

When We Were Orphans Study Guide

When We Were Orphans by Kazuo Ishiguro

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



Contents

When We Were Orphans Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Chapter 1.....	5
Chapter 2.....	6
Chapter 3.....	7
Chapter 4.....	8
Chapter 5.....	9
Chapter 6.....	10
Chapter 7.....	12
Chapter 8.....	13
Chapter 9.....	14
Chapter 10 and 11.....	15
Chapter 12.....	17
Chapter 13.....	18
Chapter 14 and 15.....	19
Chapter 16.....	20
Chapter 17.....	22
Chapter 18 and 19.....	23
Chapter 20.....	24
Chapter 21.....	25
Chapter 22.....	26
Chapter 23.....	28
Characters.....	30
Objects/Places.....	33



Themes..... 35

Style..... 37

Quotes..... 40

Topics for Discussion..... 42



Plot Summary

When We Were Orphans is set in England and Shanghai prior to World War II. Christopher Banks, the narrator and main character of the story, was born and raised in Shanghai before he is sent back to live with his aunt upon the mysterious disappearance of his parents. In Shanghai, he has a Japanese friend Akira, who lives next door. When his father disappears, Akira starts a game of detectives, apparently to try to help Christopher cope with the situation. This game is at the root of the vocation he eventually chooses and attains prominence by. He becomes a detective.

In London, he quickly becomes well-renowned for his ability to solve cases that others can not. At the beginning of his career, the solving of these difficult cases in England consumes him. It also satisfies him. However, as his career stabilizes, he starts to feel a necessity to return to Shanghai and solve the case of his parents' apparent kidnappings. He feels, in fact, that the world is relying on him to solve this mystery and save it from the turmoil that has befallen it. By then, he has adopted Jennifer, an orphan like him and the thought of abandoning her causes him much distress. However, he feels that even she would not be able to respect him if he shirked his calling.

Upon arrival in Shanghai, he sees that the city he knew so well is ravaged by the Sino-Japanese war; the officials whose cooperation he needs are corrupt; and all clues lead nowhere. He is frustrated and discouraged. Nothing is as it seems in Shanghai and he despairs of ever being able to solve the case.

While there, he runs into Sarah Hemming, the evasive woman that he has known since the early years of his career. Sarah is now unhappily married to a man addicted to gambling and opium. She asks Christopher to run-away to Macao with her. In a moment of disenchantment with his own mission, he agrees and shows up to the meeting place. The two share one kiss, but at the last moment, he decides that he absolutely must follow one last lead to bring him to where his parents are imprisoned. His intention is to return right away and set sail with her. However, things do not go smoothly and he is unable to return to her within a reasonable amount of time. She sets off to Macao without him. They never see each other again.

As for the lead, it turns out to be a complete waste. However, in time, he does acquire access to the one man who knows everything. This is the man he grew-up calling Uncle Phillip. Christopher has long known about Uncle Phillip is deeply connected to his mother's kidnapping. Now he learns from Uncle Phillip that his parents' disappearances, which he always assumed had something to do with their courageous stand against opium, were due to causes much less noble. His father had simply left Shanghai with his mistress and died of typhoid fever in Singapore. His mother was kidnapped by a War Lord to be his concubine. Christopher would find her in a mental institute in Hong Kong.

The book ends with Christopher being content that he had pursued his mission to the end. His vocation, however, has made his life a lonely one. Jennifer and the anticipation that she might one day marry and have children, is his one consolation.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Part 1, which is Chapter 1 to 3, takes place in London, on July 24th of 1930. Christopher starts Chapter 1 recalling the summer of 1923, the first summer after he came to London after finishing school in Cambridge. In the first chapter, Christopher mentions that he had no family, except for an old aunt in Shropshire and that he is a detective.

He runs into a school friend, James Osbourne, who was famous for his well-connectedness. James unknowingly offends Christopher by making a comment about Christopher having been an "odd-bird." However, Christopher decides to accept James' invitation to come to a fancy dinner party.

At the party, Christopher sees Sarah Hemmings for the first time. Christopher is advised by an older gentleman at the party against speaking to Ms. Hemmings, who explains that it would be a waste of his time. As a result, Christopher does not introduce himself to her for another two years. When he finally does, she snubs him blatantly. He does not forget this and unconsciously remains resentful towards her.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapter 1 sets up a few basic facts, about the protagonist, that are important to start the story. For example, Christopher was born and raised in Shanghai until he became an orphan, whereupon he returned to England to be raised by his aunt. After attending several boarding schools, he went on to graduate from Cambridge. In 1930, he is a young man at the beginning of his career as a detective. These facts create an image of Christopher and the world he lives in. This book is his story told from his eyes; therefore, the reader must first have a solid enough understanding of him. The story, however, is naturally biased. On occasion, as when James makes a comment that Christopher disagrees with, the discrepancy between what Christopher perceives and what a third-person perceives forces the reader to regard Christopher as possibly an unreliable narrator.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

In Chapter 2, Christopher runs into Colonel Chamberlain, the man who brought him from Shanghai to England many years ago. Being a successful detective at this time, Christopher invites him to dinner at a rather posh restaurant. They reminisce about their past. Christopher is again irritated at how he is remembered. The Colonel remembers him as a crying little boy, while Christopher distinctly remembers himself as being very optimistic about the trip.

