience to question and think deeply about people's connections with one another, even with strangers. But Szabo wants Luc to change it. He envisions big stars and adventurous plot twists. Luc, wanting desperately to enjoy the success of screenwriting and Hollywood, reluctantly goes along with Szabo's changes. But Luc's turnaround is even more profound. He has lived his life with moderate success, and has not found "the one." It takes a drastic event like finding Aegina's husband with someone else and then falling overboard for Luc to realize that he loves her and always will.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is Szabo's plan for Luc's newest screenplay disappointing?

## Discussion Question 2

How does water almost destroy Luc? How does it save him? What role does Aegina play in this, even though she was not on the yacht at the time?

## Discussion Question 3

Lulu has a complicated history with boats. Why does she decide to go on the yacht, regardless of her hate for boats? When she ultimately changes her mind, and jumps off, what does this tell about her character?

## Vocabulary

threadbare, putter, impecunious, dubious, fatalistic, consumptive, incontrovertibly, inexorable, salinity, laconic, expansive, incongruent, sinuous, ponderous, prospectus, chagrin, blithely, cloistered, solipsistic, solicitous, entreaties, indignantly



## "1970 The Phoenicians" (page 183-254)

### Summary

Aegina, a recent high school graduate, wanted to put herself through art school. In order to do so, she needed to find a creative way to make some money. Her solution was to travel to Morocco in order to purchase handmade cotton shirts in bulk, and sell them at a profit. When Aegina ran this idea by her Aunt Billie, who had helped raise her since her mother died, Billie suggested that Aegina not go alone. After asking many friends, Aegina went Morocco accompanied on by her long-time friend Luc.

Luc was attracted to Aegina from long before this trip, but felt a sense of comfort around her since they were "step siblings by a near miss" (194), since Luc's mother had briefly been married to Aegina's father. After deciding they will use Luc's old car for the trip, they told one another about their boyfriend and girlfriend. Then, they began planning for the trip.

Luc and Aegina arrived in the marketplace in Marrakech and began searching for a vendor that sold the shirts. After some success, they became hungry. While eating, Luc and Aegina met a couple, also foreigners. Rolf was a German and his girlfriend Minka, who did not speak German. The two couples exchanged pleasantries and Minka invited them to join them for dinner the next day.

After a successful day in the marketplace, Aegina settled on a vendor and made a deal to purchase 100 shirts. At the end of the day, they met up with Rolf and Minka, eating, drinking a lot, and smoking dope. In their hotel room, both Luc and Aegina fell asleep. Both were hopeful and prepared for something to happen between them, which until this point, nothing had. In the morning, the timing was off again, and when Aegina was finished getting dressed, Luc was already out the door getting coffee.

The next day, Luc and Aegina went to check on the progress of the shirts, and were very pleased with the results. They wanted to celebrate the good deal Aegina made with a fancy meal. By chance, they ran into Rolf and Minka once again, and joined them for lunch. Rolf insisted on the very best seafood restaurant. During the meal, he explained to the others that the Phoenicians came to the Mediterranean 3,000 years ago to trade. At the end of the meal, Rolf declared that it was too late to drive back, and that they would all stay there for the night. Luc offered to drive, but Rolf refused. Finally, after arguing, Rolf agreed and they started back. However, Rolf pulled over and said he was going to be sick.

The two couples stopped at an inn, where both Rolf and Aegina vomited and had diarrhea. Luc suffered as well, but not as badly as Aegina. As he helped her pull her hair back, he told her that he loved her "very much" (224). Aegina replied, "Oh sure, especially like this" (224). To which Luc answered, "like this most of all" (224).



The next morning, Luc woke before Aegina and went out to the beach. There, he found Minka, who immediately took off her clothes and invited Luc to go into the water with her. Minka's clear intentions quickly led to sex, even though Luc repeatedly asked her to stop and even protested by telling her he was in love with Aegina. Minka responded in the midst of their lovemaking with "Of course you do. She's adorable. I love her too" (227).

Luc and Aegina packed their bags and shirts and began driving toward the ferry home. On their way, Luc hit a cow and the car was totaled. Aegina commented on Luc's bad mood ever since they had to stay at the inn, and that at least they are not hurt. Soon after, Rolf and Minka drove by and saw their friends stranded. Much to Luc's dismay, they piled their things into Rolf's car. Once they get on the ferry, Aegina asked Luc when he and Minka slept together. Aegina figured it out by watching how the two of them avoided one another during the car ride, and informed Luc that it was obvious. When Rolf's car was inspected, the authorities found kif, a cannabis product, hidden in the door panels. Suddenly, Minka became sick and vomited, and Aegina watched as Luc helped clean her up.

Gerald left for Morocco without a second thought to bail Aegina out, imagining his past voyages during the section of his travel by sea. At the same time, Aegina spent her days in a cell, reading and thinking about how Luc had told her he loved her. Though she was still angry, she decided that at the moment he said it, she loved him, too. Lulu helped expedite Luc and Aegina's release by speaking to an old flame who happened to have connections. Upon their release, Gerald gave the officer who helped him a bottle of his olive oil as a thank you.

The chapter ends as Gerald and Lulu met in Morocco to bring their children home. Gerald eyed the scar on Lulu's chin, barely noticeable. He brought up the subject of the film, asking if she ever got it. "I lured them away, you know," he told her (250). Lulu ignored all of this and chose to focus instead on the fact that it was her connections and not Gerald's persistence, that got Luc and Aegina released. A few days later, Luc showed up at Aegina's to apologize to her, but Aegina was away in London.

## Analysis

The Phoenicians explains the history of Luc and Aegina's relationship, as the two young adults travel to Morocco. The title of the chapter is explained when Rolf, the German tourist they befriend, explains that the Phoenicians used to travel to Morocco for trade purposes 3,000 years ago. He tells of their expert sailing and navigating, and how they "always kept the land in sight so they don't lose the world" (220). Rolf tells this history in part because he, too, has traveled to Morocco many times, and is in the trade business.

The story of the Phoenicians relates to Aegina and Luc as well. Aegina is stepping into the world of trade by buying and selling Moroccan shirts. Luc is drawn to this idea, and finds it - and her - attractive and exotic. Everything about Aegina, from her oceanic name to her mother's native Mallorca background, her natural beauty and her





adventurous nature, is perfect to Luc. But Luc's tragic mistake in the chapter comes when he loses sight of the land, literally and figuratively. Luc falls into Minka's spell in the ocean's waves, and though he makes it clear that he wants to stop, he cannot. Luc's actions echo the Phoenicians who get lost in the vast ocean and find themselves in a very different place than they had intended.

Luc and Aegina are young at this point in the story, and are finding their way in a vast and unpredictable world. The poor timing for Luc and Aegina's relationship is the foundation for their failure to make things work between them. They are both confident, but both lack the ability to make the first move. Eventually, Luc professes his love to Aegina when she is sick on the bathroom floor of a hotel. They both learn that life does not always end in the romantic love affair that classic movies present. They trust people who turn out to be drug dealers. They fall prey to the sexual advances of others. They get locked in Moroccan prison, only to be released with the help of Lulu and Gerald, a reminder that they still need the care and guidance of others as they navigate the world.

Throughout this chapter, Aegina learns about the real world, beyond the secluded island on which she was raised. She is confident in the Moroccan market, not willing to settle on the first vendor's offer due to its less than acceptable quality and price. She has a feeling that Rolf and Minka are suspect in some way, noticing that their car is not parked outside the restaurant, that they are strange in other ways. Aegina takes to heart Luc's profession of his love, but is then devastated by his betrayal only hours later. For Aegina, this chapter brings her out into the world, but to both the world of beauty that is represented in her paintings and trade ventures, as well as the painful world of duplicity and disappointment.

The other important scene in the chapter comes when both Gerald and Lulu (travelling separate from one another) meet in Morocco in an effort to get Luc and Aegina released from prison. Gerald tries to bring up the film, and whatever happened in their past that haunts him, only to be brushed off by Lulu. She changes the subject and delegitimizes Gerald's efforts to get the kids out of jail, even though he had already been in Morocco a full week. Lulu tells him that it was her phone call to someone with authority that made it happen. In doing this, Lulu takes away from Gerald the one thing he has, his ability to advocate for and protect his child.

