The Sea, the Sea Study Guide

The Sea, the Sea by Iris Murdoch

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

This book, published in 1978, is at times written as a journal or in first person narrative, is the story of an eventful summer late in the life of Charles Arrowby, a famous man of the British theatre. Arrowby is an actor, playwright, director, and romancer of women.

The novel begins with Charles having just retired from what he tends to think of as the glittering superficiality of the theatre world and moving to what he also tends to think is the relative peace of coastal England. He has purchased a house near the sea, Shruff End, has moved in with very little, and seems resolved to let go of old emotional habits, practices and beliefs. He plans to live simply, eat purely, and think quietly.

Charles' friends from London seem to have other ideas. A series of letters and uninvited visitors repeatedly disrupts Charles' refuge, the most disturbing of which involve previous lovers. After a particularly emotional encounter, Charles suddenly realizes that a woman almost run down by the departing visitor's car is in fact his childhood sweetheart, Hartley. They had loved each other non-sexually as teenagers and vowed to marry each other, but shortly before Charles moved to London to begin theatre school, Hartley broke off their relationship and suddenly and completely disappeared. This loss has haunted Charles and all his other relationships for his entire life.

After seeing Hartley, Charles becomes obsessively focused on rebuilding their past innocent, purely loving relationship. Complications appear in the form of Hartley's emotionally violent husband and runaway son (Titus), Charles' repeatedly visiting ex-lovers, his strangely distant cousin James, and Hartley's own ambivalence about returning to the past. At one point Charles forcibly confines Hartley to his home, where she becomes nearly deranged in her desperation to return to her other life. Charles is finally persuaded to let her go.

Once Hartley has gone, life takes on a kind of forced normalcy at Shruff End - until, following a drunken evening with friends, Charles is pushed into the sea. He survives, imagining he was rescued by James. Shortly after he recovers, however, he receives another shock. Hartley's son, who had been living with him and whom he had come to regard as a son of his own, drowns in the sea. These traumas send Charles even further into fixated fantasies and imaginings about Hartley and her husband, whom he blames for both the attempt on his life and the death of Titus.

Eventually Charles learns that he was pushed into the sea by the angry ex-husband of one of his ex-lovers, that Hartley and her husband are emigrating to Australia, and that several of his friends whom he once believed he could absolutely control and manipulate are getting on with their lives. He also discovers, following James' sudden and slightly mysterious death, that he's been left heir to his estate. He sells Shruff End, moves to London, and as he sorts through his feelings and impressions and experiences, begins to move back into the life he left behind.

Prehistory

Prehistory Summary

This book, published in 1978 and at times written as a journal and at other times written in first person narrative, is the story of an eventful summer late in the life of Charles Arrowby, a famous man of the British theatre - actor, playwright, director, and romancer of women.

Charles begins his journal with a paragraph of detailed observations about the sea. He comments in the following paragraph that that after writing the first paragraph, which he says was intended to be the first paragraph of his memoirs, that something happened that was so frightening that he stopped writing, can't bring himself to write about it, and hopes that after time and consideration he'll be calmer and more able to include it.

After commenting on the nature of, and necessity for, memoirs, Charles introduces himself as a retired but formerly extremely successful man of the British theater, an actor, playwright, and most notably a director. He paraphrases a quote from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, at the conclusion of which an aged magician retires. "I shall abjure magic and become a hermit," Charles says, "put myself in a situation where I can honestly say that I shall have nothing else to do but to learn to be good." He also details the life he has recently forged for himself, having retired from the theater and purchased an eccentrically constructed house called Shruff End in a small seaside community called Narrowdean. The house includes a strange inner room which has windows high in its walls, and also describes items that came with the house when he purchased it, including an exotically framed mirror and an equally exotically ugly vase. He also describes in detail his passion for simple food, his swimming routine, and the terrain in which his house sits, including a naturally formed rock bridge over the rough sea.

In the course of all these descriptions, Charles refers several times, sometimes in passing and occasionally in detail, to important people in his life, including several women with whom he had relationships. The most significant of these women are the foolish, gentle, Lizzie and the passionate, very talented Rosina. He also refers to several male colleagues, with Gilbert, a gay comic actor, and Peregrine, a self-important Irishman being the most important. He discusses in detail members of his family, including his beloved and still-missed father, his emotionally distant Evangelical Christian mother, exotic Aunt Estelle and Buddhist/soldier cousin James, with whom he still shares a strange kind of rivalry. The detail with which Charles describes these relationships contrasts starkly with his continued and repeated avoidance of telling the story of his relationship with Clement, an older actress with whom he became involved when he was a young actor. Fragments of the story do emerge. These include Charles' observations that she guided his life and career, that the relationship was emotionally stormy and not always sexually passionate, and that it continued off and on, interrupted by affairs they both had with other people, until Clement died. He does describe in some

detail the misery in which Clement died, commenting that he's been haunted by the ugly circumstances of her death ever since.

Eventually, Charles reveals the frightening event during his first days at Shruff End. One day while looking out at the sea, he saw a gigantic sea serpent rising out of the sea, coiling itself up, stares at him, and sinks back under the surface. He wonders what possible explanations there could be for its appearance, and concludes that it was a flashback to the single very bad, experience he had with LSD. Other unexplained circumstances disrupt what Charles clearly intends to be a very peaceful existence - the sudden shattering of both the mirror and the vase, and the appearance of a mysterious face in one of the windows opening into the inner room, which Charles investigates and is perplexed to discover there is no-one in the house but him.

After waiting for several weeks for a response to a letter he sent Lizzie, asking that she come to him and resume their relationship, Charles discovers that all his mail has been delivered to a mailbox he didn't know existed. He collects the accumulated mail and finds the long awaited letter. In it, Lizzie reveals that she still loves Charles passionately, but has set up housekeeping with Gilbert in the hopes that his tenderness towards her will help heal the pain caused by Charles. She repeatedly expresses confusion about what Charles wanted by writing the letter, implying that she believes he wants her to marry her, a belief Charles, in his narration, suggests is both false and hopeless.

Charles also speaks dismissively of her relationship with Gilbert, his tone and attitude echoed in his equally patronizing comments when he receives a polite but distant letter from James. Following this letter, he describes how James' family was socially and financially better off than his own, and how this circumstance fueled a sense of rivalry felt by Charles that continues to the present day. Soon afterwards, Charles receives a third letter, a shallow and chatty one from Peregrine that leads Charles into detailed reminiscences about the triangular, emotionally volatile relationship between himself, Peregrine, and Rosina, the woman they both loved and were both involved with at one time or another.

Frequently in this section, Charles refers to an incident in his past that colored his life, his career and his relationships. Several times, he avoids setting down the details, commenting on how painful it is for him to remember them. Eventually, after living in Shruff End for several weeks and gradually becoming calmer and more settled, he reveals that the incident involved a woman he calls Hartley but whose real name was Mary. He recounts their story in more emotional language than that in which he has written before. Hartley was a childhood sweetheart with whom Charles had an understanding that they would eventually marry, but who broke off the relationship when he was about to leave their small home town to study theater in London. Charles recounts how heartbroken he was, and how her parents told him she left their hometown, never wanting to see him again, and eventually married. He also relates his series of unsuccessful and unfulfilling relationships to his ongoing, desperate love for Hartley, and expresses the hope that coming to Shruff End will finally help him heal completely from the wounds she caused.

At the conclusion of this section, Charles claims to feel calmer about Hartley, but admits to wanting to tell the story of the relationship and how its ending affected his life, to another person, perhaps Lizzie. He expresses the tentative belief that the well of feeling that had been closed off to him for so long following Hartley's disappearance might again be open to him.

Prehistory Analysis

This introductory section sets the stage for the action to follow. It establishes not only the characters, relationships, symbols and themes that recur throughout the main body of the book - it also defines the perspective from which the story is told, the extremely subjective and very personal perspective of the narrator. The style in which this first section is written, as a series of diary entries written (for the most part) as events and thoughts occur, reinforces the idea that the reader is being taken along on a deeply personal, but not quite objectively viewed, journey.

The narrator, Charles Arrowby, is thoroughly self-absorbed and defines his world and his experiences absolutely from his own point of view. Nevertheless, it's possible for the objective and perceptive reader to read between his calculatedly evocative prose to understand the true meaning of many of the events, places, persons and relationships he writes about. His patronizing contempt for Lizzie, for example, can disguise neither her evident vulnerability nor the fact that he has treated her very badly and continues to do so throughout the book. His nearly obsessive focus on what he eats and how he prepares it, and his equally obsessive recounting of the minute details of his swimming routine, suggest that he is determined to think about his life in the way he's decided to think about it. In other words, he needs to be in control of his thoughts, feelings, actions, destiny, and most importantly, of all those aspects of the lives of the people around him. This aspect of his personality defines his actions and attitudes throughout the book, as well as the way in which he writes about them.

Several key symbols are introduced in this section. There is the mirror, the vase, the sea serpent, and the house with its inner room. The meanings of all these symbols are discussed later in this Analysis. The most important symbol in this section, and indeed in the book, is that of the sea itself. References to it are everywhere. Charles seems intensely aware of its many moods, describing them in detail at almost every opportunity. The sea represents Charles' soul, or spirit, its moods, its changes, its eternal presence, and its importance as a source of ultimate truth. The sea serpent emerges from the sea, Charles finds his strength being in the sea, the one character other than Charles who swims frequently (Titus) is in many ways his spiritual soul mate, and several acts of violence take place in and/or around the sea. It's interesting to note that the novel begins with Charles just having arrived at the sea, while it ends with him having left it behind. The Postscript contains almost no references to it at all. It can be understood from this that the novel as a whole is about Charles' journey into the depths of his soul, about his life and self shattering encounters there, and his return to the "real world."

Charles' quote from Shakespeare, as mentioned, is from *The Tempest*, a play about an aged magician in exile on a magical island where he raises his daughter, controls several powerful nature spirits, and plays manipulative tricks on a group of shipwrecked lords who betrayed him in their previous lives. At the conclusion of the play the magician, Prospero, who is as controlling in the play as Charles is in this book, realizes the ultimate folly of acquiring and keeping such control, frees the nature spirits, relinquishes the source of his magical power, and returns to "the real world." Charles here is likening himself to Prospero at that point, clearly seeing himself as a powerful "magician" of the theatre and relinquishing his power in the same way. The irony is that he hasn't relinquished his desire to control at all, an aspect to his character indicated by his increasingly obsessive attempts to control Hartley and his former lovers.

The reality of the book, then, is that Charles is actually Prospero at the BEGINNING of the play, with the action of the book paralleling the action of the play as Charles/Prospero controls and manipulates one last time. Other parallels between book and play include the important role of nature and the sea, the enforced submission of some characters (Lizzie-Gilbert/Ariel), the clownish antics of others (Gilbert-Peregrine/Trinculo), the theme of revenge (Peregrine-Rosina /Prospero), and the relative innocence of children (Miranda/Titus.)

History 1

History 1 Summary

Charles' contented routine of swimming, food and memoir writing is interrupted by the arrival of the over-dressed and subtly made up Gilbert, who begs Charles to leave Lizzie alone. Withstanding Charles' withering contempt, Gilbert explains in pathetic detail how happy he and Lizzie are, how much they both care for him and fear him, and how happy they'd both be if he either joined their household or let them alone to live in peace.