Sarah Hemmings, meanwhile, is trying to hunt down Christopher. She finally finds him at Kensington Garden where he is looking for clues about a mysterious death. She asks him to bring her as a guest to the Meredith Foundation dinner. Reminded of his resentments towards her, he declines. She becomes very upset and threatens that she will be waiting for him in the lobby, regardless.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2 introduces an even earlier time in Christopher's life. Colonel Chamberlain's appearance creates an opportunity to explain some of the history behind his beginnings. The mystery is alluded to and once again the discrepancy between Christopher's perception of himself and that of a third-person's is brought up.

Sarah Hemming's sudden interest in Christopher foreshadows that she will be an important part of the story. At this point, it is still unclear whether their relationship will be antagonistic or supportive. Her motive for approaching him is clear, however. She does not try to hide the fact that she is trying to use him. Christopher's proud character shines through when he turns down her request, despite his obvious attraction to her.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Christopher forgets all about Sarah's threat and is surprised to find her there on the day of the dinner. He still declines to take her as his date and she creates a scene. She manages to get in anyway, but not as Christopher's date.

The dinner is in honor of Sir Cecil Medhurst, for his contribution to world affairs. During the evening, Christopher and he talk. Christopher asks him if, in his travels to Shanghai, he ever met Akira Yamashita. Sir Cecil has never met her. Sarah approaches them in time to hear about this inquiry.

Later in the evening, Christopher and Sarah make amends. Sarah explains that her ambition is to marry a man who will "make a difference" and hence, it was imperative that she be present at such prestigious affairs. They both apologize for the way they treated each other.

Chapter 3 Analysis

This chapter is used as an opportunity to highlight the politically restless atmosphere. The impending war is foreshadowed, as well as the effect that it will have on Christopher. Also, for the first time, Christopher's true obsession is hinted at. The fact that Christopher wants to ask this eminent man specifically about Akira, his childhood friend and that he is made uncomfortable by Sarah's interest in it, sets the stage for Christopher's eventual return to Shanghai.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Chapter 4 is the beginning of Part 2. It takes place in London, on May 15th of 1931. The chapter opens with a memory from Christopher's childhood in Shanghai. He talks about Akira and especially his peculiar habit of never admitting that he is wrong. He also remembers that Akira was always afraid of Christopher's mother. In retrospect, Christopher decides that this is due to an incident that occurred between his mother and the health inspector. The health inspector had told her that she was to get rid of her servants, because they came from a certain region believed to be unhygienic and dishonest. His mother, in turn, rebuked the health inspector for his lack of integrity. His mother's involvement with the anti-opium campaign is also recalled, as are tender moments of time spent with her.

Christopher and Sarah, meanwhile, run into each other at a luncheon. A general discussion at the table about mothers upsets Sarah, for she too is an orphan. Seeing her leave the room, Christopher senses that something is wrong. He goes after her and finds her at the entrance of the restaurant with tears in her eyes. A bond is formed between them, as they both acknowledge their orphan hood. She asks Christopher to ride the bus with her, as she so often had with her mother. On the bus, Christopher tells her more about Shanghai.

Chapter 4 Analysis

In this chapter, Christopher's life before losing his parents is portrayed in vivid details. In the chapters before, his past is only mentioned in passing. Nostalgia colors Christopher's memory. Also, in trying to recall the past, Christopher is frustrated with the unreliability of his memory, foreshadowing future issues with it. As for his relationship with Sarah, he seems to feel closer to her now; by the way he refers to her as "Sarah" as opposed to Miss Hemmings. Sarah is shown here in all her vulnerability.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

One day, Christopher's parents are arguing in the dining room. He cannot hear much of it. However, he can discern that the argument revolves around the fact that while his mother is an avid campaigner against opium trade in China and his father is employed by the British trading company responsible for opium distribution in China. This, naturally, is a source of tension between Christopher's parents. On this day, his mother chastises his father for making them all part of the sin. His father responds defensively that he it is not that simple. He also adds that it is too bad, but he cannot be like Philip.

Philip is a former colleague of Christopher's father, who quit the company in protest of the opium trade. Because of this, he is allied with Christopher's mother and is often at their house. Christopher feels very close to him, calling him Uncle Philip. In fact, he looks up more to Uncle Philip than he does to his father, to whom he is always cautious of showing alliance to. In retrospect, Christopher wonders if the words of reprimand he remembers his mother speaking to the Health Inspector might not indeed have been words spoken to his father during this argument in the dining room.

In either case, the tension between his parents is markedly heightened after this day and his parents do not speak to each other. Feeling concerned, he asks Akira if her parents ever stop speaking to each other. Akira says that this happens when he is not Japanese enough and his parents become too disappointed for words. He then advises Christopher that the problem at his home is that Christopher is not English enough. Hearing this, Christopher goes to Uncle Philip and asks him to be a role-model, such that he can be sufficiently English. Uncle Philip assures Christopher that he is fine just the way he is and that his parents are very proud of him.

