

The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet: A Novel Study Guide

The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet: A Novel by David Mitchell (author)

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Plot Summary

"The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet" is a novel by David Mitchell which is an account of the life of Dutch clerk Jacob de Zoet on the man-made island of Dejima in Japan between 1799 and 1817.

Jacob de Zoet, seeking to advance himself and marry his beloved, Anna, travels to Japan with the Dutch East India Company to work at the trading town on a man-made island, Dejima, in Nagasaki Harbor. Jacob is a devoted Christian, and prays daily using his family Psalter. He is abhorred by the corruption of the island, the black market trade, and the ill-practices of the Europeans around him. Jacob nevertheless befriends a Dutch physician, Dr. Marinus, and earns the respect of the people who work for the trading company. Jacob falls in love with a beautiful Japanese girl named Orito Aibagawa, who is studying medicine under Dr. Marinus. But due to Japanese law, and owing to Orito's high social status, Jacob cannot pursue her. Nevertheless, it is clear she returns affections to Jacob.

Meanwhile, Orito is sold by her stepmother upon the death of her father to a warped and twisted mountaintop cult, which slaughters babies and imprisons and impregnates girls. A rescue attempt by Orito's Japanese friends fails. Jacob, meanwhile, receives intelligence about what has happened to Orito, but is powerless to do anything. When the Dutch East India Company goes bankrupt, the British attempt to buy and then bombard Dejima, attempts which Jacob - now the senior officer at the company - is able to block. He gains respect with the local Japanese magistrate, who passes along the intelligence about the mountaintop cult, and commits ritual suicide with the cult's leader in order to make sure he dies. Jacob marries and has a son with a local Japanese woman, but she dies. Jacob's son is required by Japanese law when he leaves Dejima. Jacob later sees Orito, and they part ways. Back home, Jacob remarries and has a new family, and passes on his Christian faith and his Psalter to his Dutch son.



Part 1, Chapter 1 - Part 2, Chapter 20

Part 1, Chapter 1 - Part 2, Chapter 20 Summary

Part 1, Chapter 1 - In the village of Nagasaki, in the house of Kawasemi the Concubine, Kawasemi is in labor, and is attended by a midwife, Orito Aibagawa, and Dr. Maeno. The baby appears dead, half-born, and the doctor and midwife must help Kawasemi finish birth if she is to live herself. The doctor and the nurse have been trained in Dutch medicine, and use this to their advantage. Miraculously, the baby is not dead, and survives.

Part 1, Chapter 2 - In Nagasaki Harbor, the ship Shenandoah is anchored. It is July 20, 1799. Jacob de Zoet, a clerk, who works for Unico Vorstenbosch, chief-elect of the trading factory of Dejima, of the Dutch East Indies Trading Company. A man named Daniel Snitker is found guilty of dereliction of duty, visiting a brothel instead of helping to stop a warehouse from burning down. His dereliction has been witnessed by Captain Anselm Lacy of the Shenandoah. Snitker attempts to bribe Vorstenbosch through black-market trading kickbacks, but Vorstenbosch is unamused. He dutifully sentences Snitker. Snitker tries to escape, and Jacob takes a punch for Vorstenbosch while the first mate of the ship fells Snitker.

Part 1, Chapter 3 - Jacob is brought out by devout Christians, and he is given a Psalter - the book of Psalms from the Bible - when he is young. Jacob is deeply Christian, and guards his Psalter diligently, hiding it among his books when the Japanese demand all Christian symbols, paraphernalia, and texts, be handed over to them upon visits. The Christian materials are returned upon departure. As Jacob and his mates are taken ashore by Japanese sampan boats, he sketches the coastal town. The black slaves of the Dutch are in tow. They are all met by Deputy Melchior van Cleef. They are also tended to by Sekita, a translator and interpreter, and his assistants. One of his comrades, Ogawa Mimasaku, is very interested to learn that Jacob has brought many books along, and reveals that he will be searching the books.

Arie Grote shows Jacob around the small trading island connected to mainland Japan by a bridge, meant to keep foreigners out. Grote volunteers himself to be Jacob's agent on the island. Grote brings Jacob to the hospital, to see about his injuries to his nose from being punched by Snitker. But the physician, Dr. Marinus, wants nothing to do with Jacob because of where he was educated, which Marinus calls a nest of slavers. Marinus tells Jacob to bathe his nose with cool water twice daily, and to get punched again to straighten it out. Ogawa comes to see Jacob, and Jacob believes his Psalter has been found, but by an act of Grace, Ogawa has fixated on Adam Smith's "Wealth of Nations", and wants to borrow it, which Jacob readily consents to. Ogawa wants to translate it into Japanese.

Part 1, Chapter 4 - Jacob's house translator is to be the youthful Hanzaburo. Jacob also meets up with junior clerk Ponke Ouwehand. Jacob reflects on his desire to marry a girl



named Anna being postponed for five years by her father, because Jacob is only a clerk. Jacob has five years to advance himself to prove himself to Anna's father. Vorstenbosch reveals to Jacob that the Dutch East India Company is in jeopardy. They need copper to mint coins to pay locally-recruited garrisons to serve them and to maintain their military and economic power. But the entire mission is in danger of falling apart unless Japan begins trading in copper. The Governor-General of the area has sent a letter to the Japanese, telling them that if they do not increase their output of copper for trade, the Dutch will pull out of Japan, taking everything from their goods to their knowledge, with them. Jacob and Vorstenbosch then head over to mainland Japan, into Nagasaki. There, they go to meet with Magistrate Shiroyama, and his interpreter, Kobayashi. Ogawa is also present. The ultimatum is delivered, and the room erupts in chaotic voices. Jacob then notices a quiet man, intelligent looking and quiet, who reminds him of a monk.