At the height of the argument Lizzie herself appears. Gilbert reminds her that she promised to stay in their car. Charles leads her to a tower on his property, where he repeats his demand, first expressed in his letter, that she leave Gilbert to be with him. At first Lizzie refuses, but then weakens and says she needs time. Charles speaks with increasing contempt to her, and she finally flees, followed by Gilbert. Charles watches them go. In narration, Charles comments that everything about the visit was perfectly predictable, and so is its outcome - he confidently asserts that Lizzie will soon leave Gilbert and come running to him. He goes into Narrowdean to buy some wine to drink with his celebratory dinner.

Night is falling as Charles is returning to Shruff End. At a short distance from the house, he catches sight of a figure in the window. "I could now hear the soft grating sound of the [sea], like a gentle scratching of fingers upon a soft surface." He drops his bottle of wine in shock, gathers his courage and returns to the house, explores it, and finally corners Rosina in one of the back rooms. She speaks with careful, furious formality, confessing that she journeyed from London to haunt him, confessing that she knocked over the vase and broke the mirror. She denies, however, being the face that Charles saw in the window to the inner room. "I suddenly then, as I was staring at her, saw a vision: it was as if her face vanished, became a hole, and through the hole I saw the snake-like head and teeth and pink opening mouth of my sea monster."

As Charles prepares himself dinner, with continuing calm ferocity Rosina tells him she knows of his desire to be with Lizzie. She reminds him of a long ago commitment he made that if he every married anyone he would marry her, and promises to make sure that if he doesn't marry her and does marry Lizzie, or anyone else, she will dedicate herself to spoiling his life. Charles angrily tries to gain the upper hand, telling her firmly that he has no arrangement with Lizzie, and ordering her to leave him alone. Rosina prepares to go, insisting that he tell her he believes her threats. To get her to leave, Charles tells her he believes her. She gets into her car and angrily drives off. As he watches her go, Charles again catches sight of an old woman he's seen occasionally in the village whom he says reminds him of Hartley. With shock, he realizes that the woman IS Hartley.

History 1 Analysis

This section develops the literal and symbolic context for the action to come. Charles' principal ex-lovers appear in person for the first of several times, their presence dramatizing important aspects of Charles' character - his selfishness, manipulativeness, and desire to control. At the same time, the symbolic meanings of the house, the sea serpent, the mirror and the vase are further defined for the first time. Symbolic meaning can also be found in the fact that Charles speaks with Lizzie in a tower, a tower being a traditional phallic symbol or representation of male power.

The characters of Rosina and Lizzie are clearly differentiated, and in the passion of the former and submissiveness in the latter it can be seen what attracted Charles to them both. What one has, the other lacks. It's interesting to note here how different both these women are from the gentle, idealized Hartley and the domineering, needy Clement. The appearances and desires of Rosina and Lizzie foreshadow later developments in the story, Lizzie's eventual return and Rosina's attacks.

History 2

History 2 Summary

Charles describes his shock at seeing Hartley again, and the flurry of thoughts that race through his mind, with whether she's a widow and whether she's happy being the primary ones. Those particular questions haunt his sleep that night and his waking the following morning, leading him to search the town for her. At first, his search is fruitless, and he stops into a church to pray, for the first time since he was a child, that he find Hartley and be allowed to make her happy. Upon emerging into the street, he resumes his search, eventually discovering Hartley in the market. Fear is in her eyes as she recognizes him, encounters him, and follows him at some distance into the church. Their conversation there is awkward, with Charles speaking in eager, spurting questions, and Hartley responding with fearful, trembling half-answers. Charles learns that Hartley is married, and reacts with inner disappointment. Twice his hand brushes Hartley's clothes, and twice she moves away. Several times, she says she has to leave and do her shopping, but doesn't move. Finally, she gets to her feet and runs out, responding to Charles' question about where she lives by describing her home, Nibletts. She asks him to remain behind in the church and not follow her, which he does.

After giving Hartley what he considers enough time to finish her shopping, Charles returns home and tries to calm himself by having a glass of sherry and staring at the sea. He imagines several alternative possibilities for developing a relationship with her, eventually deciding that the first thing he must do is meet her husband, Ben Fitch. To that end he cleans himself up and goes to Nibletts, where he interrupts Hartley and Fitch's evening meal. They bring their food into their front room, where they have an awkward and superficial conversation with Charles. "The sea was shining into the room like an enameled mirror with its own especial clear light. This light excited and upset me, and dazzled me so that now I could scarcely see my surroundings." He discovers that Fitch has a limp, which he says is the result of a war injury, and also learns they have an adopted son, Titus. Feeling increasingly awkward, Charles excuses himself and leaves.

As Charles walks home, he again imagines several possibilities for becoming involved in Hartley's life, including befriending and perhaps mentoring her son. He considers in detail what little he saw of the relationship between Hartley and Fitch, and again (still?) wonders whether they're truly happy, and indeed whether any married couple is truly happy. Arriving back at the house he stares out at the sea. As the sun sets, he suddenly realizes he's looking for the sea monster.

The morning after his visit, Charles goes into the church and waits for Hartley. When she doesn't appear, he goes out into the town looking for her. He spots her, again on the main street, and realizes she's avoiding him. He tracks her down, and convinces her to meet him in the church. Their conversation there is as awkward as their first one, with Hartley tearfully revealing that Titus has run away from home, and Charles eagerly and

confusedly offering to help in some way. He confesses that he wants to be able to love her again, and says he's convinced she wants the same thing. Hartley admits she doesn't know what she wants, tells him to stop calling unexpectedly the way he did the night before, promises to write him, and leaves.

Charles goes back to Shruff End and composes a letter to Lizzie in which he tells her to forget any possibility of continuing their relationship. As he's walking to the post office to put it in the mail, he collects the letters he's received and discovers one from Lizzie in which she agrees to leave Gilbert and be with him. Charles still sends his letter, has dinner in the pub (where he's regarded with suspicion by the locals), and then returns home. From outside he sees Rosina in the kitchen, preparing an intimate dinner for two. Stealthily he collects some blankets and pillows he left outside and goes to the tower, where he camps out for the night. Drowsily he watches the sea and the stars, eventually slipping off into sleep and dreams of a starlit infinity.

The following morning Charles discovers that Rosina has left and that Hartley has not yet written (contrary to his assumption that she would.) He formulates a plan for seeing Hartley in as unthreatening a way as possible and goes by Nibletts with an invitation for her and Fitch to come to tea. He's greeted at the door by Fitch, who is unkempt and unshaven and who refuses to let Charles come any further into the house than the spare bedroom. With an effort Charles keeps his conversation light and chatty, offering his invitation. After reading it, Fitch tells him in no uncertain terms that he and Hartley don't want him in their lives in any way, becoming increasingly angry as he says that if they meet him in the village they'll pass the time of day but there can be nothing more between them. Charles struggles to remain cheerful, refusing to accept both Fitch's refusal and his assertion that Hartley is not at home. Fitch finally shows him the door.

Charles returns to Shruff End as his initial anger at being rebuffed is replaced by different kinds of feelings. He realizes that one of those feelings is a kind of perverse gladness that Fitch is apparently such a bully, believing there's now at least some possibility he can win Hartley away from him.

History 2 Analysis

This section of the book is important for two main reasons. First, it contains several examples of the how Charles seems aware of the presence of the sea at every important moment in his life, and how its moods reflect his mood or the prevailing mood of the situation he's in. As previously discussed, the sea represents Charles' soul, and by including such frequent and detailed and varied descriptions of it, the novelist is cleverly indicating what's going on with Charles even though he, in his self-absorbed way, seems determined to ignore the inner nature that the action of the story is forcing him to face. In other words, his writing reveals what he's trying to conceal. For example, his description of being blinded by the light reflected off the sea suggests that he is blinded by his own love and desire and longing and idealization for Hartley. It's interesting to note here as well that the sea is described as a mirror, an image that has

echoes of the mirror in Charles' home destroyed by Rosina. The fact that this mirror was destroyed foreshadows the eventual destruction of Charles' idealization of Hartley.

The action begins in earnest in this section, the second reason it's so important. It marks the true beginnings of Charles' pursuit of, and obsession with, Hartley. His memories, his determinedly negative perspective on Fitch, and his focus on freeing Hartley from Fitch's control start here and motivate his actions through the remainder of the book. It must be remembered at this point that everything that happens and experienced is recounted in the book from Charles' point of view. This means that to an objective reader it's impossible to accept anything he says at face value - he is an untrustworthy narrator. His view of Fitch, for example, is colored by his obsession with Hartley, while his recollection of Hartley saying she wants to be with him is possibly inaccurate - it may be that this is what he wishes and/or believes her to have said, a justification for his extreme actions that follow.

It's interesting to note that in the first part of the book, meaningful conversations between Charles and Hartley take place only in the church. The symbolic value of this is discussed later in this analysis.

History 3, Part 1

History 3, Part 1 Summary

Charles writes from the relative security and peace of his small flat in London of the events following his encounter with Fitch. He tells how Rosina drove him to London, and they had a polite, superficial chat, during which Charles was thinking of Hartley the whole time. He also tells of searching his flat for photographs of Hartley, which he describes in love-struck detail, and of discovering photographs of his severe mother, gentle father, enviable cousin James, and romantic Aunt Estelle and Uncle Abel. This last photograph he suddenly recalls having stolen from their home. He refers to how cluttered his London apartment is, and for his desire for male company, which leads him to a drunken, gluttonous evening with Peregrine.

As Charles tells it, Peregrine dominates the evening's conversation, talking at drunken length about his hatred for both his former wife (Rosina) and his current wife (Pamela), his hatred for the theatre, his hatred for his job, and his hatred for his home country of Ireland, with which he is still obsessed. When asked by Charles who or what his first love was, Peregrine speaks with loving reminiscence about his Uncle Peregrine, who held him and kissed him and encouraged him, and who was banished from young Peregrine's home by his parents who thought there was something odd about him. He tells how he changed his name to reflect his love, saying his birth name was William, and then asks Charles who his first love was. Charles says he forgets, and prepares to leave. The lonely Peregrine tearfully begs him to stay, and then promises to visit him in Shruff End.

The next day Charles suffers from a hangover, and takes refuge in a favorite art gallery, where he sees several portraits that suggest both Hartley and the other women in his life. His impressions, emotions and hangover get the better of him, he hallucinates another sighting of the sea monster, and runs out of the gallery to get some air. Outside the gallery he encounters his cousin James, who takes him to his apartment crowded with Far Easter memorabilia that is equal parts junk and treasure, including a small ornate casket which Charles jokes contains a demon. As they drink tea, they make superficial small talk about Charles' move to Shruff End, making casual conversation about how Charles has been looking for, and has yet to see, seals.

Charles comments that as always in their conversations, James made him feel defensive and small. Nevertheless, Charles finds himself blurting out a brief version of the situation with Hartley, which James (predictably, in Charles' mind) tells him to leave alone. James does, however, express particular interest when he hears about Titus, but doesn't explain why. He also reveals that he's left his service in the army, but again never explains why. He hurries Charles out the door to catch a train. Charles returns to Shruff End to find it shrouded in fog, very cold and very damp. The sea is flat and unmoving, and Charles spends a very uncomfortable night.