## Discussion Question 1

Once again, Luc gets into trouble when in the water at the beach in Morocco. How does this scene represent his downfall?

## Discussion Question 2

How is the author building tension between Gerald and Lulu? How does the chronology of the novel (the fact that it is told from the present going back) add to this tension?



## Discussion Question 3

Why might the fact that Lulu and Gerald must bail out their unrelated children from jail be ironic?

## Vocabulary

eschewed, scrofulous, swathed, tepid, undulated, heedless, contiguous, allayed, inordinately, domestic, aloft, interceded, intercession, bromide, supplicant



# "1966 Perfidia" & "1956 The Waves" (page 255-325)

## Summary

1966 Perfidia begins with the arrival of Gerald's sister Billie to Mallorca. Billie came to help Gerald and 14-year-old Aegina after the sudden brain hemorrhage of Paloma, Gerald wife. All three of them knew that they would take Paloma off of life support within a short amount of time. As Gerald brought the car to bring Billie home from the airport, they ran into Dominick, a summer visitor to the Rocks who recognized Aegina and Gerald. Dominick took a ride with them into town, unknowing of their imminent loss. Dominick, in his thirties, droned on about development in the small town, not noticing the pain or awkwardness of the others.

Luc, aged 16, made some extra money during the summers taking hotel guests water skiing. His guest, Arabella, made no effort to find her bikini top when it fell into the water. Luc felt that Arabella had made passes at him for a few summers, and that the time had come for things to progress. It did not bother Luc that Arabella came to The Rocks with her husband. He knew from the way she flirted with him that this time something would happen, though when she checked on her whereabouts that evening, she had already gone to bed. In town, Luc looked for his friend Aegina and asked the local bar performer, Jackson, if he had seen her. The two began talking and Luc asked Jackson what the song was he had just played. Jackson told him it was called Perfidia, which Luc thought was a woman's name, only to learn it was a term for oral sex.

Luc continued to look for Aegina and eventually found her at their mutual friend's house, Francois. The two of them had smoked many joints and were already wasted when Luc arrived. Though Luc did not want to see Aegina like this, he also did not want her to develop an intimate relationship with Francois. Instead of leaving, he joined them.

Gerald's wife Paloma did not recover. Gerald explained in detail the night of the hemorrhage to Billie, who listened with sympathy. They briefly discussed their concern about Aegina. Billie focused on her riding a moped without a helmet. Gerald worried about Aegina too, but expressed it in more general terms. Gerald continued on with his business of harvesting and selling olive oil, needing to ensure an ongoing salary intake, even while his wife lay dying.

Dominick spent his summer at The Rocks playing poker, drinking and having sex with whomever he pleased. He announced that he wanted to "get my leg over that," referring to Lulu (285). The other guests assured him that he did not have a chance. He made passes at her, danced with her and flirted. Though Lulu was willing to have fun with Dominick, it remained innocent.



Aegina and Luc met up one night at The Rocks, with a large group of teenagers. Aegina, drunk and dealing with her mother's impending death, she told Luc to follow her to the water, where she jumped in. Luc brought her back to shore where she first fell asleep for a while. Later, she made a pass at him, asking if he liked her breasts and if he was a virgin. Luc insisted on taking Aegina home, and even resisted her continued groping on the motorcycle.

Meanwhile, a detailed sexual encounter occurred between Jackson, the town musician and an unnamed woman. Jackson, an African American and the woman, with wild hair and a wild sexual appetite, had done this before. Though the woman was unnamed in the scene, she ran into Gerald on her way home from her tryst. Gerald was shocked to see Lulu, and looked for the scar on her chin, remembered having sex with her on his yacht, the same wild hair clinging to her.

Toward the end of the chapter, Gerald, Billie and Aegina went to the hospital to instruct the doctors to remove Paloma from life support. She died quickly and peacefully. Aegina screamed when she realized it had happened and ran from the room. Later, Gerald and Billie discussed the options for raising Aegina in the future. Gerald expressed his failures as a father, and Billie pointed out all the good things he did. She told him she thought Aegina would be better off going with her to London.

Shortly after her mother's death, Aegina decided to sleep in Luc's shed that doubled as his room. When he did not show up, Aegina left and ran into Dominick. He took her to his room and they proceeded to drink heavily, and Dominick, twice her age, seduced her. Aegina was not conscious the entire time, and moaned or cried occasionally. In the morning, when Dominick woke up, Aegina was already gone. It was at this point he saw the stains on the bed, and he hoped she would be back for more so he could "teach her a few things next time" (316).

Gerald and Aegina took Billie to the airport and saw Dominick there. Instead of calling out polite farewells, Aegina kicked Dominick twice in the crotch. Gerald went to her, and held her as she sobbed, coiled up into a ball.

1956 The Waves is only three pages long and describes a scene from Luc and Aegina's childhood. They were at the water's edge with Aegina's mother Paloma and Luc's nanny. The children played as the waves crashed, sometimes on top of their little bodies. The women talked, and Paloma explained that Gerald was still bewitched by Lulu, and was still in love with her. The children continued to play in the waves together and were described as "one tumbling creature" (325).

## Analysis

Perfidia focuses mainly on the pain and loss Aegina suffers, when she loses her mother unexpectedly at age 14. During this time, Aegina is acutely aware that her mother is connected to life support, and that eventually she will be disconnected. Gerald is hesitant to tell her, but Aegina already knows what is inevitable. Her coping mechanism



is first to scream wildly and run out of the hospital room, then to find her friends and drink or smoke. A few times in the chapter, she behaves recklessly while under the influence or passes out.

Aegina's Aunt Billie knows she is putting herself in danger and mentions her concern to Gerald. But Gerald is dealing with Paloma's imminent death in a much different manner. He continues to farm his olive grove, wanting more than ever to make his sale. Gerald wishes to maintain some sense of regularity during this period of time. He knows his daughter is in pain, his own life is spinning out of control with no warning. At first, his commitment to the olive grove might seem trite, but in fact, it symbolizes Gerald's need for normalcy.

Aegina and Luc have the first sexual misunderstanding of their lives together when Aegina asks Luc if he is a virgin and if he wants her. Luc, who already loved Aegina, knew she was high and told her it was not the right time. This timing mishap repeats later in their lives (earlier in the novel, since it is told moving backwards in time) when they are in Morocco, only Aegina is sober. It is the first of many misunderstandings between Luc and Aegina, and she is offended that Luc does not want to be with her. She is too drunk or stoned to realize that in fact, Luc wants her more than anything. When Aegina lures Luc into the water, he tells her if she goes any further, he will not be able to save her. All Luc wants to do is keep Aegina safe, which is ironic because besides bringing her home after this scene, he will never have the chance to do so again.

Under normal circumstances, Aegina might have grown up to look back on the time around her mother's death with a profound sense of sadness. But Aegina had to add to that the moment her life spun totally out of control and she was raped. Her rapist, someone she knew, is a minor character throughout the story, and someone Aegina saw throughout her life during summers on the island. Dominick knew better than to sleep with a 14-year-old girl, and also knew she was intoxicated. He realized she was unconscious for part of the time, and yet still admired her childlike beauty, hoping she would come back the next day for more. This blatant misread of a sexual encounter, and Aegina's first, was a life altering tragedy for Aegina. It is no surprise that all she wants in her personal life is to feel safe. She tells this to Fergus when they are dating and she explains to Gerald that she married Fergus because he makes her feel safe.

Both Luc and Aegina struggle with sexual naïveté. Aegina waits in Luc's hut for him to return, so that she can sleep with him. But when Arabella stops by, Aegina feels embarrassed to have thought something might have happened between them when he was obviously sleeping with a beautiful married woman. Luc watches Aegina, and does not want to her to hang out with their mutual friend Francois, lest something happen between them. But Luc does not know how to approach Aegina. Instead, he hopes something will happen between him and Arabella, a guest he takes waterskiing to make extra money. Arabella flirts with Luc and he is sure it is leading somewhere. Luc feels that he should sleep with her to get it over with, but when he tries to find her, she is already sleeping. All of these misinterpretations show that these characters are young, inexperienced, and struggling with life in some respect.