Chapter 5 Analysis

In this chapter, the tension between Christopher's parents, apparently due to his mother's stand against opium and his father's employment to the trading company, is explored. His mother's obvious contempt and his father's weaknesses are depicted. Young Christopher, who is affectionately called Puffin by the adults in his life, naturally gravitates towards his mother and hence does not bond with his father. He does, in fact, feel a closer bond with Uncle Philip, who has more of his mother's respect than his father does. The scene between him and Uncle Philip shows a true affection felt by both parties for each other. The adult Christopher offers this as proof that Uncle Philip also had no idea of the way things would eventually play out, foreshadowing Uncle Philip's eventual betrayal.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

In this chapter, Akira leaves to attend school in Japan. This is in the fall. The summer before, he acts so nationalistic that Christopher feels rather weary of him. However, before long, he comes to miss him. In spite of this, it is a rather peaceful season, full of empty afternoons. Amongst these eventless days, he remembers a few events, which at the time seemed inconsequential, but more important retrospectively.

One afternoon, Uncle Philip comes over for one of his mother's Saturday morning campaign meetings. He stays for lunch and then proposes that they all go to the racetracks. Christopher's father begs off on account of work, but encourages Christopher's mother to take Christopher and go. Christopher's mother agrees, upon which all three adults look at Christopher to make the decision. If he acquiesces, then the outing would happen. If he doesn't want to go, his mother would not go either. Christopher feels his father's silent plea. He knows, without knowing how, that his father does not want them to go. He goes anyway and distinctly remembers his father laughing and waving good-bye at them as they drove off.

The other memories are about his father's boasting. His father never boasts. However, as they're eating dinner one night, his father turns to his wife and asks her if he told her about how the representative from the dock workers thanked him for all he did. Christopher's mother responds coldly that he had. Then he turns to Christopher and tells him that he is referred to as the honored hero. At another time, they are at the Public Gardens and Christopher's father makes a strange speech about how Christopher's mother has turned his father into a better man. He continues to say that he is not the same man that Christopher and his mother burst in on years ago. He is a man that Christopher will someday be proud of.

The incident he is referring to is the time when Christopher and his mother found his father in his study perspiring, distraught and possibly sobbing. Christopher does not remember the actual words and sentiments expressed at the time, but looking back on it, he thinks his father told his mother that he could not go against the company and they could not afford to go back to England on their own. Christopher admits, however, that this is an interpretation from foggy hindsight.

Other than these events, there is nothing to be recalled about that fall. Christopher is bored and listless for much of it. He is, therefore, very glad when Akira returns from Japan, quite unexpectedly.

Chapter 6 Analysis

This chapter, aside from Akira's departure and return, is based on memories that are hazy. Most of the memories are about Christopher's father. The retelling of these



memories establishes the dynamic between his parents. According to these recollections, his father is forever trying to live up to his mother's high expectations and establish his moral worth. His mother, however, always holds his father in disdain, even though, according to his father's speech at the Public Gardens, his father does eventually become nobler. These recollections explain why Christopher comes to believe that both his parents were kidnapped, because they stood-up for justice in the face of a mightier evil force. The fact that these are hazy memories is important, for the reality will turn out to be quite different. Ishiguro explores the true relationship between memory and reality, by first setting up in this chapter how Christopher creates his memories to support his beliefs. Reading this chapter, the reader believes that these memories are accurate, despite Christopher's own admission that they may not be. Eventually, when the reality is revealed, the unreliability of memory is disconcerting.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Akira's return is permanent. Evidently, he is not Japanese enough and was tormented by classmates, teachers and relatives alike. His unhappiness is such that his parents feel compelled to bring him back. Thereafter, however, Akira is constantly afraid of being sent back. Perhaps to compensate for this fear, Akira becomes obsessed with doing something very brave. He comes up with a plan to steal the "magic lotion" from one of the servant's room. This servant is one that Akira believes to have a collection of hands in his room, as well as other supernatural powers. He and Christopher accomplish this, but then are faced with the prospect of having to return it. Akira is very scared to go back in the room, but he is more scared about his parents finding out that he had taken the bottle. He is torn between the need to return the bottle and the fear to return to the room. To alleviate his friend's anxiety, Christopher agrees to take the bottle back with Akira the next day,

However, on the planned day, Christopher's father disappears and the police come to his house. He is confined to the library for the whole day. Christopher is more annoyed by this situation than scared. He worries mostly about what Akira will think of him when he doesn't show up at the promised time. In fact, this is what he is thinking about when his mother tells him that, no matter what, Christopher can be proud of his father.

Chapter 7 Analysis

This chapter delves into the fears that Akira has about his world, both the supernatural and the concrete. Akira, for all his boasting, harbors seemingly irrational fears. He is afraid of sorcerers and being sent back to Japan. His fears are contagious, for even though Christopher doesn't understand their basis, he starts to also feel the same fears. This chapter accurately evokes the world of a child. A child's fears, although much detached from reality, feel very real to that child. In fact, real life tragedies, like the disappearance of his father, does not feel as real to Christopher as the possibility of Akira's wrath.