The following morning Charles is surprised by the arrival of Rosina, and by the fact that during their long conversation she doesn't react as badly to the story of Hartley, which he decides to tell her, as she did to the thought of his being with Lizzie. She continually refers to Hartley as an old woman with a beard, apparently quite secure in her own sexiness and beauty. In his narration, Charles reveals that as he told the story he withheld certain details from her, most importantly the existence of Titus, and the angry conversation he (Charles) had with Fitch. Rosina urges Charles to leave Hartley alone, saying he's operating on assumptions that have no real basis in reality. Charles says she doesn't understand, but just as Rosina is about to reply Lizzie appears. Charles barely manages to avert a violent confrontation between the two women, shepherding Lizzie into the inner room. She confesses that she has left Gilbert and has come to surrender herself, but Charles tells her he made a mistake when he wrote his first letter and doesn't want to be with her. Lizzie becomes tearful and pleads with him, but Charles remains firm, not telling her about Hartley. Lizzie leaves weeping, and is shortly followed by Rosina, who reveals that she's staying at the local inn on her way to do some filming. She promises to come back to see him and promises to do nothing to interfere with what happens between him and Hartley, as long as he promises to tell her everything about it. He agrees, and she goes. Shortly afterwards, the fog clears.

History 3, Part 1 Analysis

The beginning of this section marks a shift in narrative style as Charles begins writing from a more distant perspective, telling of of events in the past, as opposed to writing in diary form as events occur. This increases the sense, discussed earlier, that said events are being recorded from a considered and reasoned point of view - he's had time to think about what happened, perhaps change it a little to make a better story, reflect what he believes should or could be happening in his life, or illuminate what he believes those events mean. This is perhaps another manifestation of his desire and intent to control, in that he controls even the interpretations of his life. This perspective isn't consistent - in the latter half of this section, the narrative returns to the diary/journal style of writing. Later in the book, however, when his life becomes more and more OUT of control, he writes from a perspective of even MORE time between the event and writing about it. The more time apart, the more control - or so he thinks. What he learns, and to his credit he ADMITS that he learns it, is that he doesn't have nearly the control he thought he did. Is this why, in the Postscript, he returns to London and seems tempted to return to the life where he did have control?

This possibility is first indicated in this section by the appearance of the box that Charles believes has a demon in it. It shows up only briefly here but plays an important role in the Postscript, when Charles has moved into James' flat and seems obsessed with the demon in the box which eventually gets out. At that point, the "demon" represents Charles' return to the theatre. This means that in its appearance here, the fact that the box is both securely closed and part of a large and muddled collection indicates that Charles' feelings about the theatre are hidden away, a key aspect of the confusion of his life that must, and will, eventually be dealt with.

Charles' examination of the photographs relates to one of the play's key themes, the relationship between the past and the present. Charles is haunted by his relationships with his family - not as much as he's haunted by his past with his lovers and colleagues, but his relationships with his parents, aunt and uncle all play an important role in his wonderings about himself. There is some suggestion in this and other references that Aunt Estelle was the first woman that Charles felt attraction to, that his mother was the repressive influence in his life from whom he acquired his determination to control and his submissive father was the vulnerable, thoughtful man, whom Charles simultaneously reveres and determines he will never be like. The irony, of course, is that dominated is exactly how he ends up - dominated by his false ideas of Hartley.

Yet another key symbol appears in this section, that of the seals. Charles hopes throughout the book to see them, only actually encountering some in his final moments at Shruff End at the end of the book. They represent to him an ideal of nature and of the sea, playful and completely at home, living life where they belong. On one level this is how he sees himself at Shruff End, an illusion similar to the illusion he has about Hartley. On another level, it's significant that Titus, whom Charles eventually treats as a son, described in words and terms that would also be appropriate in describing seals. This suggests that Titus is a source of pure, natural joy.

History 3, Part 2

History 3, Part 2 Summary

In the afternoon of the day of Rosina's visit, Charles sneaks his way into the garden at Niblett's and overhears a violent conversation between Hartley and Fitch, in which he is verbally and physically violent, and she is tearful and apologetic. He accuses her of planning to reunite with Charles behind his back and of lying to him their entire marriage. Their conversation contains passing and mysterious references to other lies in their past, to their having come to Narrowdean to make a new start, and to something not quite right about the appearance of Titus in their family. Fitch says at the conclusion of their argument that he's not going to end the relationship in the way he thinks she wants, but he's going to force her to stay in the marriage and take care of him.

Charles runs home, sent into a shocked panic by having had all his suspicious hopes, or hopeful suspicions, about their marriage confirmed. He eventually calms down, and formulates a plan for getting Hartley out of her marriage. He writes her a long letter confessing his love and revealing his intention to take her away and indeed to take care of her for the rest of her life. Narration reveals that Charles is writing with the unsent letter in front of him, attempting to convince himself that he's trying to think of a safe way to deliver it but eventually admitting he's frightened of his plan going wrong. Later that day, however, he puts that plan into action. He watches Nibletts for a long time, finally sees that Fitch is out of the house, races to the front door, and knocks with a secret knock he and Hartley used when they were children. Hartley answers the door, and he thrusts the letter into her hands and runs back to Shruff End.

That night, Charles' mind whirls with possibilities - has Fitch read the letter? Did Hartley burn it unopened? "The house was still acting up, but I felt by now that I was getting to know its oddities ... it was not exactly a sinister or menacing effect, but as if the house ... intermittently registered things which had happened in the past - or ... were going to happen in the future." When there's an insistent knock on the door, he imagines fearfully that Fitch has come to confront him, but when he opens it he discovers a frantic Hartley. He pulls her into his arms, speaks lovingly to her, kisses her, fleetingly caresses her breasts, and then ushers her into the kitchen. He speaks incoherently about how much he loves her, about his plans to take her away, and about his certainty that they should discuss their past in detail so they can finally put it all to rest. Hartley says she's only got a very short time to visit since Fitch is attending one of the night classes he habitually signs up for. She then, with incoherence equal to Charles', explains that why she left him, why she married Fitch, mentions in passing that he still has his revolver from his days in the army, and finally explains why she's so unhappy. She reveals that Fitch is intensely jealous, that he thinks she and Charles have been seeing each other the entire time they've been married, and that he thinks she got pregnant by Charles and that Titus is Charles' son. She also tells him that Titus, who had often heard his parents arguing, used to taunt Fitch by saying he really was Charles' son, and that he wanted to

live with him. Finally, she tells him that Fitch used to beat Titus, part of the reason Titus ran away from home.

Charles becomes increasingly angry at what he perceives as Fitch's brutality, urging her again and again to leave the marriage. Hartley suddenly realizes that Charles has been lying to her about how late it is and tries to leave. Charles tries to restrain her, they struggle physically and violently, and Hartley manages to run away. Charles, fearful that she might have stumbled on the rocks by the sea and hurt herself, goes searching for her. When he can't find her he rushes to Nibletts, and finds out from a bewildered Fitch that she's not there. Charles invents a story to explain how he and Hartley saw each other and Fitch goes in search of a flashlight. While he's waiting for Fitch to return, Charles sees Hartley coming, runs to her, and tells her the story he told Fitch. Hartley then goes into the house, and Charles resists the temptation to follow her in and protect her from what he assumes will be Fitch's violent reaction. He goes home, and discovers that the candles he lit during his conversation with Hartley have burned long dark marks into the table "which remained there ever after to remind [him] of that terrible night."

History 3, Part 2 Analysis

This section is filled with violence, emotional and physical - Fitch's anger at Hartley, Charles' anger at Fitch, Hartley's anger at Charles, Fitch's anger at Titus, and the confrontation between Hartley and Charles, as she tries to leave Shruff End. It also includes the violence of Charles' feelings, his fear and anger and desperation. It even includes the violence of the candle flame, which has left scars on the table in the same way that the violence in the rest of the section, in the past, the present and the future (as represented by Fitch's revolver) has left scars. This idea of scars develops the theme of the relationship between past and present even further. The past between Hartley and Fitch haunts the present in the same way as the past between Hartley and Charles, with the small detail of the secret knock on the door providing a poignant example of just how closely Charles has held the memory of their youthful relationship to his soul.

The symbolic value of the house is defined further in this section, as it becomes not just a place where Charles lives but also an atmosphere, a source of feeling and/or foreboding in and of itself. This indicates its value as representing the unknown qualities of the present in which Charles finds himself, the potential for violence key among them.

Hartley's essential character and personality are never as clear as they are in this scene, both in terms of who she actually is and how Charles sees her. It's clear from her story of her marriage, and also from reading between the lines of Charles' admittedly idealized descriptions of her, that she's indecisive, uncomfortable with strong feelings, inarticulate, lonely, and very passive. What's interesting to note is how Charles' memories and obsessions transform what comes across as weakness into gentility, grace, lovingness and supportiveness, both in terms of who she was in the past, and who she is in the present. He sees her as he is determined to see her, controlling who she is to him, refusing to see the truth of who she is both when it's right in front of him

and when it's pointed out to him by nearly all the other characters. In other words, it's very possible that events such as their kiss in the hall and later events, such as Hartley kissing his hand are in fact inventions, or at least alterings of reality to reflect what he wants and needs it to be in order to justify his actions.

History 4, Part 1

History 4, Part 1 Summary

In narration, Charles comments that he's writing about the events that happened some time previously. In other words, he's no longer writing a diary but a memoir, which means (as he says) that everything is much more reflected upon and considered. He recounts how the first few days after the visit with Hartley he was distracted from thinking and worrying too much by the arrival of Gilbert. Gilbert tells him Lizzie has left him, that he doesn't know where he is, and that he's come to see if he can be any sort of use to Charles, as a sort of servant. Charles accepts the offer, and for a few days they settle into what is superficially a very comfortable living arrangement, but is in fact a distraction for Charles from his worries about Hartley. Another distraction is provided by the arrival of a young man, who proves to be Hartley's son Titus, who has left the university he was attending and has come in search of Charles (whom he knows from newspaper reports) to ask whether he is in fact his father and whether he can help get him into the acting business. Charles tells him he's not his father, promises to help him, feeds him well, and takes him swimming. All the while, he is formulating a plan to use him to trap Hartley into leaving her husband.

The following morning, after calculatedly manipulating Titus into trusting him a little and opening himself up, Charles tells him he wants to bring Hartley to see him. Titus immediately and accurately assumes that Charles means to use him as bait, but Charles softens the negativity of that perception by admitting that he wants them to be a kind of family together, the kind of family that none of them ever really had and all of them want. Titus grudgingly agrees, and Charles puts his plan into action. Using a trick from their childhood, involving sunlight reflected off a mirror, Charles gets Hartley's attention and lures her away from Nibletts and into a wooded area, where she allows herself to be embraced and lovingly kisses Charles' hand. He tells her Titus is at Shruff End, convinces her to see him, and leads her to where Gilbert is waiting with his car. He takes them to Shruff End, and Charles watches as Hartley and Titus are reunited. He becomes frustrated when the emotions between the two of them don't seem as warm as he'd hoped they'd be, but is almost grateful when they shut themselves into the inner room and have a long talk. He sends Gilbert to the pub, telling him to wait there for further instructions.

Much later that night, Titus and Hartley finally come out of the inner room. Hartley insists it's time for her to leave, but Charles tells her he's brought her there with the intention of keeping her there. Titus begins to protest that Charles can't arbitrarily end someone else's marriage like that, but Charles convinces him that the marriage needed to end. Titus admits to grudgingly admiring Charles for his determination, and goes out to swim. Hartley is at first angry and upset at what Charles has done, but then becomes almost unnaturally calm and resigned, telling Charles that sometimes things must simply be allowed to happen and adding that he has no idea just how much worse he has made things. At first, he's alarmed by how strange she seems, but then convinces himself that

she has in fact accepted the inevitability of his love. He leads her to the inner room, where he had prepared a bed for her. They lie down together, and he recalls how they used to lie together in the grass when they were much younger. He begins to initiate lovemaking, but she insists that all she wants is to sleep, and he allows her to go to bed. She lies down in her clothes and completely covers herself with a blanket. Charles himself goes to bed and falls asleep immediately.