1956 The Waves represents the one, and perhaps only time that Luc and Aegina's relationship was pure, joyful and simple. Of course, the scene was in the water, a place they end up often later in life. But in this scene, their unadulterated joy in playing in the waves represents the beginning of their love for one another. They are described as "one tumbling creature" (325), which beautifully describes their devotion to one another. It is also reminiscent of the circumstances of Gerald and Lulu's death, rolling off the side of the cliff after tumbling together through the grass. This generates hope that Luc and Aegina will somehow end up together at the end of the book, despite their history of misunderstandings, and that they will manage to communicate better than Gerald and Lulu did, in order to avoid the ultimate tragic end.

## Discussion Question 1

How is the scene between Dominick and Aegina similar to the scene at the beginning of the book between Lulu and Charlie? How is it different?

## Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of Luc and Aegina as little children splashing in the waves? Why is this chapter only three pages long?

## Discussion Question 3

How do Gerald and Aegina deal differently with Paloma's death?

## Vocabulary

salacious, swarthy, trite, ruse, inscrutable, katabatic, desultory, hirsute, inscrutable, implacably, preternaturally



# **"1951 The Way to Ithaca," "1948 – August, A Sailor's Seasons," "1948 – August A Week Later, Cyclopes," "2005 Old Photos," & "2005 Together Again" (327-419)**

## **Summary**

"1951 The Way to Ithaca" begins with Gerald remembering Lulu's shifting feelings for him. He then ran into an American man and his young son, Luc, Lulu's new husband and their son. Lulu's husband Bernie took a drive into town accompanied by 15-year-old Cassian, the son of Lulu's close friends. Cassian had some business to take care of, and took a bag full of cash from a Hungarian man to a yacht docked nearby. When Bernie asked what he was doing, Cassian explained the money trafficking was common since England regulated the amount of cash you could take out of the country. He said that most of the trafficking happened by yacht, including the money his parents brought to Spain to help Lulu buy the Rocks.

Gerald was contacted by a publishing house who knew of his writings and traveling throughout Asia Minor. They made a proposal to him to publish his writings as a collection documenting the places thought to be described in Homer's *Odyssey*. Gerald accepted the offer, received an advance, and thought back to all of the places he traveled and how he wished to get back on a yacht and continue his voyage. However, the path of his life got railroaded when he stopped at an island called Mallorca. His thought about purchasing a boat with his advance disappeared when he looked back at his olive grove. Gerald heard from the publishers, who insisted on a different name for the book that would appeal to more readers. Gerald thought about it, and eventually came up with *The Way to Ithaca*, which was inspired by a poem and reflected the journeying aspect the publishers wished to incorporate.

Around the same time, Gerald met his second wife Paloma, who was out in the fields with her father. Gerald had seen her before, and had also witnessed the abuse she suffered at the hands of her father. However, when Paloma's family proved to help Gerald out with his olive farm's business side, he got to know her better, beginning with a tightly wrapped ride on Paloma's Vespa.

This chapter ends with a casual encounter on the road between Gerald and Bernie. Bernie had just returned from a walk on the beach with his son Luc. Bernie cherished Luc, and connected with him deeply. He vowed to keep his perfect son safe. When he saw Gerald on the road, he assumed he was a laborer, not a native, but someone who had been on the island a long time. Gerald knew exactly who Bernie was.



Bernie asked Lulu when she was planning to tell him she was buying The Rocks. Lulu told him she had been planning for months to make the purchase, and planned to live there. Bernie was confused, and reminded her that his work as a journalist depended on living in Paris. Lulu had considered all of these details and asked Bernie to be reasonable. They continued on to discuss Luc but there was not much to decide since Lulu had already done that. Luc would stay with her until age eight or nine and then move to Paris to go to school and live with his father.

"1948-August, A Sailor's Seasons" is a short chapter giving the first clues as to what happened between Lulu and Gerald. Gerald sought to find Lulu after they were at sea together on Gerald's yacht. He left her somewhere in order to take care of something important. For some reason, Lulu was naked and had to beg people for clothing and to get a ride to her friends Milly and Tom. Lulu was humiliated and would not see Gerald when he came to find her. Milly told him his behavior was unforgivable and he should be ashamed.

Instead of trying to explain to Milly what had happened, Gerald gave her a roll of film. He asked her to give it to Lulu to develop and said that it would explain his reason for leaving her, and that he did intend to return for her but when he did, she was gone. Milly told him that all Lulu ever wanted was to trust someone, and that Gerald had lost that status with this incident. Gerald assured Milly that even though the film would not solve their problems, he hoped Lulu would develop it anyway. The chapter ends with Gerald's intentional sinking of his yacht, and then he found a place to make camp, as he did not have a home anymore.

"1948-August, A Week Earlier, Cyclopes" is the chapter in which the mysterious past between Gerald and Lulu becomes clear. Gerald and Lulu were young lovers, on adventure aboard Gerald's yacht. Gerald held Lulu beyond compare as a lover and took her to all the places he loved, exploring Homer's Odyssey scene by scene making being with her even more heavenly. Upon reaching The Rocks, Lulu insisted on climbing up. When she fell, and cracked her chin open, Gerald brought her out of the water. Upon waking up and realizing Gerald had saved her, she told him they should get married. She told him that she wanted to be safe, and that he had proven he could keep her so. Lulu's friends Milly and Tom helped plan a simple wedding in London, and then they went on a real seafaring adventure.

Lulu convinced Gerald to climb ashore one day, naked, as she loved to do. Lying in the sun, Lulu asked Gerald questions about the places connected to Homer's Odyssey. Gerald loved that she was inquisitive, as nobody else seemed to care about his passion. Soon after, Gerald noticed an Italian Coastguard boat docking nearby. Fearing they would board the yacht or seek Gerald's paper, he rushed Lulu back toward his yacht. As they swam, the three sailors hit them both with oars and grabbed Lulu up onto their boat. Gerald, reeling underwater with a blow to the head, was helpless, but Lulu jumped back into the water and swam to shore. By the time Gerald came to and went in the same direction, he realized he was too late. The Italians had found her and he could hear Lulu's telling moans well enough to know what was happening to her.





With the help of a noisy flock of goats, Gerald surprised the men and they scattered. He knew Lulu got away and hoped she ran toward the yacht, but when he got there, she was nowhere to be found. Gerald, knowing his life was also in danger, followed the Italians' ship, hoping to turn them in. He planned to return as soon as he could to find Lulu. After briefly losing sight of the Italians, Gerald realized they were approaching him, with the intent to sink him. The collision happened soon after.

A brief scene seven years previous described Gerald's experience during the war, aboard the HMS Furious. The sailors looked at their charts and hoped there were no U-boats nearby. They realized that the water was extremely shallow and Gerald made a note that in a certain area of the Tyrrhenian Sea, there were shallow areas less than six feet deep, where countless ships had sunk.

The collision hurt the Italians. The ship was damaged and Gerald continued to lure them to a shallow area. Once there, he fired a sulfur flare at their boat, causing it to ignite. With the sailors scrambling, Gerald took out his camera and took a roll of film documenting the ship's demise. He then returned to find Lulu, but she was gone.

"2005 Old Photos" describes Luc and Aegina meeting shortly after the funeral ceremonies of Lulu and Gerald. Luc felt unbearably alone, figuring nobody would even notice if he floated out to sea. But upon meeting with Aegina, both of them in the fifties, his mood changed. Luc finally enjoyed success on a French mini-series.

Over lunch, he gave Aegina a collection of photos he developed after finding the film in a box in his mother's house. They looked through them together, commenting on Lulu's beauty and the shipwrecked Italian boat. They figured Gerald had helped rescue the sailors aboard it. Aegina, without warning, then told Luc that his mother had seduced Charlie many years before. She felt strange telling him this, but explained that she figured out it was Lulu even though Charlie never told her who the woman was by name. She knew because Lulu gave him an old Moroccan shirt, that could only have come from Aegina's collection. At the end of their lunch, Aegina invited Luc to come by the next night, an invitation that filled him with a happiness he had never known.