Addressing Akira's fears and not Christopher's, helps to distinguish any that existed for Christopher, before the disappearance of his parents. There is no question as to the validity of the fears that he inherited from Akira. If the adult Christopher had looked back at the child Christopher's fear, it would not be so easy to show that they were completely unfounded. For this reason, despite the fact that Christopher is the main character, it is Akira's childhood terrors that are discussed the most in this chapter.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Akira is at first very angry with Christopher's betrayal. However, when he finds out the reason, he forgives him and invents the detective game to help Christopher deal with the situation. Akira is very sensitive, for when Christopher is uncharacteristically adamant in insisting that his father is not tied-up, it is Akira who ensures that Christopher's father is accommodated very comfortably by the kidnappers in their game. Meanwhile, Christopher is just as anxious to find out the fate of the magic lotion. Akira is reluctant to talk about it at first, but Christopher eventually finds out that the lotion was returned by Akira's sister Etsuko. The two boys discuss the possibility of Christopher having to return to England if his father is not found, but Christopher dismisses this as unlikely.

As Christopher evokes these childhood memories, he recalls a Chinese man with a plump face and is certain that he had something to do with the kidnapping of his parents. He remembers this man visiting his house and his mother chasing him away in a fury. Years later, he comes across a newspaper photograph of this same man. He is identified as the warlord, Wang Ku. Christopher intuits that this Chinese man is intimately connected to Uncle Phillip.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Even when it becomes evident that Christopher's father is truly missing, Christopher's fears are not openly acknowledged. He deals with it through play. It is this play with Akira that influences the vocation he chooses, the obsession that will drive him and the illusions that he'll pursue. This chapter goes into the details of the detective game, which will be important in understanding the development of the story when Christopher returns to Shanghai later.

The warlord Wang Ku is introduced and it is foreshadowed that this man is profoundly connected to his parents' disappearance.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Since his father's disappearance, Christopher has been careful not to let his mother out of his sight; for fear that the same fate should befall her. He does not understand why the other adults have done nothing to protect her. Uncle Philip is the only other person he trusts her safety with.

One sunny day, the atmosphere in Christopher's house is cheerful for the first time in a long time. Hearing his mother laugh in her old way, Christopher lets down his guard. He is tempted by Uncle Philip's promise to buy a piano accordion and allows his mother to be alone in the house. After they leave his mother, Uncle Phillip takes Christopher to a strange part of town and abandons him. When Christopher finally finds his way home, he finds that his mother has been kidnapped.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Christopher is afraid to let his mother out of his sight, betraying the true sense of insecurity caused by his father's disappearance. His fears are warranted. Not only does his mother disappear, but trusted Uncle Philip is somehow responsible. This chapter finally explains what eventually happens to his relationship with Uncle Philip. It also gives an explanation for why Christopher feels so responsible for his parents' fate. Young Christopher feels responsible for not protecting his mother and allowing anything to happen to her. As an adult, he seeks to rescue her, so that he may find redemption.



Chapter 10 and 11

Chapter 10 and 11 Summary

Chapter 10 and 11 are the only two chapters in Part 3, which takes place in London on April 12th of 1937. Jennifer is introduced. Christopher adopted her three years ago. She, too, is an orphan. With the money Christopher inherited from his Aunt, he supports her and pays for her boarding school.

He has come to be Jennifer's guardian through Lady Beaton, the widow of a famous philanthropist. Jennifer quickly wins Christopher over with her amazingly positive attitude. For example, when her trunks are lost in travel, she takes the news without even a flutter of an eyelid. It concerns Christopher, however, that she is just putting up a front. He approaches her in hopes of opening her up, going so far as to recount his own journey back to England after his parents' disappearance. However, her response is that the things that were lost were just things, nothing compared to the loss of parents.

In this chapter, he is torn about his responsibilities for Jennifer and his need to return to Shanghai to resolve his parents' kidnapping. By this time, he is sure that he must go. This is largely due to the silent pressure he feels from society at large. He recounts two conversations, where his responsibility to go back to Shanghai is strongly implied by the other person.

The dilemma of how to tell Jennifer of his possible long departure weighs heavily on his mind. However, he is now convinced that the world is waiting for him to return to Shanghai and solve the case. Somehow, it is now a case that affects the stability of the whole world.

His determination is further solidified when he meets Sarah at a wedding. She is now married to Sir Cecil and the two of them are about to leave for Shanghai where Sir Cecil will attempt to better the situation. Christopher does not see her before she leaves. Indeed, it is over a year before he actually embarks for Shanghai.

Chapter 10 and 11 Analysis

The adoption of Jennifer is symbolic of his desire to right something that is wrong. His empathy for Jennifer betrays the lack of resolution he feels about his parents' disappearance.

Adopting Jennifer proves not to be enough. Suddenly, his need to return to Shanghai becomes critical. The fact that it is personally critical to him is something he cannot accept. As a way to justify this need as an external one, he starts to perceive that others, including Sarah, are pressuring him, expecting him to return to Shanghai and solve the mystery. He begins to believe that it is a matter of global peace. Whether this perception is accurate or not is unclear. Logically, it is unlikely that the mystery can have

such universal implications. However, Christopher's depictions of other people's expectations are convincing.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Chapter 12 and 13 comprise Part 4. It is set in the Cathay Hotel, Shanghai, on September 20th of 1937. Christopher is finally in Shanghai. He is discouraged by the destruction he sees in the city of his childhood, but more so by the apathy he witnesses amongst the "Shanghai elites," who are the ones that depend on him to save them while they themselves are unwilling to do anything themselves. He is also frustrated by the authorities who are supposed to assist him in finding his parents.