History 4, Part 1 Analysis

Aside from returning to the more considered, memoir-ish style of writing, this section is chiefly notable for the appearance of Titus, who plays an important role both dramatically and symbolically in the book. Dramatically, he's a catalyst for much of the action, serving as he himself describes as bait for Hartley and as a focus for Charles' dreams and intentions about building a new life. He also catalyzes realizations for Charles about his desire to be a father, if not a biological one then a spiritual one. There is some question, never fully explored in the book, as to whether Charles truly wants this or whether the idea is yet another rationalization for what he does to gain control of Hartley. Other characters, particularly James, make brief comments and/or observations to that effect, but neither Charles nor Titus spend a great deal of time analyzing that aspect of their relationship. Instead they find real joy in each other, particularly in their shared pleasure at being in the water. It's in this section that language is used that likens Titus to a seal, not in direct terms but in ways that imply he shares similar characteristics, particularly playfulness.

It's possible to see at this point what both Titus and seals represent, both to Charles and the book - pure joy, naturalness, and self-ease. It's significant in this context that on land Titus is troubled by his family and his unresolved future, but in the sea all of that slips away. This in turn adds a layer of meaning to the symbol of the sea, suggesting that it's possible to find joy in one's soul if one abandons oneself to it in the way Titus abandons himself to the sea. Meanwhile, the image of Titus' freedom and joy is vividly contrasted with images of Hartley's captivity and misery, developed further in the following section of the book. These sections mark the high points of Charles' obsession with her, his self-delusion and the development of the house/inner room symbolism.

History 4, Part 2

History 4, Part 2 Summary

The next morning, Charles discovers that Titus and Gilbert are getting along in a way he finds uncomfortable, and sends Gilbert to keep an eye out for Fitch and alert him when he's coming. He also discovers that Hartley is almost catatonic with fear and tension, seeing her actual physical age for the first time and becoming alarmed when she refuses breakfast, repeating over and over that she wants to go home. He decides that leaving her alone is the best option, and goes out to keep an eye on Titus, who has been swimming nude in the sea. Charles waits impatiently for him, and then when he comes out and is drying and clothing himself, says again that he wants Titus to consider himself his son. Titus is at first resentful at the way he believes Charles has used him, but eventually admits he's flattered and gratified by Charles' attention. Their conversation is interrupted by a warning from Gilbert, meaning that Fitch is on his way. Titus reacts with apparent fear, gratifying Charles as he crosses the rocks to confront his father.

Fitch demands that Hartley (whom he calls Mary) be allowed to return home, accusing Charles of kidnapping her. Charles insists that she's there of her own free will, and when Fitch becomes insistent, imagines throwing him off the rocks and killing him. Fitch seems to understand this thought, backs off, and turns to go home, confessing that he'd hoped "Mary" would be pleased at the dog he brought home for her. Charles watches as Fitch leaves his property, and reacts with pleasure when he sees Titus turn his back on his adoptive father. He (Charles) then goes in to see Hartley, who has become even more catatonic, mumbling over and over that she wants to go home and that she wants to die. Charles becomes angry as he insists that he's offering her freedom, but Hartley just says again she believes she's going to die. Charles leaves her alone.

Hartley's attitude continues for what Charles describes as a period of four or five days, during which she has a few very awkward conversations with Titus, eats practically nothing, and sleeps a great deal. Charles recounts how he spends a great deal of time looking after her and worrying about her, resenting the fun Titus and Gilbert seem to be having with each other, and worrying about what Fitch will do. He tells of a few moments in which Hartley becomes coherent, and it's during one of those moments in which they have a long conversation about their past relationship, about Charles' plans for their future (which he defines as the two of them and Titus forming a new family), and Hartley's repeated comments that his plans are pointless.

At one point, she tearfully comments that she would have liked to be at home when Fitch returned with the dog he bought, and Charles becomes impatiently angry with her, telling her he overheard the violent conversation between her and Fitch. Hartley reacts with sudden, extreme, horror at what she sees as a violation of her privacy, and collapses into shrieking hysterical tears. Charles panics at the thought of those tears being overheard and also at the thought that he doesn't know what to do about them,

but Hartley calms down before he can do anything. When she's able to listen he promises to take her away, she tells him that leaving her home would kill her, he tells her that the miracle of love has come to rescue them all, and she says that what he's doing is neither a miracle nor love - that what he's really doing is murder. She then says she's very tired, and Charles leaves her. When he goes to bed he has several bad dreams, and upon waking in the middle of the night finds he can't go back to sleep. He checks on Hartley and finds she's all right. Then, as he wanders through the house, he realizes that the only way he could have seen someone's face in the window to the inner room was if that face was the reflection of someone outside looking in. He imagines that it was Hartley, and then realizes with fear that he has lost control over all the lives he has been attempting to manipulate.

Charles loses even more control when, the following day, Rosina is the first of several visitors. She playfully sings along with Titus and Gilbert in the kitchen, and taunts Gilbert mercilessly about what he's doing with Hartley. Charles finally manages to get her out of the house, where she angrily turns on him, telling him that when they were together he made her pregnant, and she aborted the baby. She begins to cry as she tells him she'd been tormented for years by both the thought of what she did, and the fact that he forced her to do it alone (he'd by that point left her for Lizzie.) She threatens to go to Fitch and comfort him, and drives off.

Charles spends the next few days becoming increasingly apprehensive about Fitch, fending off suggestions by the increasingly angry Titus and the increasingly fearful Gilbert that he do something. He also has several conversations with Hartley, whom he locks in the inner room for what he says is her own safety. Their conversations go over and over the same material. He loves her and wants to take her away, she only wants to return home. This interlude is interrupted by the arrival of two more visitors, both within a few minutes of each other. James and Peregrine arrive, both saying that they invited by him to visit. Charles tries to get rid of them both, but they both end up staying. The house becomes very crowded as the five men (Charles, Titus, Gilbert, James and Peregrine) jostle each other in their efforts to find places to sleep, eat, swim, and think. James and Peregrine eventually become completely aware of the situation, joining forces with Gilbert and Titus in an effort to convince Charles to let Hartley go home. He becomes increasingly angry as he argues with them that his plan to free her from Fitch is not only absolutely just, it is inevitable. Just as the argument is peaking, Hartley is heard kicking at her door and shrieking to be let out. This triggers Charles to realize that the others are right, and that Hartley must be allowed to leave. He writes a terse letter of apology to Fitch, in which he insists that Hartley has done nothing wrong and that nothing physically inappropriate has happened between them. The letter is delivered by Gilbert, and plans are made for all five men to accompany Hartley on her return to Nibletts.

History 4, Part 2 Analysis

The full symbolic value of the inner room becomes clear in this scene, with Hartley being physically trapped in Charles' home in the same way as he has trapped her

spiritually in his memory. Both manifestations of her captivity reach their climax in her kicking at the door and screaming to be let out. Physically, she is desperate to be let out of her prison. Spiritually, she is desperate to be freed from Charles' image of her. The fact that he's finally prevailed upon to take her home has no real meaning. His obsession continues, as the rest of the book dramatizes.

An intriguing moment in this section, and the book, is Hartley's screamingly hysterical reaction to hearing that Charles has been, in effect, spying on her and Fitch. It's clear she sees this as a betrayal, as an invasion of the life she has built for herself and a perhaps fatally destructive act that threatens to tear apart the fragile belief system that has made her life bearable. The question is why this is the highest point of emotion for her in the entire book. Why is this action of Charles the one that causes her the most pain? Perhaps it awakens in her the fearful belief that there is absolutely no-one left in her life that she can trust, or perhaps she feels afraid that now someone knows how awful her life is she'll have to face it herself. If that's the case, then her journey at this point can be seen as being parallel to Charles'. Both are being forced to face truths then would rather not confront, which if true would mean that the end of their journeys is also parallel. Both turn to lives and to worlds in which its possible to continue to ignore that truth - Hartley moves with Fitch to Australia and Charles, it seems, returns to life in the theatre.

The exact identity of the face at the window, first scene in the Prehistory and recalled by Charles here, is never revealed. What is revealed is the face's symbolic meaning. Whether it was Hartley or not, the face in the window represents Charles' own desire to look deeply into his inner self (the inner room.) He doesn't want to do it - or, perhaps more accurately, he doesn't know he WANTS to do it. Something in him is driving him to this confrontation with his soul, a confrontation foreshadowed by the appearance of the face in the Prehistory and his realization of at least one aspect of its nature here.

Rosina's story about having to give up a child functions on several levels, firstly as a comment on Charles' desire to see Titus as a son - the suggestion of the story is that on some intuitive level he knows he fathered a lost child and wants to replace it. It's no coincidence that Charles' desire to father Titus increases after this encounter. On another level, Rosina's story functions as a point of comparison with Hartley - both have, in their own ways destroyed a child, both have been traumatized by their experience, and both have, in their own ways, made attempts to go on. Rosina's attempt is her career, Hartley's attempt is her obsession with rebuilding her marriage, manifesting as her move to Australia.

The appearance of all the male figures in Charles' life, in a story dominated by female influences, is particularly significant here. There are exceptions (the feminine Gilbert and the androgynous Titus), but for the most part the male figures in the story are beyond Charles' means of control - Fitch, James, Peregrine, even his father. They represent the necessity for Charles to submit, to let go of his desire to control both this particular situation with Hartley and in his life in general. This symbolic aspect to their presence in Charles' story plays out later in the action, as Fitch controls Hartley's move to Australia, James continues to espouse the Buddhist philosophy of submission,

Peregrine attempts to control the end of Charles' life, and Charles' recollections of his family focus on his father's relative contentment in his role as submissive to his wife.

History 5

History 5 Summary

The next morning, Charles dresses Hartley in an overcoat and scarf and leads her down to Peregrine's car. As everyone (Charles, Hartley, James, Gilbert, Peregrine and Titus) is climbing into Peregrine's too-small car, Gilbert quietly tells Charles that when he dropped off the letter he heard Fitch talking with a woman. Charles tells him he probably just heard the television, and they climb into the car. Their trip to Nibletts is interrupted by Rosina, perched on top of a crag and hurling rocks at them. Her target is apparently Peregrine (her ex-husband), who loses his temper and throws rocks back at her. James eventually pulls him back into their car, and the journey is resumed, with Charles wondering whether the woman Gilbert heard was Rosina, following through on her threat to "comfort" Fitch. When they arrive at Nibletts, Hartley quickly slips out of the clothes given her by Charles, and walks with him to the front door. Charles knocks, the new dog barks angrily, Fitch opens the door, and Hartley races past him without a word and locks herself in her bedroom. Three brief conversations follow, in which Fitch speaks dismissively to Titus, Fitch and James recognize each other from their days in the army, and Fitch threatens to kill Charles if he comes around the house again. Charles and the others leave, with Titus getting out half way and walking, because he feels sick and needs some air.