"2005 Together Again" tells the last moments of Lulu and Gerald's lives. They just fell off the cliffs at the Rocks. Gerald splashed to the surface and took hold of Lulu, who was alive but unconscious. He pushed her hair back gently and cradled her from an oncoming wave, noting how perfectly beautiful she was. He told her that he came back for her, that she escaped from the very same cave the Odysseus escaped from. He explained that he lured them away, and knew now that he would get her back to his yacht, Nereid.

## Analysis

Following a traumatic event, which the reader is still not privy to, both Gerald and Lulu settle on Mallorca and begin new lives only moments away from one another. The fact that Lulu remarries and has a child is painful for Gerald, as is established when he sees



Bernard and his baby, Luc, out for a walk. Lulu's decision to buy The Rocks, with the help of her friends speaks to her oft repeated wish to be safe. Lulu has learned that only she herself can provide this. Both Lulu and Gerald seek the stability of the land. Both put down roots, Gerald in an olive grove and Lulu running an inn. The distance between them is based upon their mutual pain, not the physical distance. Though Gerald meets Paloma, his second wife, she quickly realizes that Gerald is still under Lulu's spell.

Both Gerald and Lulu take specific action to relinquish their connection to the sea, but both also remain close to it. Gerald literally tends to the land each day, and makes his income from the fruits of his orchard. In addition, he purposefully sinks his beloved yacht, its final journey bringing him too much pain to set out upon it, or even to see others doing so. Lulu does the same, in her own way, overseeing each and every detail of her inn at The Rocks. For Lulu, the damage is also evident in her inability to commit to one man. She buys The Rocks without her husband Bernie's knowledge and subsequently ends the marriage, taking Bernie by surprise.

Immediately after the rape, Gerald tries to give Lulu the film and she is not there. The fact that Lulu is gone and does not wish to see Gerald at all is symbolic of their relationship for the remainder of their history. At a crucial time, when Lulu was in perilous danger, Gerald was not there. Now, Lulu feels he has no right to be in her life. She has no use for him, and does not wish to see him, ever. In all of the previous scenes between the two characters (which happen earlier in the novel, but later in their lives), she is dismissive of him, and at times, even rude.

Cyclopes, the chapter in which Lulu is raped by Italian Coastguard sailors and Gerald subsequently sinks their boat, is named for the Greek mythological figure. The Cyclopes were wild and brutal, the most notorious among them Polyphemus who fell in love with a nymph but then mistreated her. Many of these Homeric scenes took place in and around caves, similar to the scene in this chapter. Its brutality and revenge echoes Homer's *Odyssey* both in its setting and in its inherent tragedy.

Another metaphorically named aspect of the novel is Nereid, Gerald's yacht. Nereid was a Greek mythological nymph that lived in the Aegean Sea. Nymphs were friendly and helpful to sailors, and were symbolic of everything kind and beautiful about the sea. Nereid represents this in Gerald's eyes, but only until the tragic events of this chapter, after which his yacht reminds him of the worst sort of pain.

When Luc and Aegina meet to share the developed photos from Gerald's film, there is once again an ironic misinterpretation of what the photographs mean. However, the implication of their plan to meet up the following night is that Luc and Aegina will finally be together happily, as they were once when they played together in the ocean waves as children. The irony here is that it took the tragic death of their parents to finally bring them together, as they should have been long before.

The final scene of the book describes Lulu and Gerald after falling into the water together. Gerald holding Lulu and pushing her hair back brings both him and the reader back to their time Gerald saved Lulu and earned her complete affection. He admires her



beauty and assures her that he will get her back to his yacht. Gerald, in this statement, is finally saving Lulu from the monsters that haunted her throughout her entire life. Though their end is fateful, Gerald gets the chance to explain to Lulu once and for all, why he left and that he did what he did for her. It is as if the promise to her is happening in the original scene, and one can imagine the two of them living out their lives together, doing everything to stay safe and to love one another.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why do Aegina and Luc assume Gerald took pictures of a sinking ship? Why do they not attempt to look further into the story of the roll of film?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What effect on the story is accomplished by beginning and ending with the scene where Lulu and Gerald die?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What is the significance of the place where Lulu was raped? How does it connect personally to Gerald, beyond what happened there that day?

## **Vocabulary**

lithe, peregrination, wanton, rakish, capacious, inscrutability, nefarious, erudition, impervious, cosseting, tetchily, asinine, furtively, officious, irresolute, ambient, quotidian



# Characters

## Lulu

Lulu is a woman set in her convictions, from the end of her life all the way back to the beginning. When Lulu does not prefer to discuss something, it is off the table. When she does not want to do something, it is impossible. When she throws a party, everything is just so, down to the final detail. Her inn, The Rocks, is run with perfection and is known to cater to the customer's every need. Lulu is the definition of style and grace, though she does not put much effort into beauty upkeep. When it comes to her history with Gerald, the reader is kept in suspense until the very end of the novel as to the nature of their failed marriage and the event that was at the heart of it.

Lulu gets what she wants, whether it is the seduction of a 15-year-old boy, the unlikely rescue of her son lost at sea, or the release of Luc from a jail in Morocco. Lulu is tough, weathered by her many lovers, and the winds of a complicated past, not to mention the demands upon her as the proprietor of the Rocks. She is set in her opinions, and is not afraid to share them. Her constant disappointment in her only son's professional and personal life are no secret.

Lulu ends her second marriage with no warning to Bernard. She has already thought out each detail by the time she tells him of her decision. While Bernard should be the one upset and critical, it is Lulu who snaps at him, impatient with his questions, sadness and frustration.

Consistently, Lulu is upfront, if not rude, to Gerald. She physically fights him at the beginning of the book, which is actually the final point of their mysterious relationship, and of their lives. She cuts him down when they go to Morocco to bail out Luc and Aegina from jail. She ignores him when they meet by chance a few years after their divorce. Her only consistent behavior throughout the novel is her behavior toward Gerald, which is standoffish. The reader is not privy to the source of Lulu's behavior toward Gerald until the end of the novel, which clarifies the ugly circumstances of their short marriage.

## Gerald Rutledge

Gerald Rutledge begins his life as a sailor and British naval officer during the war. His passion for the sea leads him to journey throughout the Aegean Sea to look for the scenes Homer used in writing *The Odyssey*. This passion, unique to the point of being quirky, is part of what draws Lulu to him when they meet. Though Gerald is conservative, soft spoken and quiet, his travels around the world are significant and he enjoys the adventure.

But for Gerald, the life of travel, passion and wandering is short lived. Gerald is so changed by Lulu's rape and the events after it, he must stay near to Lulu, even if she



never wants to see him again. His second wife, Paloma, knows from the beginning that Gerald is under some sort of spell when it comes to Lulu. His deep feelings of responsibility and failure force him to stay near her, in case someday she might reconsider.

Gerald quietly goes about his life, tending his olive grove quietly and raising his daughter to the best of his ability, even after Paloma dies. Gerald's commitment to keeping Aegina safe stems from his failure to do so with Lulu, and so he does all he can for Aegina, no matter the situation. Gerald is even willing to give up his land, all that he has, for Aegina's stability.

His character is misunderstood, and taken advantage of many times throughout the story. Sometimes this happens because he is a man of few words. Gerald neglects to ask many questions when Fergus offers to buy his land for development projects. Gerald's sister Billie convinces him that Aegina should go to London to study after Paloma died, and he agreed, even though the thought of being away from her is devastating to him. And of course, the most tragic misunderstanding in Gerald's life is with Lulu. He is never able to explain what he did for her, how he came back to look for her. Only at the bitter end of his life can he tell Lulu the truth and guarantee that he will take care of her. But for Gerald, the irony is that his last words to Lulu are as they lay dying in the ocean. In his mind however, it has worked out perfectly. He has gone back to the first time he saved her from drowning, when he earned Lulu's love.

## Aegina Rutledge

As an adult, Aegina has made something of herself, and of her life. She has raised a beautiful son, thoughtful and respectful. She has become moderately successful in her painting, and stayed closely connected with her father, the one consistent presence in her life. Aegina was able to break from Fergus and realize that her life is better without him, and that she can feel safe without Fergus's financial stability.