At the welcome party thrown in his honor at the English consulate, Christopher asks Mr. McDonald about the Yellow Snake killings. He is convinced that Mr. McDonald is actually a senior intelligence man in disguise. Christopher is anxious to speak to the Yellow Snake. He is met with a lukewarm promise of assistance from Mr. McDonald. Another official, Mr. Grayson, barrages him with questions about the details of a welcoming ceremony for his parents. Christopher is thrown off-kilter by the strange direction of this conversation. Just then, he hears a loud explosion. Everybody moves towards the window, where he can see the Japanese war ships sending shells over the International Settlement. The group seems unnaturally undisturbed. They seem to be convinced that the bombings are no more than a show to watch, as far as they are concerned. Christopher finds this attitude disgusting. At the time, somebody expresses the belief that all will be well now that Christopher is here. Christopher uses this as an opportunity to make a speech of his optimism concerning the probability of his solving the case.

Just as the crowd is breaking away from the window to give their attention to the new show of Eurasian dancers, Sarah approaches him. He finds her in good health and humor that night. However, he mentions that his first impression of her will turn out to be false and he chastises himself for his lack of observation. Before they part, Sarah off-handedly mentions that she will be in Shanghai a long time, unless someone comes to her rescue.

Chapter 12 Analysis

This chapter creates a very surreal stage. The entire welcome party, thrown for Christopher at the British consulate, is very strange. The bombing that takes place outside the window is observed as if it were just another show. Grayson bombards Christopher with questions about the welcome party for his parents. Sarah appears and Christopher is discombobulated. The sense of coherence that has been established up until now is systemically destroyed. This chapter is important for creating the feeling of chaos that will persist during his stay in Shanghai and throughout his search for his parents.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Christopher's investigation is leading nowhere. One night, after spending a day in a boathouse where three dead bodies had been discovered, he finds himself in low spirits. He decides to go to a small club to unwind. There, he falls into a conversation with the doorman, who mentions in passing that he saw Sir Cecil and Sarah on their way to the Lucky Chance Club. Christopher decides to look for them there.

Lucky Chance Club turns out to be a rather seedy gambling establishment. He finds Sarah with a very drunken Sir Cecil. Christopher finds out that Sir Cecil has fallen into gambling since he's come to Shanghai and has lost a considerable amount of money. In an attempt to win it back, Sarah and Sir Cecil's evenings are spent at establishments like the Lucky Chance Club, where Sir Cecil becomes wasted and proceeds to lose even more money. There is nothing left of the man Christopher last saw in England. Christopher becomes very alarmed at the turn Sarah's life has taken, but when he expresses concern, Sarah waves it away.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Christopher arrives in Shanghai to see that London's two most prominent people are not who he thought they were. This is a further derivation on the theme of reality and illusion. In this chapter, once again, things are not what they seem to be.

Sarah married Sir Cecil because of her aspiration to marry a man who would "make a difference." Sir Cecil is a great deal older than her and a man who has already made a mark on history. However, her hopes are that if she supports him, he will be able to do one more great deed. These hopes turn out to be deadends. Once she gets him to Shanghai, Sir Cecil is unable to rouse himself to do anything except gamble, drink, take opium and degrade Sarah. Sarah, meanwhile, is basically a babysitter for the once great Sir Cecil. She no longer inhabits social events like the Meredith Foundation dinner.



Chapter 14 and 15

Chapter 14 and 15 Summary

Christopher has an unsatisfactory meeting with Mr. McDonald and loses his temper. He attributes this to the fact that right before this meeting, Mr. Grayson had cornered him again with questions about his parents' welcoming ceremony. Christopher finds these questions unnerving.

The only other time he had contemplated life after his parents' rescue was when he met Anthony Morgan, an old school friend living in Shanghai. Morgan takes Christopher to Christopher's old house, the house he grew-up in. A Chinese family lives there now, but upon Christopher's arrival, they tell him they have been waiting for his return and will be moving out as soon as he is ready to move back in with his parents. The house looks completely different. After spending some time amicably with the family, Christopher and Morgan leave.

On the return trip, Christopher asks Morgan about Inspector Kung, the man whom he and Akira worshipped as the greatest detective in the world when they were children. Morgan tells Christopher that Inspector Kung is now just a pitiful drunk. Christopher takes offence at this, as he did at a comment Morgan made earlier in the evening about both of them having both been "miserable loners" at school. He loses his temper again and they do not part on friendly terms.

Chapter 14 and 15 Analysis

In these chapters, Christopher is easily provoked and loses his anger quickly. His agitated state of mind is clearly expressed. His emotional state is symbolic of the instability of reality. There is almost a dreamlike quality to the whole experience of revisiting his childhood home. It is never explained who the Chinese people who live there are and why they are so willing to relinquish the house to Christopher. Nor is the connection between Morgan and the family explained. It is mentioned that there was some "agreement" made in the past, but it is never discussed. It is assumed that his parents will be found sometime in the near future and that they will all live in this home again. In his interaction with Morgan, the theme of the unreliable memory comes up again. Nobody is who they seem to be in Shanghai.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Chapter 16 is the beginning of Part 6 and takes place in the Cathay Hotel, Shanghai, on October 20th of 1937. Christopher seeks out Inspector Kung and finds him at the Inn of Morning Happiness; an establishment with rooms that are more like stalls. It appears that Morgan's description of him is accurate. Inspector Kung is a disheveled old man now, living in a wretched place. Christopher introduces himself as a longtime fan and the Inspector is pleased.