Back at Shruff End, the rest of the day is quiet. Charles convinces James, Peregrine and Gilbert to leave the following day. Peregrine spends the day in the sun, and nursing a blinding headache, Gilbert stocks Charles' pantry, and as they sit by the seashore, James tries to convince Charles that his intentions to "rescue" Hartley were delusions resulting from an old dream, a past that must be let go. Charles responds by telling him the past is the only part of his life with any meaning, and reveals his intention to stay at Shruff End, "at his post" as he calls it, waiting for Hartley so he can fulfill his duty of making her happy. James leaves him alone, and he wanders through the rocks, finally coming to rest in a private little cove where he sits and contemplates the sea. His thoughts are interrupted by the unexpected arrival of Lizzie, whom Charles greets happily and who slips and falls into the sea. She's uninjured but soaked, so Charles takes her to the house to dry off. She's introduced to James and Titus, re-introduced to Peregrine, and reunited with Gilbert, who has apparently written her a letter telling her everything.

Charles is interrupted twice by tradesmen, forcing him to leave the others in the kitchen, where he later hears them singing a years-old popular song. The singing continues into the evening, accompanied by considerable drinking and thoughtful wanderings around the garden and on the rocks. At one point, Lizzie and Charles have a drunkenly heartfelt conversation about Hartley, argue gently over how love should be expressed, and make commitments to love each other freely and unconditionally. Later, as night falls, Charles is strolling precariously across the rocks bordering the sea when someone pushes him into the water.

Charles recounts in poetic detail the horror of falling into the sea and losing consciousness. He then recalls fragments of how he was rescued - receiving mouth to mouth resuscitation from James, and being carried across the rocks by his arguing, frightened friends, returned to the house, examined by a cranky doctor, and put to bed in front of a fire. He also tells how he felt an urgent need to record an important thought, struggled to write it down, hid the note very carefully, and woke up the following morning without recalling where he hid it. The one detail missing, which no-one else can supply, is an explanation of how he got out of the water. The following day all the visitors announce their intention to stay, James sleeps off his exhaustion, and Charles broods over what happened. He becomes convinced it was Fitch who pushed him, that he must try to get Hartley completely alone (because the presence of the others confused and frightened her), and that it might not in fact be necessary for his plan for lifelong peace and love with her to have Titus as a permanent fixture in their lives.

Titus guides Charles to the seashore where they have a quiet conversation. "The sea ... was in a quietly dangerously violent mood ..." as Charles begins his conversation with the intention of telling Titus about Fitch. Titus, however, chooses to talk about their relationship, thanking Charles for everything he's done and expressing the confused hope that Charles might be able to help him in the future, but proclaiming his desire to do things on his own and not define their relationship in any particular way just yet. He also says that Charles should have left Fitch and Hartley alone, talking about how marriage belongs to the people within it and should never be interfered with by outsiders. When Charles finally gets around to revealing his suspicions about Fitch, Titus is strangely and quietly dismissive, saying Charles might have imagined everything. Charles is too weary to pursue the matter and tries to go back to the house alone, but Titus insists upon helping him. They walk back to Shruff End, both commenting that there's time for them to define their relationship comfortably.

That evening, Charles writes another letter to Hartley, telling her of his revised plan to take her away from Fitch and also telling her of his belief that he tried to kill him, adding the (invented) detail that there was a witness. In the midst of internal debates about the best way to deliver the letter, he has a philosophical conversation with the still resting James that touches on the natures of death, faith, and heaven. James refers to a Buddhist belief in "bardo," a kind of resting spot for souls recently died unable to completely transition from worldly life to fully spiritual life. Their conversation is interrupted by screams from Lizzie. Charles runs outside to discover Lizzie, Gilbert, Peregrine and a crowd of tourists gathered around the body of Titus, who has apparently drowned. Efforts to revive him fail, and Charles writes in short, unemotional sentences of how the police told Hartley and Fitch of his death, how an inquest confirmed that Titus died from a blow on the head from a rock which caused him to drown, and that his body was cremated. He also writes, almost in passing, of his belief that Titus was murdered.

History 5 Analysis

There is a great deal of plot in this section. This is a marked contrast to much of the rest of the book, which has a definitely more thoughtful, reflective and philosophical tone. With Hartley's return home, Rosina's attack, Lizzie's visit, the attempt on Charles' life and the death of Titus, it seems as though Charles is being given the message that any control he might have had over his life is completely gone. In fact, it's being systematically destroyed. In particular, the attempt on his life marks an important turning point in the book. He's not aware of it, but this is the low point of his story - everything is falling apart, and the rest of the book is focused on his struggles to put it all back together, to regain control and live the life the way he's determined to live it.

The message about lack of control given by all these events is given in increasingly violent form, as though whoever is giving Charles the message has decided that the only way to get through to him is hit him over the head with the fact that control is an illusion. The violence in History 3, Part 2 is nothing compared to the violence here, which results in near-physical and near-emotional death experiences for Charles, and an actual death for Titus. This last death is particularly significant, given Titus' symbolic value as a representation of joy. His death symbolizes the death of Charles' hopes for joy in life with Hartley. He doesn't realize it, continuing to fight as he does for what he still believes is possible. He doesn't know that in the moment Hartley returns home, he has lost her forever.

The conversation with James about "bardo" carries a significant resonance with the situation in which Charles and the others find themselves. Lizzie, Gilbert, Peregrine, Titus, Charles and even Hartley are all wandering through Shruff End in a bardo-esque kind of limbo, waiting for some indication as to the next direction in which their life is to go. Even James can be seen as being in a similar situation, if this section is examined within the context of his eventual death and what is learned of his spiritual life. In the implication at the end of the book that James literally thought himself to death, and in Charles' relatively frequent comments that James seemed to be making unusual efforts to connect with him, there is the hint that James is looking for if not preparing for a new life to begin. Shruff End in this context becomes a bardo for him as well, a place from which he can make his transition.

History 6

History 6 Summary

Charles writes that in the days after Titus' death, everyone in the house (Charles, James, Peregrine, Lizzie and Gilbert) is in a kind of daze. Gilbert goes back to London to act in a television play, Lizzie takes over the cooking, Peregrine drinks heavily, James spends much time looking out at the sea, and Charles continues to brood on the Hartley/Fitch situation, coming to the obsessive conclusion that Fitch killed Titus. Another seaside conversation with James brings out Charles' long simmering resentment and hostility towards him as James tells him again to leave Hartley alone, insists that Fitch did not try to kill him, and says he sees plans for revenge in Charles' eyes. Charles calls what he sees "sea serpents," and persists in his belief that Fitch tried to kill him. Finally James takes him into the house, where Peregrine confesses that HE tried to kill Charles in a spirit of long-simmering revenge and anger over how Charles took Rosina from him. Peregrine speaks at venomous length about how much he dislikes Charles, refers to him as a withered powerless Prospero, and viciously describes him as talent-less, saying he would have been nothing if he hadn't been supported by Clement. He then leaves, raising a cloud of angry dust in his car as he pulls out of the driveway.

Over the next few days Charles and Lizzie go for long, mostly silent walks together, and James spends even more time looking out at the sea. Charles also receives word from Rosina that she's been offered a good part in a good film. Charles speaks to her with angry contempt and dismisses her. He continues to refine his plans to remove Hartley from her home, but never to the point of deciding exactly what his next action should be. He does, however decide to ask James and Lizzie to leave. He's about to do so when they confront him with the revelation that they've known each other for years - not romantically, which is what Charles angrily and insistently assumes, but as acquaintances with a common interest in learning from the other what Charles is up to. As Charles becomes increasingly, but quietly, angry, Lizzie becomes tearful, and James becomes puzzled and then angry. Finally, Charles insists that they both leave immediately, going out to James' car and opening the doors for them while they hurriedly pack. While he's waiting, he discovers that a letter has been delivered from Hartley. He puts it in his pocket unopened as James and Lizzie come out. He tells them he never wants to see or hear from either of them again, referring to their long-secret relationship as a betrayal from which he can and will never recover. They get in the car and drive off.

Charles wanders about the house quietly rejoicing in its empty quietness, putting off reading the letter as long as he can and enjoying the comfort it offers in the face of his concerns about what happened with Lizzie and James. He can finally stand the suspense no longer, opens it, reads it, and learns he's been invited to tea the following day. The letter is signed "Mary Fitch." After obsessing about what it means and finally deciding that he has to be ready in case Hartley has decided to leave Fitch once and for

all, Charles makes preparations to run away with her, tidying the house and then arranging for a taxi to wait for them at the church and packing a suitcase. While he's tidying, he discovers the letter he wrote earlier (before Peregrine's attempt on his life and Titus' death.) He removes the pages referring to his suspicions of Fitch and puts the remaining pages into an envelope, resolving to give it to her at tea. He spends a few moments at the church in hopeful prayer, or perhaps prayerful hope, before he goes up to Nibletts. He finds both Fitch and Hartley looking well and healthy, and makes a great deal of empty small talk while his mind continues to swirl with ideas and hopes. The swirl stops when Fitch comments on their impending move to Australia, and Charles realizes they've been planning to make the move for weeks. It can be inferred here that this is the reason Hartley was so insistent on going home - she didn't want to disrupt their plans to leave. Charles soon leaves the house, having thrust the letter into Hartley's hands at the last minute, and spends the following few evenings getting drunk.

In a series of drunken hazes, Charles recalls incidents from his past (including Clement telling him to let go of his memories of Hartley), obsesses about getting Hartley free of Fitch, examines everyone's roles in Titus' death, and wonders whether Rosina actually did go see Fitch as she threatened. He decides to see whether she's still staying at the local hotel, goes to find out, and is shocked to discover that Peregrine and Rosina have reunited, and that Rosina has given up the previously mentioned important film role in order to remarry Peregrine and move with him to Ireland, where they plan to start a theatre company. After a cheerfully malicious evening of drinking champagne, Rosina sees Charles to the door. He finally has the opportunity to ask whether she visited Fitch. She confesses that she did, refuses to tell him what they talked about, and tauntingly tells him she found Fitch quite attractive. This leads Charles to have the horrible thought that Hartley married Fitch and chose to stay with him,, because she found him sexually attractive. He and Rosina make their farewells, and Charles returns to Shruff End.

Charles abandons himself again to a series of self-torturing contemplations of the Hartley situation, decides that he needs something to defend himself from Fitch, and searches the house for something to use as a weapon. He finds the disconnected head and handle of a hammer and is puzzling about how to put them back together when James arrives unexpectedly. They have a long, drunken, philosophical conversation in which James tells a story of his journey up a wintry mountain in Tibet with a guide of whom he was very fond, of a spiritual, mind-over-matter technique of keeping warm he (James) tried to practice and which failed, resulting in the guide's death. As Charles becomes increasingly more drunk, James likens the relationship between him and the guide to almost a father/son relationship. Charles doesn't hear the conclusion of his story - he passes out. The following morning he rouses himself just in time to wave farewell to the departing James, and then suddenly falls victim to a flu bug which leaves him flat on his back for several days. Just as he's recovering, he receives a phone call from Lizzie, who invites him to join her at the hotel for drinks.

Charles makes himself presentable, goes to the hotel, and is surprised to find Gilbert there as well. Charles learns that the two of them have set up house together again, that they're both very happy, that Lizzie has finally chosen to move away from her obsessive feelings of love for him, and that they both intend to continue having him in

their lives, but only as a kind of uncle figure. He resolves to accept this situation, and they part happily. He then finds himself irresistibly drawn to Nibletts, and discovers from a neighbor that Hartley and Fitch have left for Australia. He realizes they lied about their departure date, and then breaks into the house to find if Hartley left anything behind. He discovers the last letter he gave her, hidden and unopened, tears it up, and flushes it down the toilet. As he returns home he encounters a former chauffeur, whom he recalls with distaste but who remembers him with fondness. The chauffeur, who's staying with family nearby, tells Charles he was a great help in inspiring and establishing his career as an actor, and thanks him effusively. Charles excuses himself politely, and returns to the house. He finds himself unable to eat and lies down to try to sleep, but instead his mind fills with tortured remorse about how he failed Titus, vague plans to travel to Australia in search of Hartley, and the desperate belief that Hartley left the letter for him to find as a sign she wanted him to do so.