Part 1, Chapter 5 - In the warehouse, Jacob comes across William Pitt, an ape. William Pitt has stolen an amputated leg, and is chased by a young woman, who leaves before Jacob can ask her name. At dinner, Ogawa is amazed to learn of American democracy from Captain Lacy, and of the idea of all citizens being equal. Lacy speaks openly of doing away with tyrants, and this worries the Dutch. Talk soon turns to girls, wives, and prostitutes. Jacob comes to learn the girl in the warehouse was Orito Aibagawa, who works and studies under Dr. Marinus. Jacob learns as well that she is as intelligent and resilient at her work as she is beautiful.

Part 1, Chapter 6 - It is now August. Jacob in his room at the Tall House on the trading island of Dejima. Jacob reflects on the first and last kiss Anna gave him, asking him to take care of her heart in Dutch Java. Jacob decides he wants to go and see Dr. Marinus. Eelattu, the servant, shows Jacob in, where Eelattu is shaving Dr. Marinus's face. Marinus is highly suspect of Jacob's desires to speak with Orito. He brings a gift of sheet music with him, intended to be given to Marinus upon their first meeting. Marinus reluctantly agrees to allow Jacob to speak with Orito. At work, Jacob is trying to make amends of shoddy record keeping, and several years worth of records are missing. It is because Fischer and Ouwehand have been doing some of their own unscrupulous trading, but are turning a profit for the overall company in this fashion.

Later, Jacob goes to Marinus's office as his students arrive. Marinus introduces Orito and Jacob. They speak about her desire to bring science and reason to Japan, and they appear to get on very nicely. But then Marinus calls his class together, to use Jacob as a practical example, and compels him to reveal his hindquarters to the class.

Part 1, Chapter 7 - An earthquake strikes early on Tuesday in late August, and Jacob dashes off to the warehouse to see about his mercury stores. The damage to the four Dutch warehouses is bad, but not horrendous. Jacob, Grote, and the others look over the damage and sort through destroyed products as Interpreter Yonekizu and Constable Kugi appear with the man who resembles a monk who was at the Magistrate's. He is Abbot Enomoto. They speak about souls and humankind. They see a snake, which Enomoto kills by words, by manipulating "ki", the force of life. It can be used to heal and kill. Grote has arranged a sale of mercury to Enomoto without Jacob's knowledge, and



Jacob is at first angry. He then consents to the sale, hoping he can trust Enomoto to pay. Jacob sketches a picture of Orito, which puts into a fan which he gives to her as she leaves Marinus's hospital.

Later, Jacob asks Ogawa about marriage, and Ogawa explains that marriage is arranged. He had never before met his wife. Word arrives that the warehouses have been robbed, and Vorstenbosch declares there will be searches of all Japanese warehouses and interests to root out the thieves.

Part 1, Chapter 8 - A message comes to Vorstenbosch from the Shogun by way of Kobayashi. The response says nothing about copper, but requests peacock feather fans. Vorstenbosch is enraged by the trivial complexity of gift-giving and indirectness of the Japanese court. But Jacob recognizes an inconsistency in the number of fans requested: though the message has been translated as one thousand, the actual number is one hundred. This enrages Vorstenbosch once more. At the same time, Fischer is becoming annoyed and angry with Jacob, for Jacob may indeed receive a promotion that Fischer has determined should have been his, had Snitker still been in power. Jacob is given the task by Vorstenbosch of figuring out if Grote is illegally dealing, and Jacob agrees, because Vorstenbosch hints at promotion.

Later, Ogawa warns Jacob not to cross Kobayashi or Enomoto. Ogawa also warns Jacob to hide his forbidden book. Con Twomey, Piet Baert, Wybo Gerritszoon, Arie Grote, and others, are playing cards. Jacob joins them. Much rum is consumed. At last, the men begin talking about trading privately, which is legal up to a certain point. Grote explains that Jacob has made five hundred percent profit through their mercury deal with Enomoto. Jacob at last presses the issue at hand directly, asking Grote how a provedore arrives and leaves the kitchens with bags as full as when entering, and Grote explains that he is trying to sell rotten onions, and is always sent away. Grote later explains he is trading ginseng illegally. The guards are paid not to notice the transactions, and Grote explains that this is how Dejima works.

Part 1, Chapter 9 - Every night, Jacob prays. While each man on the island of Dejima believes in God, everyone approaches Him differently, from the Dutch Reformed Church members to Catholics to the Episcopalians to the Lutherans. Yet the Japanese do not allow organized services. Jacob later speaks once more to Kobayashi, and instructs him in better forms of English. But then Constable Kosugi appears with Hanzaburo, explaining that thieves have broken into the Tall House. Jacob rushes back. His room is in chaos; his books and possessions are scattered everywhere. Con Twomey helps Jacob clean up. Jacob knows that it is Kobayashi. Marinus arrives, and gets Jacob to play some billiards. Marinus reveals his own difficult childhood, his family done away by fever, and his being raised by poor relatives. Marinus promises to bring Jacob to the Shirando Academy, if Jacob digs horse manure into beetroot beds in the garden for twelve hours. Jacob agrees.

Part 1. Chapter 10 - Jacob sets to work earlier at his duties as a clerk, so that he can work in Marinus's gardens in the afternoons. It is there that Orito sees him collect some herbs, which Jacob fetches for her. Her guard waits in eye shot. Jacob tells her she is



beautiful, and she is startled, and leaves. Sjako the slave, who doesn't show up for muster, is beaten savagely by Fischer, and Marinus is enraged. This leads to a discussion about slavery at dinner. The lines are divided. Jacob is the only one among them who believes there should be no such thing as slavery..

Part 1, Chapter 11 - A storm is approaching. Jacob and the others set to work at once, preparing for the coming danger, by securing the warehouses. Jacob wants to give Orito a Dutch dictionary, and asks Ogawa how he might go about this. He asks Ogawa to bring the dictionary to Orito. The winds pick up, and Jacob helps Marinus bring in some of the plants so they are not destroyed in the gale.