Christopher asks him about the Wu Cheng Lou Shooting Incident. He reminds him of a suspect who ended up to be completely unrelated to this incident, but who confessed to being a part of a kidnapping gang. Inspector Kung remembers that they checked out all the houses this suspect had mentioned, except one. The last one, they couldn't get into. Christopher explains that he thinks his parents are in that remaining house. Inspector Kung tries to recall something about this house, but he cannot. His mind is not what it used to be. He promises to call if he remembers anything.

When Christopher returns to the hotel in the evening, he is given a note sent by Sarah, asking him to meet her. When he does meet her, she explains to him that she has made all arrangements necessary to go away. She doesn't have enough money to go to England, so she is starting by going to Macao. She explains to Christopher that she is scared and wants him to go with her. She paints an idyllic picture of them living happily ever after. Even Jennifer would be sent for. Eventually, Christopher agrees. They make plans for Christopher to be picked up by a driver the next day, at half past three. Christopher kisses her and they part.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Christopher's disenchantment with Inspector Kung and his despair at obtaining any worthwhile information from him, makes the idea of running away with Sarah seem appealing. Sarah catches him when he is depressed about meeting with his former hero and is feeling that the whole investigation is futile. On Sarah's part, she is not deceptive about why she wants Christopher to come. She does not pretend to be in love with him. She says that she is scared about going alone. She wants someone to go with her and she wants someone who will be there everyday. She is done with her ambitions. She wants to settle down and for that she is willing to "settle" with Christopher. Even the kiss they share is not romantic, as Christopher giggles afterwards and she shoos him home.

Despite the fact that this is the first love scene in the book between Sarah and Christopher, it does not promise very much as far as their relationship is concerned. It is apparent that they will not run off to Macao and live happily ever after. Throughout the

book, all idyllic ideas come crashing down. Because of this recurring theme, it is obvious that this scenario too, will not come to fruition.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Christopher goes about the next morning as if he were not leaving that afternoon for Macao. He feels this is the only conscientious thing to do. As he is finishing his lunch, he is summoned to the phone. It is Inspector Kung, who remembers something important about the house. He remembers that the house is directly across from the house of a man called Yeh Chen, who is blind. Christopher thanks him for this information, but he has no plans to pursue the lead. He packs and waits for the driver in his room. At half past three, the driver comes and takes him away.

It turns out that this driver knows of a blind actor by the name of Yeh Chen and knows where he lives. They drive through confusing little alleys until they arrive at the phonograph store, where Sarah is waiting for him. Christopher asks the driver to wait for him outside the store. In the store, Sarah kisses him and tells him that it will only be a few minutes before they will leave. Christopher decides to use these few minutes to see if he can find the house of the blind Yeh Chen. Without much explanation, he leaves Sarah at the store and returns to the driver.

He asks the driver to take him to the house of Yeh Chen. The driver takes him on a confusing trip that leads them into Chapei, where the war zone is. The driver tells him that it is too dangerous to go further. Christopher loses his temper, but then calms down enough to ask the driver to write a map of where the house is. Christopher asks him to take him to a police station. The driver points to a building, Christopher thanks him and they part.

Chapter 17 Analysis

As the previous chapter foreshadowed, Christopher does not go to Macao with Sarah. He has all the intentions in the world to do so, but at the very last minute, he cannot leave a lead unpursued. His desire to find his parents overshadows reality. The maze-like streets are symbolic of the enigmatic nature of his search for his parents. He is about to enter the war zone to find his parents. The stage is set for a difficult journey. In the style of all quest seeking literature, the hero must undergo a physically dangerous journey before he arrives at the truth. The obviously dangerous setting creates anticipation for Christopher's enlightenment to come.



Chapter 18 and 19

Chapter 18 and 19 Summary

At the police station, Christopher is greeted warmly. However, his request for Chinese policemen to accompany him to the house cannot be granted, because they are short on men. Christopher is impatient with the delay.

Finally, it is the Lieutenant himself who agrees to escort him. They stumble through rubble and holes in the walls in the midst of the fighting. Eventually, they get to a point where the Lieutenant says that they must wait. Christopher is unreasonable and does not want to wait. He lets loose a barrage of disrespectful comments. The lieutenant, however, remains calm and polite. He explains to Christopher that if he insists on continuing, he cannot go with him. However, he thinks that Christopher, as a white man, would be safer alone anyway. He gives him a torch, a revolver and some advice before he sends him off alone.

After walking alone for a while, he finds a group of bedraggled people surrounding a Japanese soldier. Christopher immediately recognizes him as Akira. It takes Akira some time to recognize him back, but eventually, he does. The two continue on together.

Chapter 18 and 19 Analysis

Christopher is the symbolic quest-seeker. Now Christopher's guide must leave him. Night falls and the sense of danger is enhanced. The scene that unfolds is hellish; full of distress, damage, death, decay and feces. Amongst this debris he finds Akira.