When Aegina goes to Morocco with Luc, she is learning about the world outside of Mallorca and Paris. While she is confident and determined to make a good deal on the Moroccan shirts, she is unsure of herself sexually, inexperienced with relationships and overly trusting of Minka and Rolf, who she sees as suspicious.

Because the novel is told from the present, working its way back, Aegina's tragic fall comes when she is only 14. The reader only learns about it toward the end of the book. At age 14, she not only loses her mother and misses out on a relationship with Luc, but also gets raped by Dominick, a man twice her age. But Aegina shows signs of her inner strength shortly after the incident, attacking him in the airport in front of her father. Though she curls up and sobs at this moment, the Aegina we know from this point on is a character who advocates for herself. The only exception is that she settles for Fergus, an unromantic choice for a husband, but one that Aegina justifies because she feels safe with him. It is the "safe" choice that keeps Aegina from being with Luc however, and this is ultimately what both she and Luc want.



## Luc

Luc's character is a drifter throughout the story and can never settle on one decision. At the beginning of the book, he is dating an actress he knows he does not love. He is already eyeing a native Mallorcan woman who he immediately imagines to be the perfect partner. Luc's screenplay writing is his passion. However, he is also willing to let go of a beautiful screenplay that is deeply inspired and meaningful, in favor of an action-packed adventure with no character development.

As a young man, Luc already knows he loves Aegina and whenever he tries to act upon his feelings, it does not work out. As he lay drifting in the sea, he thinks of her, and how she will think of him drowning in the water. He thinks about how she will never know that he only fell in because he was trying to avoid being noticed by her cheating husband.

Luc's character can also be seen as the tragic hero. Luc carries Aegina home when she is a drunk 14 year old, mourning the loss of her mother. Aegina wants to have sex with him, and though there is nothing Luc would love more, he knows these circumstances are not appropriate.

He is respectful to women throughout the novel. When he sleeps with Minka on the trip to Morocco, however, it is his tragic fall in Aegina's eyes. He had just told Aegina he loved her as she lay on the bathroom floor, sick and sweaty. Luc drifts from the woman he loves, to the woman who seduces him, and back, always knowing where he really belongs, but never quite getting there.

His character's final scene, at age six is in the ocean waves, tumbling as one with four-year-old Aegina. Together, they are laughing and shrieking with joy. It is possibly the most perfect point in their relationship and represents the one time in Luc's life where his drifting is meaningful.

## Fergus

Fergus, Aegina's husband, is suspect from the time he is introduced. His intentions with Aegina begin arounds his desire to promote her art. But his ulterior motives lead them to bed, and ultimately to marriage, though Aegina does not love him. Fergus convinced Gerald to sell him his land in order to make money on investing in properties he plans to build. But it is clear from the start that Fergus does not know much about this venture, and shortly after, sells the land to someone else, leaving his father-in-law high and dry. Fergus's character is shallow, and not accidentally. When he cheats on Aegina on Szabo's yacht, his actions are no surprise and only make the reader wonder how many other trysts he has had. In all aspects, he is not good enough for Aegina. He is unimaginative and calculating, while Aegina is creative and adventurous. Aegina feels that Fergus makes her feel safe, but he does not make her happy.



## Dominick

Dominick is a minor character throughout the book. He is a regular summer visitor to The Rocks, always enjoying the constant flow of alcohol, poker games and trysts with whomever is around. His character is flat though. The reader does not learn of his career, family or interests and only knows how he spends his leisure time. The significance of his presence at The Rocks is only clear when Aegina is 14, and Dominick is in his thirties. When he rapes Aegina, knowing her age and that she is drunk or stoned, he actually believes the sex to have been amazing, regardless of Aegina's semiconscious state. There is no regret on his part. In fact, it is the opposite for Dominick; he hopes they can meet again. Dominick represents the tragedy in Aegina's life at its lowest point.

## Rolf and Minka

Rolf and Minka, the tourists that turn out to be drug traffickers in Morocco, represent the realities and dangers of the world. Luc and Aegina, young and inexperienced, trust the couple to show them the town and give them a ride. But Rolf and Minka's intentions are not rooted in a desire to make new friends. Rolf never cares what others want, and is focused only on his needs, and what he knows of the world. Minka's ulterior motives are made clear when she seduces Luc on the beach. Rolf and Minka represent the failure of Luc and Aegina to act on their feelings for one another. Additionally, Luc's affair with Minka is not the end of it. The situation gets worse when Rolf and Minka's drug trafficking is uncovered at the border, and though they were not involved, Luc and Aegina's presence in their car makes them accomplices.

## Charlie

Charlie only appears in a few scenes in the novel, but it is important to note that he is Aegina's son and Gerald's grandson, a fact that Lulu knows quite well. Charlie is a good boy, well behaved and well liked on the island. He has many friends and a steady girlfriend, with whom things are moving slowly out of their mutual respect and friendship since childhood. Charlie's coming-of-age occurs the night he DJ's Lulu's 60th birthday party. He is too polite and too inexperienced to tell Lulu that it is inappropriate to become physically involved with her. After the fact, Charlie is somewhat relieved that his first time is behind him, though eventually Aegina does find out that Lulu seduced him. Charlie gave it away because he showed Aegina the Moroccan shirt Lulu made him wear.

## Billie

Billie is Gerald's sister, who comes to Cala Marsopa when Gerald's wife Paloma takes ill. Billie is a helpful and sensitive presence, both to Gerald and Aegina. She takes care of them both, worrying about Aegina's safety and whereabouts when she comes home



late or rides without a helmet. Billie makes plans for Aegina's schooling after Paloma dies and helps to raise Aegina during her teenage years, though her character is only present in one chapter.

## **Bernie**

Bernie and Lulu are married briefly after her marriage to Gerald. Bernie is the father of Luc. He is a doting and caring father, taking Luc on walks and telling him stories. Though Bernie is an American journalist living in Paris, he is committed to Lulu and Luc and is as attentive as he can be with his demanding career. Bernie only makes an appearance briefly, as Lulu tells him she is buying The Rocks, and, therefore, she and Luc will stay there. This announcement ends their marriage, as Bernie must return to Paris.





# Symbols and Symbolism

## The Rocks

The main setting of the novel, The Rocks, where Lulu runs her villa and raised her son Luc, represents a timeless place where the various characters in the story can count on for beauty, friends and parties. The only character that does not enjoy The Rocks is Gerald, who has only interacted with Lulu on two occasions since their short-lived marriage. The Rocks only sees minor changes throughout the novel. It is dependable, a place where patrons know exactly what they will get. Ironically, The Rocks is also the scene of Lulu and Gerald's tragic death.

## Art

Art leads Aegina in life altering directions on her trip to Morocco with Luc and ultimately, to marry Fergus. On her trip to Morocco, intending to purchase shirts to sell to help pay for art school, Aegina and Luc fail to act on their mutual affection for one another. Later, her artistic talents draw the attention of Fergus, who eventually becomes her husband, though he prefers modern art to the landscapes and portraits Aegina paints. Her sadness and joy are all expressed through her artwork, through depictions of the olive trees growing around her throughout her childhood. Art and the people it attracted define the direction of Aegina's life and love, at times to her regret.

## Olive Trees and Olive Oil

The olive trees and olive oil represent Gerald's timeless connection to his land and way of life, though they also represent his loneliness. Gerald literally made his roots on the land, in close proximity to Lulu, but also away from the water he so loved. He tends them with care and makes his own olive oil, which he offers to people as a precious gift throughout the novel. When Aegina's husband Fergus offers to buy a parcel of Gerald's land and bulldozes the olive trees, the profound sadness Gerald feels represents a turning point in his life. From this point on, Gerald is truly alone, having lost his second wife and a piece of his precious property. Fergus's building enterprise fails, and Gerald is cut out of the eventual sale of the land. He is left to look daily upon the torn-up trees and land.

## Lawrence of Arabia

Lawrence of Arabia is referenced many times, always as the movie to which everything Luc has made must be compared. The movie represents Luc's shortcomings as a screenplay writer, even though it sets a bar that Luc cannot possibly meet. In addition, the story of Lawrence of Arabia itself is a metaphor for the different sides of Luc. On one



hand, his life adventures make him romantic, intriguing. But Lawrence of Arabia has a dark side, and the protagonist is not only the hero, but also the tragic hero.