Part 1, Chapter 12 - Days later, Vorstenbosch receives the Shogun's reply. The Japanese will increase production of copper threefold, to 9,600 picules as opposed to the demanded 20,000. It is tripling the quota, but far less than expected. Vorstenbosch consents that the increase buys the Japanese one more year of Dejima's existence. Kobayashi also reveals that two thieves have been betrayed by the promise of a reward, that the previously stolen item -a teapot- is being returned, and that the thieves may be executed for their crime. Ogawa reveals that Orito's father has died, and Orito is going away. He does not know if she received the gift, for he entrusted it to her servant. Vorstenbosch later reveals he will be leaving Dejima to return to Batavia, to prosecute Snitker. Fischer is to be the new head clerk, while van Cleef will be the new chief. Jacob becomes Deputy Chief Resident.

Part 1, Chapter 13 - The aftermath of the typhoon has brought much flooding, so trading is very slow. The Japanese thieves are executed. Marinus brings away the bodies for anatomy lessons and study. Jacob discovers that Vorstenbosch is stealing 7,000 picules of copper. Jacob refuses to sign the records, and Vorstenbosch tears up Jacob's commission. He is relegated to the office of the clerk once more. Jacob finds comfort by turning to his Psalter, to God. Fischer is promoted to deputy chief. Fischer leverages his authority at once, demanding Jacob clean and address him as "Deputy Fischer" or "sir". He sees Orito trying to gain entry to Dejima, but is turned away, and taken back to the mainland.

Part 2, Chapter 14 - Otane, who lives above the village of Kurozane in the Kyoga Domain, is an elderly woman without children, and her family worries for her safety. In her mountain cabin, Otane keeps medicines and her dog. Otane is well-known and well-regarded for her capabilities and her purity in medicine. Orito comes frequently to visit her. Otane tries to visit Orito but cannot before Orito is taken up the mountain, to the Mount Shiranui Shrine, spiritual home of the daimyo of Kyoga, Lord Abbot Enomoto. Rumors abound about the sixty men and twelve women who live there. Otane practices a very personal form of Christianity, and uses a rosary to pray. She, like most of her family, are Hidden Christians, practicing their faith in fear of the authorities.

An Acolyte of Enomoto, Mohei, comes to visit her late at night. She helps warm him up, for the snow is heavy and the weather cold. He has fled Mount Shiranui, breaking his oath, having written down the Twelve Creeds, which may not be done. He consents to



spending the night, but then determines to carry on eastward to Nagasaki. But Mohei dies during the night.

Part 2, Chapter 15 - In the House of Sisters at Mount Shiranui Shrine, morning bells wake the tenants. Orito has been at the Shrine fifty days since being abducted, having been sold by her stepmother. The women are kept on the mountain by being forced to consume drugged drinks, under threat of starvation for not drinking. The "medicine" is prepared by Master Suzaku. Orito tends to Yayoi, a pregnant sixteen year-old girl. The women tend to chores, and are impregnated by the men. The women are given gifts of kimonos and other necessities for each child they birth. Suzaku insists that by living above the world below, they are happier. Orito is not impressed.

Part 2, Chapter 16 - At the Shirando Academy at the Otsuki residence in Nagasaki, Yoshido Hayato confirms that Japan is not impregnable, that it is subject to the events and circumstances beyond the seas which surround it. Yoshida argues that Japan needs a navy to protect itself - a modern and technologically-advanced navy, trained in the arts of the West. He wants France, England, Prussia, or the United States to be the teachers. Others believe no threats will come to Japan's shores, ever. Jacob is among those who attend the debate. Marinus gives a lecture on Western medicine and technology.

Part 2, Chapter 17 - Each month at the mountaintop Shrine, the women are chosen who are to "engifted", meaning that they are impregnated. Fortunately, Orito is not selected for the current month. Orito pretends to be dutiful, so that she may stop being watched, and may sneak over the wall to escape. Orito dumps her drug-infused daily medicine into her sleeve, so she can fight her addiction to it, and not succumb to the will of her masters. The chosen girls are then taken to bed by the chosen engifters.

Part 2, Chapter 18 - Marinus address his students about stones from the bladder. He operates on Gerritszoon to demonstrate the technique, for Gerritszoon is suffering from stones. Jacob and Con Twomey assist Marinus by holding down the patient. Otane arrives, seeking to speak with Ogawa, but speaking with Uzaemon instead. Otane reveals the cruelties committed against the women at the mountaintop shrine. She gives him the Twelve Creeds, written down by Mohei.

Part 2, Chapter 19 - Orito continues pretending to work diligently. She comes across a cat, who escapes through a hole in the foundation of the house. As time passes, the women tell stories and reminisce about their own past lives. Orito feels that these stories keep the women at the shrine content enough, and sane. She and Yoyoi talk about Jacob, and Yoyoi believes Jacob loved her. The cat returns, and Orito is aware there must be a conduit or a tunnel beneath the house.

Part 2, Chapter 20 - Ogawa's family travels to the Ryugaji Temple in Nagasaki. Uzaemon secretly vows to free Orito. But he knows he will need help. He tells his close friend and sparring partner, Shuzai, about the scrolls. They realize the shrine on the mountain is not a shrine, but a livestock farm. The babies are murdered, but the women are told they have been sent to other families. Uzaemon once promised to marry Orito,



and feels personal responsibility to her. Shuzai is alarmed by the immoral nature of the shrine. He agrees to help.

Part 1, Chapter 1 - Part 2, Chapter 20 Analysis

When David Mitchell's novel, "The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet" begins, both Japan - and the world - are on the dawn of a new century. Jacob enters the often-seedy world of late eighteenth-century trade as a clerk, armed with strong morals, rock-ribbed faith in God, and dutiful and genuine belief in his Christian faith. Indeed, Jacob's rooted Christian belief is so profound that he risks his career, and possibly his life, by smuggling his family Psalter onto the island of Dejima, for Christianity is outlawed in Japan. In the past, Japan has had Christians ruthlessly murdered. Jacob is confronted by a wide array of dishonest and outright sinful behavior, from drugs and dishonesty, to lies, a black market trade, prostitution, and slavery. At every turn, Jacob's faith is challenged by men who do believe in God, and in Christianity, but are simply subsumed by the existing structure of international trade.