The question is whether it is actually Akira or not. It could be that Christopher, in his eagerness to find his friend, especially at this most frightening moment of his search, chooses to believe that the Japanese soldier is Akira. The Japanese soldier may be acquiescing to this identity because he sees that it behooves him. Then again, he may actually be Akira. It is impossible to know. He gives away no clue as to whether he is or isn't Akira. Christopher, despite being a successful detective, chooses to see what he wants to see and never doubts that it is Akira.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Christopher and Akira continue on to find the house. Christopher takes care of Akira's wounds. They eventually decide to stop for the night. In the morning Akira talks about dreaming of when he was a young boy. Christopher immediately interprets this to mean the childhood they shared and they talk about this for a while. Then Akira starts talking about his five-year-old son and becomes very sad.

They continue on their way and finally find the East Furnace, which is the landmark the Lieutenant had advised Christopher to look for. Christopher finds a name board on the ground and asks Akira if it says, "Yeh Cheh." Akira is at first unsure, but becomes relatively convinced that it is. Christopher looks at the house across and he knows that it is the house where his parents are. Akira is hesitant. Just then, a six year old girl comes out of the house and approaches them. She seems to be unaware that she is hurt and starts telling them about a dog that's hurt. She leads them towards the house.

Chapter 20 Analysis

This chapter deals with the theme of reality. Christopher is so convinced of what he wants to see, if the Japanese soldier says anything vague, he immediately interprets it in a way that supports his belief. For example, when the soldier says, "home village," Christopher translates that to "the Settlement," hence further supporting the soldier's identity as Akira. The soldier acquiesces and Christopher is satisfied. Also, when they find the name board, Christopher asks Akira if it says "Yeh Cheh," until Akira agrees that it says "Yeh Cheh." In this way, the reality conforms to Christopher's perception, even though his perception may be inaccurate. Ishiguro does an excellent job of showing the inaccuracies of reality.

When the little girl appears, Christopher is confused, because she does not fit the story in his mind. However, instead of using this as an opportunity to doubt his beliefs, he tries to find a way to fit her into his reality. He asks Akira, "Do you suppose she has anything to do with the kidnappers?"



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

When Christopher and Akira follow the girl into the house, they find a wounded dog and three corpses lying about. Akira falls into a fit of uncontrollable giggles, the girl continues to plead with Christopher to help her dog and Christopher turns the house upside-down looking for his parents. Eventually, it is Akira who notices the soldiers' voices first. It takes him a while to get Christopher to listen. Akira hides, albeit poorly. The soldiers are Japanese and they start arguing about Christopher. Akira steps forward. They take him away, much to Christopher's bewilderment. It is later explained to him that Akira is under suspicion of being a traitor. They take Christopher to their camp and take care of him.

Colonel Hasegawa comes to take him back to the British consulate. In the military vehicle, Christopher and the Colonel have a discussion where Christopher acknowledges the realization that he had been living in the past his whole life and just now is starting to see that things are not as they appear to be. They also discuss the imminence of a World War.

Upon arriving at the Consulate, Christopher asks to meet with Mr. McDonald, but finds himself in the company of Mr. Grayson. It is actually Mr. Grayson who is the senior intelligence man, not Mr. McDonald as Christopher had assumed. Mr. Grayson informs him that finally all parties involved agree to let him meet Yellow Snake. Late that evening, Christopher is taken to Yellow Snake, who is no other than Uncle Phillip.

Chapter 21 Analysis

This chapter deals with the motif of the hero finding enlightenment at the end of the journey. Although Christopher's enlightenment is not complete, it is clear that he is finally ready to let go of his past. In his childhood game with Akira, there is always a physical location from whence they rescue Christopher's parents. This fantasy is something Christopher has been unable to let go of. He needs to accomplish the task of raiding the kidnapper's lair with Akira in order to move on. In the end, it is with a possibly fictitious Akira that he raids the obviously fictitious lair. He is close to madness as he searches the house for his parents.

However, when he finally accepts the fact that they are not there, the process for his healing begins. He understands that his parents are not being kept captive in a house, waiting for him and Akira to free them. Only after he has realized this is he ready to hear the truth.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Christopher has known that Yellow Snake is Uncle Phillip. Uncle Phillip tells him the truth about the fate of his parents. As it turns out, his father was not kidnapped at all, but had run away with his mistress and died of typhoid fever in Singapore a few years later. His mother was kidnapped by the war lord Wang Ku, to be his concubine. The war lord is the roundfaced Chinese man whom Christopher had earlier intuited to be deeply involved with his parents' kidnapping.

Uncle Phillip had assisted in the kidnapping by making a deal where he would arrange for Christopher's mother to be alone if Christopher could be spared from witnessing the scene or being taken along. An agreement was also made for Christopher to be financially taken care of. When Uncle Phillip saw her seven years later, her only concern was that this agreement had been kept and that Christopher was doing well. She was raped, whipped and humiliated, but for his sake, she stayed alive.