## Moroccan Souk

The chapter that takes place in the Moroccan Souk represents a coming of age for both Luc and Aegina. The souk, with its colorful fabrics, metals, instruments, jewelry and furniture, its merchants and the sea beyond, represents the burgeoning romance between Luc and Aegina, right at the moment when they are old enough to travel together responsibly. They must balance their newfound independence and responsibility with lingering danger. In the souk, they make their own decisions, bargain for a fair price, demand the best quality, enjoy delectable food, and also make mistakes. They are far away from home, and though their business aspirations are successful, their personal connections prove to be dangerous.

## Water

Water represents the unknown, literally and figuratively, surrounding the main characters at all times. Lulu's stubbornness regarding going on any sort of boat symbolizes the break she wishes to make between the present, and her history with Gerald. For Gerald, water represents the basis of his life's work. Though he spends his later years exclusively on land, tending his trees, Gerald feels most at home on the sea. Luc's near death in the Mediterranean was caused by his accidental discovery of Aegina's husband with another woman. As he floats in the water for hours, his thoughts drift back to Aegina, whose name comes from the Aegean Sea. The recurring water scenes throughout Luc and Aegina's childhood and adolescence are always surrounded by confusion or pain. There is one exception to this; when Aegina and Luc are toddlers, they frolic in the waves, giggling with pure delight and innocence.

## Moroccan Shirts

The Moroccan shirts represent danger. Aegina purchased the shirts in order to resell them at a profit, helping her to pay for her real passion, art school. But on this trip, they not only failed to make their feelings official, Luc slept with Minka. They also got imprisoned for being in Rolf and Minka's car, which carried drugs. Later in the story, Aegina notices that her own son has one of these old shirts. She realizes that it was from Lulu, and that she was the woman her own son slept with.

## Gerald's Boat, Nereid

Gerald's yacht, called Nereid, ironically represents all that is friendly at sea. Nereid is named for a Greek sea nymph, and these creatures were known to provide help to lost or endangered sailors. Gerald's yacht, until his tragic fall with Lulu, was his scared home, the vehicle that brought him to every necessary stop along the way to writing his



book about Homer's Odyssey. But ironically, the Nereid's final journey could not be fixed by a friendly nymph, and the yacht is ultimately destroyed by its owner, due to the incomparable pain its final voyage caused him.

## **The Undeveloped Role of Film**

The role of film Gerald gave to Lulu shortly after the tragedy represents the couple's unfinished resolution and understanding of what happened on that horrible day. The fact that Gerald continues to ask Lulu if she developed it shows his valiant effort to prove where he was and that his intentions were to protect her and to avenge her rape. Lulu's dismissal of Gerald's request represents her unwillingness to address anything related to that day. Despite Gerald's knowledge that Lulu will never do it, he continues to try to put closure on that day, for the good of both of them. Lulu however, is not interested, or does not understand the importance of the role of film, and could not possibly, unless she saw it.



# Settings

## The Rocks

The Rocks represent both stability and deviation. The Rocks is an inn where the same people return summer after summer. They go there not only for the beautiful setting, but also for the relaxation, time on the water, and ultimately, to misbehave. Clients at The Rocks enjoy gambling, drinking and sex, whether married or not. The stability and deviation of The Rocks also reflect the character of the woman who runs it, Lulu.

## Gerald's Olive Grove

Gerald's olive grove represents the stability he seeks after his tragedy with Lulu. Gerald chooses a place not only on land but literally deeply rooted land. The olive trees are hundreds of years old, completely predictable in their behavior. Gerald puts his heart into tending his grove, in the same passionate way he had done with regard to his yacht and his travels as a young man. Gerald chose a place on land, but not far from the water he so loved. Additionally, his grove was close enough to Lulu for him to keep tabs on her life, even if he did so through the information of others. The fact that Gerald sold part of his grove to Aegina's husband was another profound sadness for Gerald. However, it gave him solace that he could do something for the well-being of his daughter and her family. When Fergus later sold it without Gerald's knowledge, Gerald's lack of control over the circumstances of his life were highlighted once again.

## Gerald's Yacht

Gerald's yacht provides the setting for the climax of the novel, the scene of Gerald and Lulu's demise. Gerald had put significant effort into stocking his yacht with his navigational tools, maps and favorite books. He had traveled the world in it, seeking the precious caves and inlets from Homer's *Odyssey*, and had enjoyed the most beautiful moments of his life with his lover and then wife, Lulu. But his yacht is also the setting of his tragic fall, the chase and sinking of the Italian ship captained by Lulu's rapists. Gerald purposely sinks his yacht when he comes to realize that he has lost Lulu forever. Upon doing this, and being turned away from Lulu, he is homeless.

## Morocco

Morocco is the scene of Luc and Aegina's failed attempt at a relationship. Their trip is packed with adventures, business deals and interesting friends and food. Morocco is the setting where Luc professes his love for Aegina, and then proceeds to succumb to the seduction of Minka, for only a moment's pleasure. The exotic setting is perfect for the awakening of Luc and Aegina's adult life. It is simultaneously perfect in its differentness, but there are dangers lurking as well.

## Szabo's Yacht

Szabo's yacht represents transgression. After days of working on a new screenplay that is not at all the meaningful and creative piece Luc had in mind, Szabo continues to insist on the shallow plot and A-list star in hopes for a larger audience. Later, the group of partiers get stuck at sea on Szabo's yacht, ironically after Lulu jumped ship. During their delay, Luc almost drowns trying to avoid walking in on Fergus having sex with someone. Nothing positive happens on Szabo's yacht. The people are crude, sinful and petty. Szabo, a pornography producer, is suspect from the beginning. The moment Szabo's yacht leaves The Rocks, it is clear their journey is not to be forgotten.



# Themes and Motifs

## Homer's Odyssey

Journeys are an important and mysterious element of Gerald's life and are at the heart of his obsession with Homer's Odyssey and its different settings.

As a young man, Gerald set out on a journey that informed his book, and brought him to the place where he met Lulu. At the book's re-release party, he could not speak, although his personal reasons are more complicated than the writing of the book itself. At this point in his life, Gerald's journey has been a complicated and often painful one.

Gerald's final journey, that of his accidental death along with Lulu, is also embraced in mystery. Gerald refers to an important aspect of their common past, and this causes Lulu to become angry along with him. Their subsequent fighting and clawing lead them to roll off The Rocks, to their death. But their final journey, in the same sea where their history happened, Gerald promises Lulu he will protect her from the vicious monsters and evils of the world.

Gerald's life, similar to Odysseus on his return home, is wracked with events that are not controllable by mortal man, though Gerald tries. He tries to avenge Lulu's rape, only to be blamed by her. He tries to free Aegina from jail, only to find out Lulu did it. He tried to do right by Aegina by selling his land, only to have it sold without his knowledge before a profit was made. Gerald, a kind, gentle and well-intentioned man, finds disappointment in each era and aspect of his life.

## Feeling Safe

Throughout the novel, the author highlights Lulu and Aegina's mutual desire to feel safe, and the fact that they were both let down by men they loved plays a role in their lack of trust moving forward in their lives.

Both women suffer sexual assault at a young age, and this speaks to their need for safety. However, the women each have their own way of protecting themselves. Lulu ensures her safety by never again allowing herself to settle with one man, after what happened to her days after her marriage to Gerald. Lulu enjoys sex, and finds many partners, some of whom she has an understanding with that the sex is good, can happen repeatedly, but that nothing more will follow from the relationship. This can be seen in her relationship with Jackson, an American musician who spends time on the island. We also know that Lulu's brief marriage to Bernie, Luc's father, is ended when she decides to purchase The Rocks.

Lulu learns that her safety is only guaranteed when she is in control. This is why her relationships do not last, why she must be the boss of not only her body and her relationships, but also of her professional life. She will stop at nothing to ensure her



safety, even jumping into the water and swimming back to shore upon realizing that the yacht was not going to remain at port. Lulu has the roll of film for decades and decides never to develop it. In her own way, she is taking charge of that fateful day by refusing to revisit anything associated with it. In doing so, she is keeping her distance, and maintaining her safety.