That night, Charles is again restless, and wakes the following morning to several discoveries in the mail that make him even more so. These include a letter from Lizzie, again pleading for love to exist between them, a letter from a once happily married friend, who reveals that she's getting a divorce, and a letter from Peregrine's step-daughter, who overheard his conversation with Peregrine in London, and who offers herself to him as a mistress and potential wife. He leaves several other letters unopened and burns the ones from the women. Over the course of the day his appetite returns, and he goes for a swim for the first time in several days, reminding himself him of his bond with the sea and his own personal vigor. That night he has a half-drunk, half-drowsy encounter with two important memories involving the night he almost drowned. He recalls seeing the sea serpent near him when he was underwater, and then the rediscovery of the hidden note leads him to remember being lifted out of the water by James, who accomplished the feat with what seems like supernatural ease. Charles is suddenly filled with compassion, understanding, affection and respect for James, and attempts to call him to make plans to visit him in London. There's no answer, and Charles prepares for bed, discovering as he does that one of the unopened letters is from an Asian doctor, writing to tell him that James has died and for no apparent physical reason. The doctor claims, however, there are some enlightened souls, who are able to control their spirits to the point where they can engineer their own deaths, in effect deciding when it's time to leave the physical plane and move on to the spiritual. He says he's convinced this is how James died, and urges Charles to contact him if he wants to discuss what happened any further.

It's a beautiful warm night, and Charles decides to sleep outside. Sleep eludes him for a while as he imagines meaning behind James' death and his final visit, which he eventually decides involved an attempt by James to end their relationship on peaceful terms. Charles is finally able to go to sleep, looks deeply into the canopy of stars above him, and goes to sleep. The following morning he wakes up, and is making his bed when he's startled by a strange sound coming from the sea. He investigates, and discovers that something he's been searching for ever since he arrived at Shruff End has finally appeared. Four seals have come to visit.

History 6 Analysis

The essential purpose of this section is to dramatize the way in which Charles has lost complete control over that which he believed he could control completely. Lizzie, Gilbert and Rosina all indicate their complete refusal to be dominated by him through their decisive choices to live in a way he rejects. Hartley and Fitch resume their lives as though everything that Charles' did with the conscious or unconscious desire to ruin their marriage never happened. His relationship with James, which he had always defined and compartmentalized, is forced to change by both the revelation that James and Lizzie have been acquaintances for years, an act that's as infuriating as it is, because he realizes that the control he thought he had, over Lizzie's life and over James' role in his life, was a complete falsehood. Finally, he realizes he can't even control the circumstances of his own near-death when his obsessive belief that he was pushed by Fitch is destroyed by Peregrine's confession (which also contains the revelation that the touching story he told about his Uncle Peregrine was in fact a fabrication.)

The encounter with his former chauffeur raises an interesting point in relation to Charles' desire for control. This has to do with the question of perception, and specifically how Charles perceives his past. The meeting with the chauffeur, in which both men have very different recollections of their previous relationship, is yet another example of how Charles is essentially uninterested in any view of life but his own. In their time together he perceived the chauffeur as being resentful, and had no faith whatsoever in any other possibility. In other words, he controlled his relationship with the world by controlling the way he perceived and remembered the world. The chauffeur proves that his lack of control extends even into that area of his life, illustrating yet again how much of an illusion control is.

There are several small, but nonetheless telling references here. These include Charles' reference to what James sees in his eyes as "sea serpents," a particular choice of phrase that Charles must make deliberately, given that he's just had an experience with a sea serpent and has a particular idea of what the image means. He seems to be suggesting that the sea serpent, the one he experienced and the one James sees in his eyes, is a manifestation of hate and destruction. In terms of the symbolic language of the book, it's certainly the latter, much less so the former - the sea serpent represents the ultimate destruction of Charles' belief systems about himself, and is much less the agent of destruction of other life (i.e. Fitch's) that Charles seems to think it is.

Another telling references is Peregrine's comment that Charles is a withered Prospero, an image that suggests Charles is nothing without his magic/control and which is reinforced at the end of the book by the hints that Charles is about to return to the theatre where he has all the control he wants. Yet another is the passing reference to Charles having a taxi waiting at the church, which is where he and Hartley had their most honest, heartfelt conversations. This represents the idea that Charles believes Hartley running away with him will be the most honest, heartfelt moment in both their lives. Yet another key reference can be found in James' story about the trip to the

mountains and his dead companion, which can be seen as a parallel to the story of Charles and Titus. Charles tried to take Titus along on his spiritual journey, but failed to protect him in the same way as James failed his guide. Here also are two surrogate father-son relationships that ultimately, and tragically, fail.

The sea-monster makes its final, symbolism-loaded appearance in this section, representing the fact that Charles' near-death experience, as triggered by Peregrine's jealous rage, is the highest (deepest?) point of his confrontation with his own malicious, evil nature. Its appearance is contrasted with Charles' discovery of the note, which represents the highest point of his encounter with a more positive, spiritual nature. It's interesting to note that both aspects of his experience are dismissed in the Postscript as being figments of Charles' imagination, the first steps along the road to returning to the life he thought he left behind.

Finally there are the seals, making their long foreshadowed and long awaited (at least by Charles) appearance. Their appearance at the end of this section marks the climax of Charles' journey, the encounter with true pure simple joy he claimed at the beginning that he'd been seeking. This is the true joy that had been overwhelmed by his illusory joy and defiant obsession with Hartley, the joy he thought had been destroyed when Titus died, and the joy that the hinted-at return to the theatre in the following section is all about. The appearance of the seals, examined in context with the story's final moments, indicate that it's possible he's at last found what he wanted, or what he didn't know he wanted - the potential for true joy without the pressure of needing to control.

Postscript

Postscript Summary

This section of the book returns to the diary style of writing. Charles writes a paragraph here, a paragraph there, the rambling contents of which are anchored by descriptions of his new life in James' apartment, which he keeps almost completely as James left it. Diary entries reveal that in his will, James named Charles his sole heir. Entries also reveal that museums and other interested parties insistently ask to be given his books and artifacts, requests that Charles eventually agrees to. The only thing he keeps is the ornate casket which he now believes quite seriously contains a demon. Diary entries also recount his process of selling Shruff End, and of rebuilding friendships with Lizzie (who appears to be devoting herself to him in the non sexual but utterly loving way she always wanted), Gilbert (who has a great deal of success in his television show), and with Peregrine (who is murdered for his theatrical/political activism.) Entries also recount how he slowly returns to life in the theatre, taking more and more of an interest in things and actually considering some tempting offers. Finally, diary entries reveal his increasing belief that both James and Hartley are deceiving him. James isn't really dead but has gone into hiding, possibly in Tibet. Hartley and Fitch deceived him about moving to Australia and either moved to another English town or stayed in Narrowdean, after hiding out with friends until Charles left. This in turn leads him to reconsider his notions of what happened the night Peregrine tried to kill him, a thought process that leads him to decide that James had nothing to do with it - he was saved by a freak wave. Of course, by this time Charles has also revealed that he's getting drunk every night, and many of his thoughts emerge from a drunken semi-stupor.

Charles also recalls Clement and the misery of her death, which in turn leads him to finally realize that she, and James too, were both right about how he should have left Hartley alone. Final, very brief diary entries indicate that Charles has come to believe that changing oneself is ultimately impossible, that he now realizes he has always been in love with his own youth, that he may accept an offer to direct a play from an old friend - and that the ornate casket has fallen to the floor, releasing the demon within.

Postscript Analysis

The action of this section is anchored in two significant ironies. The first is that Charles seems to be giving up control of much of his life at the same time as he's planning to return to a world in which he has complete control (the theatre.) This world is represented by the demon in the casket, while the movement of his life is dramatized in different ways. He begins by refusing to get rid of any of James' possessions and/or make room for his own, but by the end of the section he's starting to clear things out. He begins with the complete belief there was something spiritual about what happened the night he nearly drowned, but ends by returning to the belief that he was saved by a freak of nature. His beliefs about Hartley and James transform from a kind of awed

acceptance of their reality to the belief that he was lied to, which can be seen as a twisted version of his desire to control and/or be seen as controlling - he was so powerful that major lies had to be fabricated in order to escape his control. His relationship with Lizzie starts out, in the diaries, as being on her terms but by the end is on his terms.

The second irony is that while he's apparently realized an important truth about himself (his idealized view of the past), he's returning to life in the world of illusion - the theatre. Have all his experiences counted for nothing? The novel seems to be making the point that human illusions are themselves a necessary reality, that illusions like those of Charles, Hartley, Lizzie, Peregrine, and others are what make reality tolerable.

Characters

Charles

Charles is the central character in the book, its narrator and the definer of its perspective. He is selfish, arrogant, manipulative, prone to self-delusion, simultaneously intelligent and unwise, a glutton and a self-indulgent sensualist. In his own mind he is the victimized central character in his own drama-filled life, manipulated by Clement, abandoned by Hartley, unloved by his mother, and emotionally abandoned by his father. This sense of victimization is perhaps the prime motivating factor for his insistent perspective that he is the central character in other people's lives. As far as he's concerned, the experiences of Lizzie, Gilbert, Rosina, Peregrine and Clement all revolve around him, and there are clear indications throughout the book that he has made deliberate choices to ensure that indeed, the drama in their lives is the result of his actions and/or inactions.

Charles' journey in the book can perhaps be defined as a variation on the traditional hero's journey, in which "the hero" is forced to confront his own internal nature through a series of symbolic external encounters. There is extensive symbolism in *The Sea the Sea*, defined and examined later in this analysis, all of which suggests that Charles' various encounters with individuals, objects and circumstances are all intended to propel him further along a journey of self-discovery. The irony, of course, is that by the end of the book Charles ends up returning to the world he just left at the beginning - the world of the theatre, which he repeatedly describes as full of illusion. There is the overall sense at the story's conclusion that he has actually learned nothing from his experience - but the journey has, for the reader, been undeniably interesting, entertaining, and thought provoking.

Lizzie

Lizzie is a middle aged actress, a former protygy of Charles and a former lover. Open hearted, vulnerable, and madly devoted, she is perhaps the most honest and self-aware of Charles' lovers. This is not to say that she's certain or confident - she functions at the whim of her feelings, acting on whatever impulse she feels at a given moment.

Rosina

Rosina is also a middle-aged actress. She is much more physically attractive, sexually energetic, and emotionally volatile from Lizzie. Demanding where Lizzie is hesitant, direct where Lizzie is passive, she is a powerful and insistent force in Charles' life. Her unexpectedly poignant revelation that she aborted Charles' child provides a profound emotional subtext to her passionate vindictiveness and aggression.

Clement

Clement appears only in Charles' recollections. She is nevertheless one of the most important figures in his life, having introduced him as a young man to theatre, sex, and relationships. Several years older than Charles when they first meet, she had an on again-off again relationship with him until her death, which is described by Charles in very painful terms that portray Clement as deluded, angry, and in deep pain. Her life becomes a wreck, and there are indications that Charles, who attempts to control the lives of others in the way Clement controlled his, is also headed for a wrecked final few years.