There is much mistrust between many in the Japanese hierarchy, and in the Dutch trading post. Despite this mistrust, the Dutch and the Japanese get along fairly well. They trade, and leave cultural and political matters to the side, apart from official meetings and negotiations. Jacob hopes to make something important of himself, and earn an excellent income, so that he can return and marry Anna. He has promised her that he will return in five or six years, and this is a plan that has met with the approval of her father, who has refused the marriage until Jacob secures a good future for himself. So there is much at stake for Jacob, between keeping to his Christian faith, navigating Dutch-Japanese relations, and honestly and expertly performing his job as clerk, all the while dealing with the dregs of humankind, and the corrupt practices of the Europeans on Dejima.

Just as Jacob is baffled by the anti-Christian fervor of the Japanese, he is also baffled by many of their ways. He also comes to understand that the forces of old and new are constantly at war with one another in a few, tantalizing glimpses of the Eastern nation -progress and preserving tradition are hotly-contested ideas. Things become even more difficult for Jacob with the sudden appearance of Western-learned, Japanese beauty Orito Aibagawa. He is at once smitten with her, and instantly torn between his love of Anna, and his interest in the new girl. Interestingly enough, Jacob is not just part of the duality of the meeting of West and East, but the shortcomings of both cultures.



Part 2, Chapter 21 - Part 5, Chapter 41

Part 2, Chapter 21 - Part 5, Chapter 41 Summary

Part 2, Chapter 21 - Orito decides to descend into the cat's escape. She moves around the shrine secretly. Along the way, she discovers the truth about the infanticide going on. She finds her way into a tunnel. She contemplates escape.

Part 2, Chapter 22 - Shuzai gathers information about the Kyoga Domain. He even sneaks up to the shrine and sketches its layout. Shuzai believes the place can be infiltrated with the right men. Uzaemon goes to see Jacob, to ask him to hide the scroll upon which are written the Twelve Scrolls. Jacob readily agrees as he learns the truth of the Shrine.

Part 2, Chapter 23 - Yayoi gives birth to twins. Orito has returned voluntarily to help tend to her and her children. The Lord Abbot is expected to return any day, to take the babies down the mountain.

Part 2, Chapter 24 - Uzaemon tells his ailing father he is going off into the winter to Kashima to pray for him. Uzaemon bids farewell to his wife, and promises not to be gone more than eight days. He also bids farewell to his mother. Uzaemon heads out, and meets up with Shuzai.

Part 2, Chapter 25 - Orito challenges Enomoto on the practices at the shrine. Enomoto insists it is for their own good. Enomoto offers Orito the chance to be midwife and head housekeeper, never to be engifted, and to receive whatever books she wants. Enomoto tells her to consider the offer. She must remain on the mountain for twenty years if she accepts.

Part 2, Chapter 26 - Uzaemon, Shuzai, and their hired men stay at the Harubayashi Inn. While outside, he sees an old woman watching him, which the landlord writes off as a local inbred girl. Uzaemon and his men travel to the foot of the mountain, and decide to attend in six groups of two. They will all ultimately storm the shrine, tell Enomoto that Orito is leaving with them peacefully, and they will not hesitate to kill to get her out. The party begins the ascent up the mountain. Uzaemon asks what it is like to kill a man, and Shuzai reveals that a man's first blood separates him from ordinary life. The first gate is taken, and the guards are tied up and gagged peaceably. Night comes on, and the party continues the ascent. Uzaemon waits while Shuzai and his men go and free Orito. No blood has been spilled to do so, Uzaemon learns from one of the men. One of the men encourages Uzaemon to drink from a flask, which he does, and he passes out.

When he awakens, he is with Enomoto in the shrine itself. Enomoto says the women are nuns and are property of the shrine. Uzaemon counters that Orito isn't anyone's to sell or buy. Enomoto reveals that Shuzai is his loyal friend, not Uzaemon's. Enomoto is



an elitist who hates Uzaemon's adopted family. Enomoto is an insane elitist, and reveals he has had Otane murdered. Enomoto then shoots Uzaemon in the head.

Part 3, Chapter 27 - It is now August, 1800. The slave, Ignatius, narrates the chapter. He wonders if he can own his own name, since he, as a person, is owned. He also wonders this because his changing masters have changed his name at will. Elattu tells him he can own his own name. Meanwhile, Ignatius talks about how much he enjoys the summer heat, while the whites do not. Ignatius also comes across Jacob, who is translating a scroll.

Part 3, Chapter 28 - Captain John Penhaligon reads about Japan from a book in his cabin on board the HMS Phoebus, which is traveling through the South China Sea. It is October 16, 1800. On board is Snitker. The ship's physician. Dr. Nash, bleeds Penhaligon help ease his gout. Snitker is being taken back to Dejima.

Part 3, Chapter 29 - Jacob wakes with a start during a nightmare, to discover he has slept with a prostitute. Heading around with van Cleef, Jacob spies a Dutch frigate sailing into harbor.

Part 3, Chapter 30 - Enomoto converses with Magistrate Shiroyama in Nagasaki, about how many things have changed. Debt, for example, is now called credit. The death of Ogawa Uzaemon means his family line shall end, and Enomoto lies and says that his death is a terrible thing. They receive news of the Dutch ship.