Aegina's feeling of vulnerability stems back not only to her rape, but also to the loss of her mother, which occurs during the same summer. Unlike Lulu, Aegina wants nothing more than to find someone who will make her feel safe. Though not truly in love with Fergus, and possibly knowing of his dishonest business practices and his infidelities, Aegina maintains that he is right for her. They do divorce later, allowing some question as to whether Aegina and Luc will be together at the end of the novel.

Both Luc and Gerald try to do the right thing for the women they love, and both fail. Though Gerald's heroic act saves Lulu from drowning, Gerald fails to keep Lulu safe from the Italian sailors and fails once again, to find her after the fact. Luc also saved Aegina from drowning when she swims while intoxicated. However, Luc fails Aegina by not making a move on many occasions, but also by sleeping with Minka right after declaring he loved her. It is the failure of these men, both of whom are responsible and caring, to provide a sense of protection and security, that lead both Lulu and Aegina to have issues with safety throughout their entire lives.

## Misunderstandings

Deeply rooted misunderstandings about sensitive topics lie at the heart of the failed relationships throughout the novel.

Lulu never developed the roll of film Gerald gave her after the rape. Had she done so, she would have known that Gerald went after her attackers, with the intent to kill. She would have known that the revenge Gerald took represented his undying commitment to her, even though in her mind, she was left naked and alone by her husband of only a few days. This transgression was unforgivable to Lulu, and nothing on the roll of film could have changed that from her perspective. Gerald knew that it might not change anything, but wished at least that Lulu knew his intentions in the moment.

Luc and Aegina's long history of misunderstandings was much more complicated than Gerald and Lulu's circumstances, though not quite as dramatic. For Luc and Aegina, the timing never ended up being quite right. In Morocco, Luc confessed his love for Aegina while she vomited. A few nights before, Aegina hoped something would happen between them, but when she came out of the bathroom, Luc had already gone. When the two were younger, Aegina also came on to Luc, who clearly had feelings for her. But Luc knew that at 14, high on something and mourning her mother's death, it was not the right time.

There are other, more minor misunderstandings in the novel. Lulu thought her boarding of Szabo's yacht meant they would stay docked and enjoy a party. When she



understood that the day was meant as a day at sea, she jumped into the water, for a quick, clear, and dramatic escape. Gerald, taking Fergus's word regarding the sale of part of his olive grove for a development, misunderstood Fergus's intentions. He was not purchasing the land in order to protect his wife and child financially. He planned to resell it at a profit from the beginning. Luc and Aegina are also accused as accomplices when they hitched a ride with Rolf and Minka. The police kept them jailed for more than a week.

But these misunderstandings do not lie at the heart of the novel. Rather the former, more substantial misunderstandings that pave the road for the entire future of the characters' relationships are the mistakes that matter. The deeply held misunderstandings lead to regret, sadness or a sense of aimlessness. Some of the characters experience a combination of all.

## **Native Versus Foreign**

The theme of native versus foreign pushes characters to examine their choices, whether pertaining to their spouse, lover, or home.

Lulu does not internalize this issue, as she relocates to Mallorca without much thought. Carefree and beautiful, even in old age, Lulu is sought out by men from all over the world. She invites them all to be with her. The fact that Lulu runs an inn to cater to guests from far and wide speaks to the fact that native or foreign, people are people.

For Gerald, native versus foreign is more complicated. Gerald decides to stay on the island after Lulu's rape and purchases land. He eventually marries a native woman whom he loves dearly. This marriage also guarantees that Gerald is not going anywhere. His daughter has a Spanish look, and her beauty draws attention from a young age. Gerald's love affair with a native woman (his wife) brought him the joys of family life. But his affair with Lulu and the foreigners that ruined her were the defining moments in his life.

Luc longs for the native woman he cannot have. At the beginning of the novel, he is dating an American actress with no personality and no intellect. He is bored. Immediately, his eyes meet those of a native Spanish woman serving food at his mother's party. Luc is mesmerized at her unique beauty, and when they speak, he eventually learns that she had been in love with him when they were young. Later in the story, it becomes clear that Luc has always been in love with Aegina, the native daughter of Paloma and Gerald, and Luc's childhood friend.

## **Making Sacrifices**

Many of the main characters make sacrifices in their lives in order to protect the people they love.





Gerald's sacrifices are the most significant, beginning with his yacht, Nereid. After Lulu's rape, Gerald sinks his yacht, his most prized possession, the vehicle that allowed him to pursue his passion. Rather than sell it or abandon it, Gerald needs the finality of sinking it himself, in order to rid himself of that horrible day completely. Even though he is subsequently homeless, Gerald feels it is his only option. He is left literally stranded, without his prized possession and mode of transportation, a failed marriage and an unpredictable future.

Gerald also sacrifices part of his beloved olive grove for the well-being of Aegina and her family. Even when Fergus resells it at a profit, cutting him out, Gerald does not go to Aegina to tell her. He realizes that doing so would not be beneficial to their relationship.

Luc nearly gives his life rather than be seen by Aegina's cheating husband. This sacrifice is a turning point for Luc, and from this point on he is honest with himself regarding his feelings for Aegina. He knows that anyone he chooses to be with will never compare to Aegina, and he mourns for what could have been, knowing that he is on the verge of drowning and that Aegina is married.

Aegina's sacrifice is her marriage. She has given in to a marriage of safety rather than love. Aegina always felt the same way about Luc that he did, ever since she was a teenager. But she is still broken by her rape and by Luc's absence that night. She also remembers how Luc told her he loved her, only to sleep with Minka immediately afterward. In her constant pursuit of safety, Aegina marries Fergus, knowing she will be financially sound and physically safe, giving up the romance and connection she knows would have existed with Luc.



# Styles

## Point of View

The story is told from a third person narrator's point of view. This allows the reader to connect with each of the characters in a similar manner, understanding each of their thoughts and emotions equally, or as much as the author, Peter Nichols, chooses to share. The reader does not connect more with one person's version of events, or led to favor them above the others. All of the four main characters exhibit traits that are admirable and traits that are contemptible. It is this human aspect of each, told from the third person omniscient that gives the reader all they need in order to connect and to put the pieces of the story together.

## Language and Meaning

Nichols uses descriptive imagery to paint a picture of each of the main settings in the novel. From his descriptions of The Rocks, the yachts, to the Moroccan marketplace, Nichols has the ability to invite the reader into each setting. He also intertwines description with dialogue. The reader comes to know each character by his or her speaking style. For example, Gerald is a man of few words, while Lulu always says what is on her mind. Nichols also uses a broad collection of vocabulary which also adds to the descriptiveness and foreign flavor of the setting.

## Structure

The novel is told beginning in the present. It then moves back in time, working all the way back to Lulu and Gerald's mysterious tragedy. It finally returns to the present, where their children are mourning their loss. This literary craft of telling the story by moving backwards in time leaves the reader to guess as the nature of the past, and its secrets. For Lulu and Gerald, their past hinges on one life-altering event. Gerald refers to it throughout the book, though not using details that allow the reader to gain insight. This repetitive reference creates intrigue and mystery.

Luc and Aegina's past is subtle, though still complicated. As the novel progresses, the reader carefully adds layer upon layer of the couple's history of misunderstanding and miscommunication, leading back to their childhood. Only by piecing together all the circumstances of their lives can the reader understand how complicated their love is, and how it is similar in its tragic nature, to Lulu and Gerald.

Because the novel is bookended by scenes occurring in 2005, we come to learn that, indeed, Luc and Aegina do ultimately discover the film, lying undeveloped in Lulu's house. Ironically, they completely misinterpret the nature of the photos, focusing mostly on the incredible beauty of Lulu as a young woman. They focus on the past, rather than their present circumstances or the nature of the couple's simultaneous death.

Telling the story in this manner keeps the reader paying attention in an unusual way. We are introduced to characters, both major and minor, some of whom grow and change, and others who remain predictable. Though it is only when the reader understands turning points in their lives, most of which happen toward the end, that one can truly understand the reasons for their pain, behavior, and character traits. In addition, the chapters vary tremendously in length. Most chapters are over 100 pages long, with additional sections marked by numbered subchapters. Some however, are only three pages long. This causes the reader to take note that the scenes described in the short chapters are important for some reason, or represent a moment in time that will be further explained later in the novel.