James

James is Charles' cousin, a perhaps paradoxical combination of soldier and peace loving Buddhist. Their childhood relationship, with James as the only son in a privileged family with happy parents, and Charles as the only son in a poor family with miserable parents, is one of the defining aspects of Charles' adult life. Charles experiences him as an emotional and spiritual rival, almost an enemy. James, on the other hand, comes across throughout his life as being well intentioned, remarkably patient and generous, and compassionate - this in spite of Charles' attempts to portray him otherwise. He represents the possibility of a wider, more spiritual existence than the one Charles currently leads, a possibility that Charles comes close to embracing as the result of his belief that James mystically rescued him from a near death experience, but from which Charles withdraws as he finds himself drawn again to the illusory world of the theatre.

Peregrine

Peregrine is one of Charles' former theatre colleagues, an Irish actor/director with a habit of telling self-dramatizing stories. In that sense he reflects a key aspect of Charles' character back at him - Charles too is a self-dramatizer. Perhaps this is why Charles finds Peregrine so irritating. Their relationship is ultimately defined by the fact that Charles stole Rosina (Peregrine's ex-wife) from him, a fact that Peregrine masochistically uses to nurture resentment of Charles that builds for years until he attempts to kill him. Peregrine's death at the hands of Irish rebels, who resented his passionate commitment to theatrically telling the stories of "the real Ireland," is perhaps symbolic of how reality, for Peregrine and particularly for Charles, is a dangerous place.

Gilbert

Gilbert is a minor character, who functions as a catalyst for the relationship between Charles and Lizzie, and as an example of how Charles desires to and is able to control men as well as women. Like Peregrine and Fitch, his servile nature perhaps reflects back to Charles an aspect of his personality he feels contempt for - he perhaps experiences Gilbert's devotion as similar to his own devotion to Clement and his father's

submissiveness to his mother, aspects of his experience that Charles fully despises and rejects. Interestingly, Gilbert is also the only character in the book, who loves unconditionally.

Fitch

Ben Fitch is Hartley's husband and Titus' father, seen by Charles as emotionally and physically abusive of them both. Whether he truly is an important question, since Charles (as previously discussed) is an unreliable narrator, obsessed with seeing Hartley as a victim. An interesting aspect to Fitch's character, which can be relied on to some degree since it emerges as the result of a conversation with James, is that Fitch was given a commendation for his actions during the Second World War in taking control of a prisoner of war camp. Charles interprets these actions as examples of Fitch's brutality and capacity for violence, and there's little doubt that they can be seen as an example of Fitch's desire to control. This means that like Peregrine he is a mirror of Charles' own attitudes, and also like Peregrine, is hated all the more for that reason.

Titus

Titus is the adopted son of Hartley and Fitch. At first described as dirty and unkempt, after coming to stay with Charles his physical appearance improves until he's described from many perspectives as beautiful. Other physical descriptions awaken echoes of Charles' much sought after seals - Titus is described as "slippery," as playful and happy when swimming, as being perfectly at home in the water. This suggests that both he and the seals represent pure joy, and more particularly the possibility of pure joy being found through intimate and open connection with the soul, which the sea represents. Titus has a scar on his lip, resulting from an operation to correct a harelip. This symbolizes the scars of his youth, with the fact that it becomes less visible the more time he spends in the sun while taking refuge at Shruff End symbolizing the way those wound is healing. His accidental death represents the inevitable death of spiritual joy in Charles, and as such foreshadows' Charles hinted-at return to the theatre life at the conclusion of the book.

The Chauffeur

The Chauffeur appears in person only once, but is referred to frequently in Charles' recollections of his past. From Charles' perspective, their relationship was an entirely negative experience. It's therefore a surprise to both Charles and the reader that the chauffeur recalls Charles and their time together in a positive light. This takes one the novel's theme of false perceptions of the past and in effect turns it around. In most of his other relationships Charles learns that his positive perceptions are false and have been manipulated to suit his own attitudes. While he does the same thing with the relationship with the chauffeur, it turns out that his negative perceptions are the false ones.

Objects/Places

The Mirror

The mirror is the first of two objects, left behind by the previous owner of Shruff End that define Charles' state of mind/being as his tormented summer begins and foreshadow the process of transformation he undertakes during that summer. The mirror shows Charles his own image, meaning that when it mysteriously shatters it simultaneously foreshadows and represents the shattering of his self-image as controlling and all powerful.

The Vase

The vase is the second of the two objects left behind in Shruff End. In its exotic ugliness, the vase represents the equal ugliness of Charles' attitude towards and treatment of women, which means that when it shatters it too is a simultaneous foreshadowing and symbol. In this case, it represents the way Charles learns he can no longer control and manipulate women in the ugly way he did before.

The Sea Serpent

The sea serpent, which Charles sees or imagines seeing both at the beginning and at the end of his journey, is also a symbol of ugliness, but of the ugliness of obsession that rises out of the sea of life the way the serpent rises from the water. At the beginning its appearance is a portent of what he's going to face, while at the end (during his near-death experience) it's a summary of what he has confronted.

Shruff End

Shruff End is the house into which Charles moves represents the new unknown self into which Charles finds himself also moving. The inner room represents the deepest core of this new self, the real ugliness and loneliness and desperation there. It's no coincidence that this inner room is where Hartley confines herself, and in which Charles is forced to confront the truth of who she now is, and what she is to him.

The Theatre

On several different occasions and in several different ways, Charles discusses the theatre in at times contemptuous language as a place of illusion and unreality. Confronted by reality at Shruff End, there are indications in the Postscript that he's prepared to return to that safe, known, illusory, world. Reality has been found to be too hard to handle.

Seals

Frequently in his diary, Charles refers to his hopes for seeing seals, being disappointed in those hopes until near the very end after he's made a kind of peace with everything that's happened. He literally realizes his hope, which suggests that the seals are a metaphor for the hope he DIDN'T realize he had - for the chance to make peace with the ghosts of his past. This idea is reiterated in the previously discussed resemblance between the seals and Titus, whom Charles sees as an embodiment of his hopes.

The Church

The church, as a concept, is a source of spiritual truth, of sanctuary from trouble, and of peace. In the book, it serves as the regular meeting place between Charles and Hartley, and is only encountered within that context. This suggests that for Charles, and perhaps for Hartley as well, the church represents the safety of their childhood relationship, and what they believe to have been its spiritual truth. It's interesting to note that they both realize that that "truth" is in fact a falsehood. Is there a suggestion here that the spiritual truth of the church, as a concept, is also a falsehood?

Nibletts

Nibletts is Hartley's cottage, in which she lives with Fitch and, presumably at one point, with Titus. Small and straightforwardly constructed, decorated in what Charles would patronizingly call a middle class style. Charles sees it as a prison, Hartley sees it as a refuge. There are parallels here between their mutual perception of the homes they have come to in Narrowdean as a refuge from earlier lives and lies.

Dummy's Grave

Dummy's Grave is a gravestone in the church yard with no name, only "Dummy" and the dates of his birth and death. Charles surmises that the person buried there was deaf and dumb, and was buried under the only name he (?) ever really knew. The grave symbolizes Charles' deafness to anything but his obsessive fantasies about Hartley, and his dumbness (muteness) when it comes to speaking anything but what's related to his own manipulative purposes. The grave is first encountered when Charles passes the church on his walks through town, and later observed every time he goes into the church to meet or hopefully meet, Hartley.

James' Apartment / The Casket and the Demon

James' apartment was first visited by Charles after he has his hallucination in the art gallery, and returned to after James's death. It's cluttered with valuable objects stacked next to rubbish, gold next to cheap brass. There are echoes here of a kind of Aladdin's

cave, a mysterious treasure trove in which a lamp might be home to a genie - an idea given form in the mysterious casket, which Charles insists contains a demon. As previously discussed, the demon represents Charles' love and desire for the theatre, kept locked in the casket until released in the Postscript, once Charles has come to accept that a true life living the illusion of theatre (the illusion of control?) is where he fully belongs.

Themes

Self-Delusion

Several of the characters, Charles being the most notable, suffer from false images of who they are, what their relationships are, and what their goals are meant to bring into their lives. They have also created a collection of beliefs about their past, about how their past affects their present, and how the future will either fulfill or transform those beliefs. In many cases, these self-delusions eventually disappear - Lizzie's ideas about the rightness of a relationship with Charles, Rosina's desire to marry him, Gilbert's devotion, and Hartley's presumed and only occasional interest in fleeing. In these cases, delusions resolve into a kind of acceptance of reality. In other cases, the characters' self delusions linger, but are masked or hidden. These include Peregrine's hatred, Titus' resentment of his parents and his belief that a relationship with Charles will provide him with the love he's always sought, and Fitch's belief that Hartley is a liar. Of all the characters, however, Charles is the one confronted most forcibly with the nature of his delusions (as represented by the shattered mirror), and Charles is the one, who fights the hardest and with the most determination to preserve them. This is particularly true of his delusions about Hartley and their relationship. But by the end of the book, he has convinced himself that the truths with which he was faced were themselves delusions, and the only true reality is the life of the theatre, where he can be safe and happy within his delusions.

Love

Love in all its forms and manifestations pervades this book - familial, sexual, obsessive, idealized, unrequited, it's all defined as a primary motivating force in human life and relationships, whether it destroys or heals, rescues or ruins. Without exception, all the characters ware motivated by the search for love, and by their reactions when their search ends, either in success or failure. This means that angry characters like Rosina and Titus are further motivated by the way their searches for love are/were met with betrayal. It also means that lonely characters like Lizzie and Gilbert are further motivated by their willingness to do anything to receive love, confused characters like Hartley are further motivated by their desire to find any kind of real love, anywhere. Finally, it means that betrayed characters like Fitch and Peregrine are seeking revenge for having their love, as they see it, manipulated and/or tossed aside. For his part, Charles doesn't know what real love is. He seems to be able to catch glimpses of it, but ultimately for him love is either about control or submission, never anything in between. Being caught between these two extremes, and his struggle to live his life according to the demands of both, is what fuels both his descent into his soul and his eventual escape into the illusory world of the theatre. James, a profound contrast to the other characters, is defined by his typically Buddhist perspective, and equally typical Buddhist search, of living from absolute love, defined by him as compassion - for Charles, for Hartley, for Titus, for Fitch, for everyone.

Unresolved Pasts

Again without exception, another key factor motivating the actions of the characters is their sense of having an unresolved past. Hartley's obsession with her relationships with Fitch and Titus, the obsessions of Charles' friends and ex-lovers with their various relationships with him, and James' (admittedly well controlled) obsession with the accidental death of the guide all indicate that too one degree or another, they're haunted by what's happened to them previously. They all struggle, again to various degrees, to resolve those pasts, and all meet with degrees of success. Charles is the only one, who fails to truly move forward. The aspects of his unresolved past are many and varied, and include his family to a great degree - resentment of his mother, guilt over the sad life of his father, fascination with his exotic fun-loving aunt, and the rivalry with James. He is also, of course, convinced that all his female lovers are still pining for him (what an egotist he is), at the same time as he's convinced his male friends and colleagues still have unfinished business with him as well, either in terms of devotion (Gilbert) or revenge (Peregrine.) Above all, there is his unresolved past with Hartley, which as the novel reveals has defined his life. Where the others achieve at least a degree of positive closure, Charles ultimately refuses to close any doors at all, preparing to move at the close of his journey back into the world where his pasts are still open to manipulation and use as a tool to shape his future in his controlling, deluded image.