Part 3, Chapter 31 - Penhaligon and his ship have come into port seeking another Dutch ship, but wonders why it cannot be found. The idea is to war with and take from the Dutch, and to seduce the Japanese. But no such thing shall occur, Penhaligon realizes, wondering why Snitker should have steered them to Dejima at all. The first and second mates encourage Penhaligon to commandeer Dejima, because the Dutch East India Company is bankrupt, and the Dutch on Dejima might not be aware of this. But Penhaligon will have none of it, because those are not their orders. Yet they continue pressing the captain, with the idea of an Eastern Empire and a brand new British Pacific Fleet. It is the lure of empire. Penhaligon has van Cleef and Fischer taken captive. Major Cutlip and Lieutenant Hovell join Penhaligon's side as he introduces himself. Fischer and van Cleef are aghast to see Snitker with the British. Van Cleef tries to spit on Penhaligon and throws Snitker off the ship. He is then led away.

Part 3, Chapter 32 - The Union Jack is raised on the Phoebus. It is seen by the Dutch and the Japanese. Jacob and the others meet up to discuss what to do about the return of Fischer and van Cleef. Jacob becomes the acting chief. The other seven Europeans agree to his self-promotion. Jacob is summoned by the magistrate. Jacob tells Shiroyama that the English captain is waiting to see how the Dutch and Japanese respond -either with diplomacy or violence. If they don't do anything, the English will reveal their intentions. He explains those intentions are probably to begin building an empire. The Japanese are enraged.



Part 3, Chapter 33 - Shiroyama and his advisers speak plainly. They says Jacob speaks well and reasons clearly. Captain Doi reports that Nagasaki harbor is undermanned and poorly defended. Rather than one thousand men ready for duty, only sixty-seven are present. Shiroyama knows his own honor and family are in danger with the presence of the British warship. He sends word to summon as many men as can be found for defense.

Part 3, Chapter 34 - The harbor empties of Japanese boats, save two guard boats that circle the British ship. Penhaligon is delighted by this. While Van Cleef refuses to cut a deal with Penhaligon, Fischer is ready to do so. In exchange for cooperation with the British, Fischer shall receive a ten-percent cut of the profits.

Part 3, Chapter 35 - Marinus comes to visit Jacob. Marinus finds the Christian hymn the British are singing from on board their ship to be pleasing. Yet, it is in violation of Japan's religious edicts. Fischer returns and reveals the British want to trade with the Japanese, and that the Dutch East India Company is bankrupt. The English will pay the Dejima Europeans all back wages and enough wages for two more trading seasons if they remain. Jacob, Marinus, and Ouwehand are invited to din on the British ship to talk things over. Yet the Europeans loyally stand behind Jacob, and support him over Fischer. Anything that happens, Jacob is to be involved in.

Con Twomey later appeals to Jacob, saying Con Twomey is not his real name, but Fiacre Muntervary is. He has, in the past, murdered a British captain. It turns out the British major is not dead at all, but Major Cutlip on the Phoebus. This worries Con Twomey to death. Jacob weighs the moral costs: collaboration and exposing Con Twomey to Cutlip, versus destitution and slow deaths over a lost lifetime. Fischer goes ahead with the British case to the magistrate, who insists meeting with only Fischer.

Part 3, Chapter 36 - Jacob later meets with the magistrate. Jacob tells the magistrate that the Dutch are at war with the English, and they break promises easily. So they must either defeat the British by a false treaty, or preventing the ship from leaving before the winter sets in. They will barricade the entrance to the harbor bay with boats armed with men with flaming arrows, which will be shot at the sails if the ship tries to escape.

Part 3, Chapter 37 - Fischer returns to the Phoebus Fischer reveals that Dejima is as good as theirs, provided Jacob is brought away in chains. However, a trade treaty must be undertaken with the Shogun, and it will take sixty days for a reply. The English are enraged. A sealed message is delivered, written by Jacob, denying the British claims on Dejima, and declaring Dejima a provisional and sovereign republic in league with the Japanese. Penhaligon knows his own honor is at risk if he returns from Japan empty-handed. Penhaligon sends a message to Jacob: surrender or be destroyed. The response is refused, and the British open fire on the guard boats. The ship then opens fire on Dejima itself, toppling warehouses. The Phoebus continues firing.

Part 3, Chapter 38 - Jacob watches the Phoebus fire on Dejima. Jacob and Marinus narrowly avoid being killed twice. The next morning, Jacob identifies a body washed ashore as that of a dead Englishman, killed by a cannon recoil. He is given a proper



burial. While waiting to see the magistrate, Jacob sees Enomoto, whom he questions about Orito. Enomoto says she will remain at the shrine. The magistrate wonders why Dejima was not totally destroyed by the English, and Jacob believes it is to make a point, and not to cause too much damage to Nagasaki. Jacob hands the magistrate a personal letter, and a plain-looking scroll.

Part 3, Chapter 39 - The magistrate leaves his post with the intent of ritual suicide, but not before playing a game of Go with Enomoto. They both drink from poisoned cups. Enomoto is accused by Magistrate Shiroyama of murder. The Magistrate reveals, as they both die, that what is occurring at the mountain has been passed on to the proper authorities, and without Enomoto to defend it, the order and the shrine will be dismantled. Both men then die.

Part 4, Chapter 40 - It is Friday, July 3, 1811. At the Mount Inasa Temple, above Nagasaki Bay, Marinus is laid to rest, overseen by Chief Resident Jacob de Zoet. Orito Aibagawa comes to visit Jacob. Jacob's son, Yuan, has arranged the meeting. Jacob has raised his son alone, for his wife has died long before. They talk about the past, and feel that their purpose for knowing one another appears to be ended.

Part 5, Chapter 41 - It is now November 3, 1817. Jacob is on board the ship Profetes, with Dejima fading in the distance. Jacob has been on Dejima for seventeen years. Yuan stays behind, consistent with Japanese law. It is revealed that in the ensuing time, Anna has married and died in childbirth. At home, Jacob becomes involved in local politics, and is well-respected. He remarries and has another son, to whom he leaves his Psalter before death.