## Quotes

As he picked up the book again, Gerald's synapses snapped him back to what had made him put it down minutes before and go into the kitchen: hearing his grandson talk of that woman. He looked down at the cover and realized that, in any edition, the book itself would always carry an ineradicable taint."

-- Narrator (1995 Golden Oldies: I paragraph 3)

**Importance:** Gerald's book describes the very place where his horrific end with Lulu occurred. His infatuation with Homer's *Odyssey* and desire to consistently visit its caves and waters was the driving force in Gerald and Lulu's tragic voyage. The fact that his own grandson was involved with Lulu in any way brings his pain back to the surface, many years later.

Gerald had never thought of himself as owning these trees. He had husbanded, pruned, ministered to them for thirty years, mindful always that he was only a caretaker for a brief duration. And they had fed him in return."

-- Narrator (1983 *The Turnaround*: I paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This passage represents the grounded life that Gerald's creates for himself. The timeless nature of ancient olive trees reminds Gerald that he is only temporary, much like the momentary love affair that defined his entire life.

He was thirty. The creeping sense of disjunction between what was supposed to happen in his life and what was actually happening terrified him. He saw himself sinking into oblivion."

-- Narrator (1983 *The Turnaround*: 3 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** The passage describes Luc and his inability to find success in his career or personal life. The interesting element here is a clear foreshadowing. Luc sees himself sinking onto oblivion, when shortly after, he nearly drowns.

Somehow she always knew when Luc was in town, but she'd managed to avoid him for years. They had seemingly excised one another, like an amputation. But now she could feel the phantom limb; it still itched or stung but it felt like a natural part of her. In its place, Fergus was some sort of efficient prosthesis."

-- Narrator (1983 *The Turnaround*: 4 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** This passage describes Aegina's connectedness to Luc. Avoiding Luc was much more simple for Aegina following their trip to Morocco and Aegina's subsequent marriage. However, even after many years, she cannot ignore the mere presence of him. Additionally, Aegina's comparison between the natural completeness of Luc juxtaposed with Fergus as an "efficient prosthesis" captures the depth of Aegina's love for her friend versus that of her husband.



That's because you need to be captain of your own ship, Lulu."  
-- Cassian (1983 *The Turnaround*: 8 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** This short quote, said to Lulu by her friend Cassian after she jumped off of Szabos' yacht, has a double meaning. Not only does Lulu not board any type of boat, she also runs her life only according to what is best for her. Lulu is captain of her own ship in that her decisions as to her own journey in life often hurt others, but always put herself first.

That was Luc's problem: he only loved Aegina. He'd known he'd never love anyone else – not like he loved her. Well, he needn't worry about that now."  
-- Narrator (1983 *The Turnaround*: 10 paragraph 8)

**Importance:** As Luc fights drowning, the most important things in his life become clear to him, namely, his love for Aegina. Aboard the yacht of a dishonest film producer who wished to make money rather than tell the story Luc proposed, Luc fell into the water. This happened only in his effort to avoid being seen by Aegina's husband, who Luc saw having sex with someone else. Luc, always trying to do the right thing, realized his love for Aegina while slowly drowning.

Aegina didn't wear a scent, but she had a smell – he didn't know what it was or what it smelled like but it was hers and he now lived to breathe it. He closed his eyes, angled his head and inhaled as he had never inhaled before. There was a dampness to the musky warmth that poured off her..."  
-- Narrator (1970 *The Phoenicians*: 6 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** This scene, during Luc and Aegina's trip to Morocco captures the power Aegina has over Luc, the intensity of his feelings for her. It is also symbolic of the fact that Luc never gets close enough to Aegina to know more than her enchanting scent.

Gerald's face was haggard and grey, as if he had not slept or stepped outdoors for weeks. His right lower eyelid twitched spasmodically. Smoking - the whole normally unconscious business of fetching the pack from his shirt's breast pocket, shaking one loose, lighting it, raising his hand repeatedly to his mouth and lowering it again, sucking in and blowing out draughts of blue-grey smoke, flicking ash lightly away from his feet - was now a deliberate, meditative procedure, offering long, drawn-out moments of relief. It gave him something to do, physical movement, a release of energy that partly masked the trembling of his whole body. And it was so blessedly ordinary.  
-- Narrator (1966 *Perfidia*: 1 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This description, of a person carrying out a normal, repetitive act, is clear and beautiful in its descriptiveness. It is an example of Nichols' ability to capture a moment in time and expand it to tell much more than just that moment. From this description, we learn that Gerald is in need of comfort for some reason. We know that through doing this thing, he is bringing a sense of calm upon himself, and the reader can picture this happening. Though the action is ordinary, the act is crucial.



Ithaca, The Beautiful Journey. By Gerald Rutledge. Except it was hardly that, was it? Mostly a wretched, storm-tossed misery, full of wrong turns and monsters. And some very nasty females."

-- Narrator (1951 The Way to Ithaca: 6 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** The title, chosen by Gerald himself is the first irony related to this passage. Homer's descriptions of Ithaca and its surroundings may be beautiful indeed, and Gerald's book does its beauty justice. However, the story behind it all is ugly and gruesome, both in Homer's version as well as in Gerald's past. Gerald's wrong turn led him to meet Lulu and their storm-tossed misery was her rape. This singular event made her into the monster, or nasty female, that haunted Gerald his entire life.

Well I've decided' - sotto voce - 'I decided this winter, in fact, that this is the summer I'm going to give Lulu a tumble. I'm going for it, I can tell you. I'm going to give her such a thrashing.

-- Dominick ("1966 Perfidia: 6" paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Dominick tells other Rocks guests of his plans regarding Lulu, whom everyone knows sleeps with whomever she pleases. Dominick has thought about this decision considerably, and has no qualms about telling his plans to others over a dice game on the patio. This behavior shows Dominick's nature, but also becomes ironic by the end of the chapter. In fact, he ends up not with the woman way past his age, but rather raping a girl half his age.

Gerald sat on the bed beside her. He stretched out a hand to the dark hair across her face and gently moved it aside. My beautiful, beautiful little girl. He missed all the children she had once been - the eighteen-month old, the three-year-old, the five-year-old, the smallness of her then, the whole weight of her against his shoulder when she was asleep - and he could only bear it because she grew into something more precious and extraordinary, more a necessary part of him, with the passage of time. Her face in repose now, her mouth open, still looked like a very young child's, as if he had sent her off to sleep the night before with The Tale of Pigling Bland. Now he was going to wake her into a harsh world, and wrench her forever out of the happiest part of her childhood.

-- Narrator (1966 Perfidia: 9 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** This scene takes place right before Gerald's wife (Aegina's mother) passes away. Gerald is amazed at the power of fatherhood, enjoying an innocent moment of admiration for his child, his pride, his most grounding and precious possession. The descriptiveness is at once beautiful and normal, as most parents have moments similar to this in some way. However, this particular description of Aegina is meaningful in a deeper way as well. Aegina is about to suffer the loss of her mother, a pain no child should know. But her innocence, unbeknownst to her or her father, is about to be taken by another pain when she gets raped by Dominick.

He didn't doubt that she had loved him, in her efficient, stream-lined way, and he had, of course, loved her, in a mute, non-declarative, resentful way. He didn't remember his mother ever saying 'I love you, darling.' Nor his saying anything along those lines to her.



They hadn't been like that with each other. They'd sort of simply taken the notion of each other for granted: someone crucial - if annoying or disappointing - but always there. Somebody who, however poorly she expressed it, had loved him.

-- Narrator (2005 Old Photos: 5 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Luc thinks about his mother, who recently died. He realizes that she did not express her love for him, though it was there. She did save him after all, betraying her one rule in life, not to board a boat, in order to do so. Luc, with the exception of his relationship with his mother, did not express his emotions like Lulu. At a young age, he declared his love to Aegina, in a moment when she needed him. This quote also explains something important about Lulu. She is not able to express her emotions, possibly due to the trauma she suffered years before. For whatever the reason, Lulu's inability to show her love was a realization that Luc had only after she was gone. Luc would never find out the reason for Lulu's hands-off style of parenting.