Marriage

The nature of marriage is referred to several times throughout the book. It's spoken of with general contempt by Charles, but with general respect by several of the other characters, particularly Titus, Peregrine and Hartley. In their various ways, they repeatedly tell Charles that he doesn't understand what marriage means, that even if a marriage seems difficult to him it may function perfectly well from within, and that he must respect the will and desires of those within the marriage. There are also different kinds of marriage - the relatively normal and, to Charles, contemptibly tranquil marriage of a pair of professional colleagues, the non-sexual and non-romantic marriage of Lizzie and Gilbert, the kind of armed truce between Hartley and Fitch, the love/hate can't-live-with-you/can't-live-without-you of Peregrine and Rosina. It's interesting to note that in all cases and despite the different specifics, marriage is portrayed as intimate, mysterious, and a kind of sanctuary. It's also interesting to note that in many ways this is how Charles views his relationship with Hartley. Does he consider them as having had a spiritual marriage? Is his pursuit of her an attempt to bring the spiritual into the world of the physical and/or actual? The overall thematic statement of the book seems to be that each marriage must be defined and experienced on its own terms, and only by the people within it and living it.

Father/Son Relationships

This is a minor theme, but is nonetheless dramatized in several ways. Primary among these is the somewhat paradoxical relationship between Charles and his father, whom

he simultaneously adored for his individuality and detested for his submissive gentleness. Titus is the son in two such relationships, the apparently negative one he has with Fitch and the more idealized potential relationship with Charles, both of which must be considered in the light of Charles' unreliability as a narrator. For Charles, Titus becomes both the son he never had and the opportunity to be the father he (Charles) never had himself. It appears that in Charles' mind, his becoming Titus' father heals two wounds. There is also the hint of a father/son relationship in the connection between James and the guide who died, while they were on a mountain climbing expedition. James reveals a sense of wanting and needing to take care of the guide in a very paternal way, and also reveals a paternal sense of guilt at having failed to do so. This in turn illuminates Charles' feelings about Titus - he too wanted to take care of the younger man, he too failed, and he too feels a deep sense of guilt. As previously noted, Charles' feelings for Titus are perhaps a sub-conscious attempt to replace the child he fathered with Rosina, but which he aborted. There is the sense that somewhere inside, he sees Titus as a chance to get it right.

Style

Point of View

The Sea, the Sea is written entirely from a first person, subjective point of view - that of Charles Arrowby. The first thing to note here is that the first person perspective perfectly suits the character. Charles is hugely self centered and egotistical, therefore it only makes sense that his story is only told from his perspective. In other words, Charles' self involvement is clearly defined not only in terms of substance but also in terms of style, even though that style shifts back and forth from diary or journal entries to a more considered, less immediately recalled memoir. There is a sense of urgency and of randomness about the former style and a sense of careful choice about the latter, but there is also the very clear sense that events are recorded and recounted with little or no attempt at true objectivity. This makes him an untrustworthy narrator. It's up to the reader to discern the truth in, and behind, what he says. One way to do this might be to consider that the diary/journal style entries are perhaps more reflective of an objective truth - incidents are perhaps more likely to be recorded as they happened, as opposed to how Charles wants them to be perceived and/or interpreted. Another, and perhaps even more effective way, is to read between the lines, look beyond the meaning Charles clearly intends for a truth that emerges in spite of his intention to define it. This, in fact, is a key aspect of the play's purpose, and its theme exploring self-delusion. Views from the outside are almost always more accurate than those from the inside.

Setting

The novel is primarily set on the English coast, and an intriguing aspect to the novel is that it never defines which one (England, being on an island, has several.) As Charles repeatedly mentions the expanse of sea visible before him without any indication that France or Europe are on the other side of it (which he might conceivably do if he were on the east or south coasts,) the implication is that he's on the west coast, facing the Atlantic Ocean. The town near which Charles' house is situated, and which is also home to Hartley and her husband, seems typical of small fishing villages in the area - remote, unsophisticated, uncultured. This creates a "fish out of water" situation in which Charles does his best to not feel uncomfortable. This also creates a sense of isolation, that Charles has no alternative but to come face to face with himself. There is no other stimulation, no other place to look - other than the sea, of course, which as indicated is symbolic of the great, unknowable depth of Charles' soul. This is an excellent example of how setting can be utilized as more than just the place where events occur - it can be reflective, emblematic or symbolic of the nature of the story itself. The action of the novel takes brief diversions into the hustle, bustle, overpopulation, pollution and noise of London, diversions which seem to represent the noise and confusion in Charles' mind.

Language and Meaning

The author of this novel was a noted philosopher, intellectual, and poet. The language throughout reflects these aspects to her personality, character and craft without overwhelming the humanism of the people living out the drama she's chronicling. Language seems very specifically chosen, whether it's being used to detail Charles' obsessions with food and how it's prepared, the poetic visuals associated with the sea, the telling details of Hartley's gestures, or Titus' physical beauty. This attention to minute detail clearly defines the meaning of the many symbols appearing throughout the book - the sea, the various homes, and the contents of those homes. It also reinforces the previously discussed sense that there is more going on for Charles than he wants us to believe. The writing is evocative of great depths of feeling and significance, and the irony is that Charles as he's writing doesn't seem aware that he's letting the reader know much more than he intends. He's self-important, not spiritually or poetically aware.

Structure

The Sea, the Sea is divided into three parts - Prehistory, History, and Postscript, all of which reflect structurally what's going on thematically, dramatically, and emotionally. The Prehistory is the second longest of the three sections, but is still substantially shorter than Part 2, the History. As previously mentioned, the Prehistory is written in diary form. Events and feelings tend to be described sketchily, without a great deal of depth. This is another way in which style is reflective of substance - the relative briefness and apparent casualness of this first section signifies the relative lack of importance Charles (self-deludedly) ascribes to his past and questions about its nature.

Egotistically, he knows what it is and what it means and isn't interested in questioning any of it. Here he is essentially sketching in the circumstances, principally geographical and personal, in which the story is to play out. That story is told in History, which consists of six sections of varying lengths and varying narrative perspectives (as diary entries or considered memoirs.) There is much more detail here, much more self-examination and much greater length, indicating that for Charles, whether he's aware of it or not, this is the most important part of his life to date. Once again, structure reinforces substance. Loose ends are tied up in the Postscript, in which what happens to the principal characters following the events of the History is recounted. Again, as in the Prehistory, the section is brief, sketchily and casually developed, indicating that at this point in his life Charles doesn't really want to give much serious thought to either what happened or where he's going. Overall, then, the book's narrative structure gives a very clear sense of beginning, middle and end - which, in fact, turns out to very possibly be another beginning.

Quotes

"It affords me a curious pleasure to stand upon this bridge and watch the violent forces which the churning waves, advancing or retreating, generate within the confined space of the rocky hole." Prehistory, p. 5.

"I am very conscious of the house existing quietly round about me. Parts of it I have colonized, other parts remain obstinately alien and dim." Prehistory, p. 17.

"The [glass] is ... somewhat spotted but remarkably luminous and silvery, so that the mirror seems like a source of light." Pre-history, p. 32.

"It has only just now occurred to me that really I could write all sorts of fantastic nonsense about my life in these memoirs and everybody would believe it!" Prehistory, p. 76.

"Can a woman's ghost, after so many years, open the doors of the heart?" Prehistory, p 89.

"...everything was in ruins about me, every old assumption was gone, every terrible possibility was open. That there could soon be dreadful pain did not then occur to me at all." History 1, p. 112.

"But did she love him? I had to know. Was she really happy? I had to know. And that old horrible sweetish thought now kept coming to me: she must regret it so much, that wrong choice. She must have spent her life regretting that she had not married me." History 2, p. 120.

"... [the church] seemed unused and very empty and a little mad. It seemed a suitable spot for a strange momentous interview." History 2, p. 131.

"And as the violent feelings became calmer another emotion, darker, deeper, came slowly up from below. Or rather there were two emotions closely, blackly, coiled together." History 2, p. 152.

"I had always run to women as to a refuge. What indeed are women *but* refuges? And sometimes it had seemed that to be held close in a woman's arms was the only and perfect defense against any horror ... Hartley was different, she traveled with me, I had never seen her as a place of safety." History 3, p. 170.

"'You've lived in a hedonistic dream all your life, and you've always got away with behaving like a cad because you always picked on women who could look after themselves ... you never committed yourself, you never said you loved us even when you did!'" Rosina to Charles, History 3, P. 185

"[Titus] was slippery, slippery, touchy, proud. I must hold him, I must be tactful, careful, gentle, firm, I Must understand how. Everything, everything, I felt, now depended on

Titus, he was the centre of the world, he was the *key* ... I could so easily, here, alarm, offend, disgust." History 4, p. 250-251.

"'Why not be sorry for me for a change? I've waited long enough ... what have I got now but my memories? I've stripped myself of all the power and all the glamour - for something - and the something, although I didn't know it, was you. You can't let me down now.'" Charles to Hartley, History 4 Part 2, p. 301.

"'You seem to think the past is unreal, a pit full of ghosts. But to me the past is in some ways the most real thing of all, and loyalty to it the most important thing of all.'" Charles to James, History 5, p. 354.

"A complete fall into the void, something which I had often imagined on aeroplanes, is of course the most terrible thing of all. Hands, feet, muscles, all the familiar protective mechanisms of the body are suddenly useless ... the frail breakable crushable animal form ..." History 5, p. 365.

"'You musn't interfere in other people's lives, especially married people ... you've got to leave them alone. They've got their own way of hating each other and hurting each other, they enjoy it.'" Titus to Charles, History 5 Part 1, p. 377.

"Then I saw below me, their wet doggy faces looking curiously upward, four seals, swimming so close to the rock that I could almost have touched them ... they curved and played a while ... looking up at me all the time. And as I watched their play I could not doubt that they were beneficent beings come to visit me and bless me." History 6, p. 476.

"Time, like the sea, undoes all knots." Postscript, p. 477.

Topics for Discussion

Several important symbols are introduced in the Prehistory - the mirror, the ugly vase, the house with its inner room, and the sea itself. Discuss each symbol in relationship to the experience of self-exploration and discovery Charles experiences over the course of the book.

Relate the image of the serpent to uncomfortable truths about himself that Charles is forced to face. What are those truths? Who challenges him? What effect do those challenges have on him? How is his perspective changed, or not changed?

Compare each of the more important women in Charles' life (Lizzie, Clement, Rosina) to Hartley. What did Charles need and/or receive from them that he did not receive from Hartley? What qualities does the Hartley of Charles' memory have that made fulfilling relationships with the other women impossible? Why did Charles, as he himself says, "never [see] her as a place of safety" in the past when that's precisely how he sees the others, and how he sees her when they're reunited as much older adults?

How reliable a narrator is Charles? Which incidents and relationships are reported more objectively, and which can be interpreted as being projections or manifestations of his desires and intentions?

Discuss the character of Hartley. What is the truth about why she disappeared, when she and Charles were young? How seriously is she drawn to the new life that Charles proposes? Why does she return to Fitch? What is her goal in moving with him to Australia?

Explore in detail the spiritual connotations of Charles and Hartley's meetings in the church. Why does Hartley seem able to relate openly to him, only when she's there? Why does Charles repeatedly use the church as the site of their meetings?

Discuss the possibilities for the future if Charles had succeeded in removing Hartley from her home. Given what is known about their respective characters, imagine what their life together would have been like. Would they have married? If so, would they have stayed married? What would have been sources of joy in their lives? Sources of conflict? Imagine their home. Add Titus to the mix - what would have their so-called family life have been like, if he had lived?