Part 2, Chapter 21 - Part 5, Chapter 41 Analysis

Throughout Part 2 and Part 3 of the novel, the pace of events pick up. Following Orito's capture, she has friends who attempt to help her escape, but they are betrayed by men loyal to Enomoto. Enomoto himself is a deeply disturbed and delusional man, who is in love with power and control. He wields it with an iron fist at his mountaintop shrine, apart from his overtures to Orito. Down below his mountaintop shrine. Enomoto approaches power tactfully, using flattery and spirituality to seek and attain the ends he desires. One of those ends is to dispose of the Ogawa family line, and Uzaemon is ruthlessly murdered by the Lord Abbot.

Meanwhile, Jacob appears to have lost all of his power as well, as he is demoted for adhering to his Christian principles of honesty, and is later relegated to menial clerk tasks by his new overseers, Fischer and van Cleef. Things are further complicated by the reinsertion of Snitker and the British Royal Navy, the bankruptcy of the Dutch East India Company, and war between the Netherlands and Great Britain. Yet, through all of these personal and public difficulties, Jacob turns to God for strength. One by one, Jacob meets his challenges. The duplicity of van Cleef, Snitker, and Fischer catches up to them, and they are all, in turn, undone. Jacob's friends and allies in Dejima support him against all odds, nullifying the power of Fischer, van Cleef, and Snitker. Surviving



the British bombardment, Jacob unveils evidence about Enomoto's shrine to the magistrate. In turn, Enomoto is dealt with and killed, and Orito and the imprisoned women are set free.

But not all is happy with Jacob, for he can not marry Orito. He doesn't see her again for several years. When he does, they agree to part ways. Jacob marries and has a son, but his wife dies, and his son is required by Japanese law to stay behind. Jacob then returns home, remarries, and has a new son. He passes on to his son his faith and his treasured Psalter.



Characters

Jacob de Zoet

Jacob de Zoet is the main character and principal protagonist of David Mitchell's novel, "The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet". Jacob is a young, handsome man with high ideals, tremendous and sincere Christian faith, and aspires to make something of himself to marry his beloved, Anna. Jacob becomes a clerk for the Dutch East India Company, and travels to an outpost called Dejima on the coast of Japan. He promises Anna he will return to marry her in five years.

In Dejima, Jacob's Christian faith is put to the test against the dregs and scoundrels he must work with, all in a corrupt environment, and in between the forces of East and West. Jacob also meets and falls in love with Orito Aibagawa, but he cannot get close to her because she is of high social status on the Japanese mainland. Jacob ultimately is demoted for his honesty, and Orito is kidnapped by a mountain cult.

When Jacob's superiors are undone by their own treachery for trying to sell Dejima to the British, Jacob's fellows -though less-than-scrupulous people- support him wholeheartedly and loyally. Jacob meets with the local magistrate, and refuses to surrender to the British. He and his men survive a British naval bombardment, and Jacob gives the magistrate information about the corrupt mountain cult, which is disbanded following the death of its leader, Enomoto.

Jacob sees Orito again years later, after his wife has died and his son is growing up. Orito and Jacob decide to part ways. Years later, Jacob returns to his homeland of the Netherlands, remarries, and has a son, to whom he bequeaths his Psalter and his devoted Christian faith.

Anna

Anna is the beautiful, young Dutch woman with whom Jacob is in love, and the two want to marry one another. Jacob promises Anna he shall be gone for five or six years, a plan approved by Anna's father. Jacob does not return, and Anna marries, and dies in childbirth.

Chief Vorstenbosch

Chief Vorestenbosch is the highest ranking member of the Dutch East India Company present in Japan, and runs the island and trade on Dejima. Vorestenbosch is corrupt and attempts to pilfer copper when he leaves the island, but Jacob will not go along with him, and is immediately demoted.



Orito Aibagawa

Orito Aibagawa is the daughter of a well-respected samurai, who is also a doctor. She is beautiful and fiercely intelligent. She studies medicine in Dejima under Dr. Marinus, is well-respected midwife, and there meets Jacob. She is smitten with him, but following the death of her father, is sold by her stepmother to the mountain cult of Enomoto. There, she is imprisoned, and attempts an escape, only to turn back voluntarily to attend the other women. When the shrine is disbanded, Orito is freed, but doesn't see Jacob for another eleven years. When they do meet again, they agree to part ways, understanding that their romance can never happen.

Dr. Marinus

Dr. Marinus is a cantankerous, obstinate, yet brilliant physician who lives on the island of Dejima. He attends locals, Europeans, and teaches the art of modern Western medicine to a class of four pupils. He and Jacob strike up a friendship, and Marinus remains loyal to Jacob through the incursion of the British Royal Navy ship, Phoebus. Marinus dies a few years later, and is buried on mainland Japan in a foreigners cemetery. His funeral is attended by Orito and Jacob.

Lord Abbot Enomoto

Lord Abbot Enomoto is the daimyo of Kyoga, and runs a cult at Mount Shiranui Shrine. He oversees the ritual impregnation of twelve young women, their babies murdered, and more women imprisoned. Enomoto is fanatical, but wears the guise of a wolf in sheep's clothing. Enomoto kills Ogawa Uzaemon when he attempts to rescue Orito. Enomoto's cult is discovered by Magistrate Shiroyama, and Shiroyama kills Enomoto with poison. Enomoto's shrine and cult are then shut down, and the prisoners freed.

Magistrate Shiroyama

Magistrate Shiroyama handles the province of Edo, and the port of Nagasaki. He is wise and just, but utterly unprepared for the British incursion, which Jacob advises him throughout. Shiroyama, upon learning of Enomoto's true nature and his cult, reveals it to the Shogun, and commits ritual suicide as he poisons Enomoto through drink.

Daniel Snitker

Daniel Snitker is the former Dutch East India Company Chief Resident of Dejima. Arrested and kicked out of office for dereliction of duty and thievery, Snitker later joins the British when the Company goes bankrupt. He attempts to have the British buy or conquer the island, but the attempt fails.



Captain Penhaligon

Captain Penhaligon is an English naval officer in command of the ship Phoebus. He brings his ship and crew to Nagasaki with the intent of plundering Dutch vessels, and later with the intent of taking over Dejima. When his demands are not met, he bombards the island briefly, and then sails his ship home, having made a point.

Yuan

Yuan is the son of Jacob de Zoet, and Jacob's local Japanese wife. Yuan is a devoted son and very intelligent, but cannot return to the Netherlands with his father as per Japanese law. Jacob never sees Yuan again.



Objects/Places

Japan

Japan is an isolated island nation that only trades with the Dutch. It is the location of Nagasaki Harbor and the island of Dejima. Japan is ruled by the Shogun, who oversees law and treaties.

Nagasaki Harbor

Nagasaki Harbor is a bay and port city in Japan, which contains the island of Dejima. Jacob arrives and leaves through Nagasaki Harbor, as does the British ship Phoebus.

Dejima Island

Dejima Island is a man-made island in Nagasaki Harbor, Japan. Dejima is connected to the mainland by a bridge, through which few can pass. Dejima is home to the Dutch East India Company, and is a place of trade, business, and corruption.

The Land Gate

The Land Gate is the gate that separates the bridge to Dejima from mainland Japan. It keeps unwanted or illegal individuals from crossing back and forth freely.

Edo

Edo is the Japanese region in which Nagasaki Harbor and Dejima sit.

Mount Shiranui Shrine

Mount Shiranui Shrine is located in the Japanese province of Kyoga. It is overseen by Lord Abbot Enomoto, is the site of a hideous and fanatical cult, and is where Orito is taken prisoner. The shrine and cult are later disbanded.

Twelve Creeds Scroll

The Twelve Creeds Scroll is written by a defecting acolyte of the Shrine, and details the horrible practices of the cult. The scroll is passed along to Jacob, ultimately, who gives it to the local magistrate to pass on to the authorities.



Psalter

The Psalter is an abbreviated book of the Gospels and other Biblical texts, used by Jacob to pray throughout the novel. It has been passed down to him from his ancestors, and he guards the book with his life, smuggling it onto Dejima, and keeping it hidden. He ultimately passes on the book to his Dutch son.

Copper

Copper is a valuable resource Japan produces, and that the Dutch require more of. Japan increases its output to attempt to whet the Dutch appetite, but the Dutch East India Company goes bankrupt. Vorstenbosch steals and resells a large amount of copper.

Cannons

Cannons line the lower decks of the British warship Phoebus. Cannons are used to bombard Dejima by Captain Penhaligon.



Themes

Clash of Cultures

Clash of cultures is a major and overarching theme in David Mitchell's novel, "The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet". Clash of cultures involves the meeting of two diverse nations or cultures, and how each is affected by, influences, and rebuffed by the other. The clash of cultures is on visible display throughout the novel, and occurs in three major areas - religion, law, and interpretation.

In terms of religion, Japan has outlawed Christianity. Its past has been very inhospitable to Christians, as Christians were slaughtered by the Japanese. Japan is a mixture of various pagan and spiritual religions, as well as fanatical cults like Enomoto's. Despite this religious intolerance, Japanese Christians still practice in secret for fear of their lives. Jacob himself smuggles his Psalter onto Dejima. The Christian concept of marrying for love is totally at odds with Japanese arranged marriages. Whereas Christianity speaks of purity, respect for the body and the self, and believing children to be gifts from God, Enomoto's cult is one of sex, impregnation, and infanticide.

Various customs and laws also seem shocking to both Christians and the Japanese. New treaties and laws cannot be made without some kind of precedent, and precedents are increasingly hard to come by. Certain Japanese concepts, such as death for thievery, seem appalling to many, including Jacob. Furthermore, indirectness in negotiations infuriates the Dutch, whereas for the Japanese, diplomacy is a bureaucratic art. That foreigners may not marry Japanese women of high social status, or allow any Japanese children from leaving the island, also strikes Jacob as saddening.

In terms of language, there is the difficulty of interpretation. Laws, customs, ideas, and figures of speech are difficult to translate or explain, from either side to the other. For example, the Japanese do not understand why Westerners would name a ship after a Greek god of a mythological religion. Jacob must explain that they do this not because of the god, but because of the metaphorical and symbolic truths that are part of the stories contained in mythology. Terms like "in broad daylight" are also difficult to translate, because they speak not just to language differences, but culturally-different relevance.

Love

Love is a major and dominant theme in David Mitchell's novel, "The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet". In the novel, love appears in a wholly romantic sense, and occurs with Jacob, two women, and presumably two other women. Love fuels the initialization of the novel, and helps to prod along Jacob's life.



Love first appears with Anna, the Dutch girl Jacob wishes to marry. The two are in love, but Anna's father will not let them marry until Jacob makes something of himself. It is his love for Anna which spurs Jacob to take a job in the Dutch East India Company in Japan, on the island of Dejima. This love is tender, gentle, and deeply genuine.

Love next occurs with the appearance of Orito Aibagawa, and occurs in a very chivalric way. Jacob and Orito are clearly in love with one another, but because of Japanese custom and law, they cannot touch each other. Jacob undertakes the role of chivalric love by sending gifts to Orito, speaking to her occasionally, and thinking about her relentlessly.

It is possible that Jacob loves at least two more women, but this love is never explicitly or marginally defined in the novel. Jacob marries a local Japanese girl, with whom he has a son, Yuan. But the girl dies at some point, leaving Jacob to raise his son alone. Back home, Jacob remarries yet again, and has another son. Based on Jacob's past experiences with women, one can surmise that love dictated the decisions to marry.

Religion

Religion is a major and overarching theme in David Mitchell's novel, "The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet". Religion appears primarily in two forms in the novel: the religious cult of Enomoto, and the Christianity of Jacob. Each religion ultimately affects its followers in profoundly different ways.

Lord Abbot Enomoto leads the religious cult of Shiranui Shrine. The religion involves, among other things, abduction of young girls, some of them disfigured, impregnating them, and slaughtering their babies in order to appeal to their goddess. The religion is truly a cult, full of fanatical devotees who give absolute and unquestioning loyalty to Enomoto. Orito is one of the girls who is caught up in the fanatical and hateful cult, sold into it by her stepmother. There is no freedom in the cult, and women are forced to stay on the mountaintop for at least twenty years before they are thrown out.

Jacob's Christian faith, by contrast, is markedly different. Jacob understands that Christianity is an empowering faith which gives strength and salvation through God and Jesus Christ. Christianity is based on freedom, love, mercy, respect, salvation, and redemption, and these sorts of values clash with traditional Japanese religions. Jacob, as a Christian, grapples with slavery, corruption, dishonesty, and the lack of freedom he finds not just among the Japanese, but among people who profess to be Christian in the Dutch East India Company. Yet, through these times of trial, Jacob's devotion to his faith is a beautiful thing which gives him the courage to weather the storms he passes through.



Style

Point of View

David Mitchell tells his novel, "The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet" in the third-person omniscient perspective, in present tense, excepting one chapter. One chapter is told in the first-person perspective, from the point of view of the slave Ignatius. The majority of the novel is told in the third-person omniscient perspective because Mitchell has to work across two vastly different cultures in a vastly different time than today. Covering thousands of miles, two centuries-old history, and a host of characters, the continuous narration of the third-person allows for easier transition between people and the events they experience.

Setting

David Mitchell sets his novel, "The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet" in late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Japan. The novel involves the meeting of two dramatically different nations and cultures, which sets a perilous and momentous stage upon which the story is told. The setting works well for the plot, for the reader is able to see a market contrast between the two cultures, as well as between the characters, their values, morals, and modes of belief. Indeed, the very time of the setting -in 1799-1800 Japan- is momentous, for it is a door to the West for Japan, and a window to the East for the West.

Language and Meaning

David Mitchell tells his novel, "The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet" in language that is simple, poetic, but immensely layered, taking some time to traverse due to vast descriptive tendencies of the author, and because of many of the phrases and terms that are antiquated. The simple and poetic language mirrors the impressions of Japan at first sight: simple, and poetic. But Japan is a much more complex country than first meets the eye. Mitchell's writing ultimately mirrors this, with the sheer number of words Mitchell uses. This nevertheless gives the novel an authentic feel for the times, transporting the reader.

Structure

David Mitchell divides his novel, "The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet" into five major parts, and forty-one consecutive chapters within those parts. Each part deals with a specific theme or plot-driving event (Part 1, for example, occurs because Jacob seeks to improve himself for marriage). Each chapter deals with events in the lives of Jacob, Orito, and various other characters who come and go with the plot. This straightforward structure works well for the novel, allowing the reader to focus on the plot and the

evolution of characters, rather than unnecessarily confusing the reader with the book's structure itself.



Quotes

A madman, Jacob supposes, might imagine himself in a half-cracked jade bowl.
-Part 1, Chapter 3, p. 16

A moth careers into a candle flame; it drops to the table, flapping. "Poor Icarus."
Ouwehand crushes it with his tankard. "Won't you ever learn?"
-Part 1, Chapter 5, p. 56

"This is the longest bridge you ever cross, because this bridge go between two worlds."
-Part 1, Chapter 7, p. 87

"A tidy metaphor does not make a wrong thing right."
-Part 1, Chapter 8, p. 107

"So you are an indigo river. You sound like a poem."
-Part 1, Chapter 10, p. 128

"Are we no more than the totality of our acts?"
-Part 2, Chapter 14, p. 185

"The one dog who barks at nothing answered by a thousand dogs barking at something."
-Part 2, Chapter 16, p. 208

Once I believe this lunacy, Orito thinks, I am truly Shiranui's prisoner.
-Part 2, Chapter 25, p. 299

"You'd think these coincidences'd not happen, not off the stage, not in life..."
-Part 3, Chapter 35, p. 406

"Nobody ever died for a flag, only what that flag symbolizes."
-Part 3, Chapter 38, p. 439



Topics for Discussion

What is the importance of the following quote: "This is the longest bridge you ever cross, because this bridge goes between two worlds." (Part 1, Chapter 7, p. 87) Why is this quote so important, and how does it reflect the various themes of the novel?

Discuss the theme of clash of cultures in David Mitchell's novel, "The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet". What is the clash of cultures? Where does clash of cultures appear in the novel? What are some of the cultural clashes that occur in the novel? What are the effects of these clashes?

Discuss the theme of love in David Mitchell's novel, "The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet". How does love appear in the novel, and which characters does love affect? In what ways does love affect these characters, and what kinds of love do they share? Why is love important to the overall plot of the novel?

As a Christian, Jacob is deeply troubled by corruption on Dejima, and many of the Japanese cultural, political, and legal practices. Give three instances where Jacob's faith is confronted by corruption or cultural, legal, and political practices. How does Jacob cope with these issues? Does he do this for the better or for the worst?

Discuss the theme of religion in David Mitchell's novel, "The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet". Which two major religions are presented in the novel? What are these religions like? What do these religions teach, and how are they used? Furthermore, how do these religions affect their adherents?

Toward the end of the novel, the British Royal Naval ship, HMS Phoebus, briefly bombards Dejima, but does not destroy it or Nagasaki. Why is this so? What are the motives of the British? Are the British successful in what they do?

At the end of the novel, Magistrate Shiroyama metes out justice to Enomoto, yet also takes his own life. Why is this so? Does this contradict, or fall in line with Japanese custom? Why? How might Jacob react to this ritualistic suicide?