Uncle Phillip also confesses that had it not been for his unrequited lust for Christopher's mother, he might have been able to find a way to save her. He tells Christopher to kill him. Christopher does not. He only asks where his mother is now. Uncle Phillip tells him that Wang Ku had died four years ago and he has no idea where she has gone since. Christopher vows to find her. Uncle Phillip tells him that it will be difficult because of the war that is engulfing the whole world. Christopher responds by saying that the war is neither his fault nor his concern and he means to start over again and find her this time.

Chapter 22 Analysis

"Snake" is symbolic of traitors. The color yellow is also representative of betrayal. The fact that Uncle Phillip is the Yellow Snake is no coincidence. Christopher has always known that Uncle Phillip's betrayal of his family had much to do with his parents' kidnapping.

Christopher's life has been shaped not by what actually happened, but by what he believes to have happened. However, it is the truth that actually frees him in the end. His response to Uncle Phillip's comment about the war reveals the extent of the guilt that had burdened him since his parents' kidnapping. It is finally clear why he had believed that the whole world was waiting for him to solve the mystery of his parents' disappearance and why he misconstrued other people's views so that they conformed to his perception.

Since he was a child, he has felt that it was his duty to rescue his parents. His failure to do so became a source of malignant guilt that metastasized into guilt for all the evils of the world. He built his parents up to be valiant heroes that sacrificed their lives for

justice and spent his whole life trying to live up to them. Finding out that his parents were just mere mortals released him from the grips of these unnatural expectations. This chapter deals with the power of truth.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Chapter 23 is the last chapter of the book and it is the only chapter in Part 7. It takes place on November 14th of 1958. It has been 21 years since Christopher's trip to Shanghai. He has since then found his mother at the Rosedale Manor in Hong Kong. She has long lost her mind and does not recognize him. However, she remembers the name Puffin. Christopher asks her if she forgives Puffin for not having found her, despite all his best efforts. She is surprised by this question and asks why she would ever have to forgive him. Upon hearing these words, Christopher finally understands that her love for him was unconditional and he did not need to save the world to earn it. This meeting is the symbolic manifestation of Christopher finally finding peace with himself.

He explains this revelation to Jennifer later. Then, he apologizes for not having been around more during her childhood. Jennifer counters this apology with words of gratitude for all he's done for her. Jennifer is thirty-one at this point. She has apparently had a relationship gone awry, which led to an attempted suicide. Christopher worries about her, but she waves these concerns away, reassuring him that all that is in the past now and she would never be so foolish again.

They talk about the possibility of a future romance for her and this leads to a discussion about his love life. He tells her that it is too late now, but at one point there had been someone. His vocation had gotten in the way then, as it had gotten in the way of many things. She says that although he gets along well enough alone, it's not really good for him. She hits on a plan to marry a nice man, have lots of children and have Christopher live with them as their uncle. This idea appeals to both of them.

Sarah has passed away some years ago. After she left that day for Macao without him, she married a Frenchman. Christopher contemplates her life and is unconvinced that she had found what she was looking for in life. The book ends with Christopher feeling a little lonely, but content.

Chapter 23 Analysis

This chapter is separated from the rest of the book with a time gap of over twenty years. This gap allows Christopher to look at the bigger picture of his life, acknowledge mistakes, make amends and see the consequences for the choices he's made. At the same time, it also gives him an opportunity to see how far he'd come and appreciate the peace he's found.

This chapter also shows what happens to the three women who were important to Christopher. His much anticipated reunion with his mother turns out to be nothing like what he'd fantasized about. However, his mother is still able to give him what he's been looking for all those years. Jennifer's dark side is completely unexpected from the way



she is described in earlier chapters, but it rings true with the theme that until one reconciles with one's past, it continues to be powerful. The quality of Sarah's life is unclear to us. In her words and in the words of another woman who knew her, she did find happiness in her second marriage. The fact that Christopher is skeptical of this may be based on his self-interest to believe that he was her true soul mate, or it may be a truth that he alone is able to intuit, because of the intimacy he shared with her.

This book is inspired by traditional detective novels. Unlike the detective novels, there is no clear resolution. Good does not reign supreme, the culprit is not captured and the world is not saved. However, Ishiguro still manages to bring the book full circle and give the story a sense of completion. It may not be a happy ending, but it is a true ending nonetheless.



Characters

Christopher Banks

Christopher, known as Puffin by his parents and Uncle Phillip, is the protagonist and narrator. He is really the only main character. The book starts in the early days of his career as a detective. Then it goes back to his childhood in Shanghai, where he lived until his parents' disappearance, whereupon he was sent to live with his aunt in England. His childhood best friend in Shanghai is Akira. As an adult, he is assailed by nostalgia for Akira and the time he spent with him. Once his success is well-established in London, he is compelled to return to Shanghai to solve the mystery of his parents' disappearances. His dream is that he will find Akira, who will help him find his parents. He finds that his memory is unreliable, however and this fact frustrates him.

He seems to have but one romance in his life and this is with Sarah Hemmings. He is attracted to Sarah from the first time he lays his eyes on her. However, for many years, they speak no more than a handful of words. Eventually, they do come to share a bond as orphans. Sarah goes to Shanghai with her husband, Cecil, before Akira. In fact, it is her departure to Shanghai that pushes him to finally go to Shanghai after thinking about it for a long time. In Shanghai, he finds Sarah unhappily married to a drunken and gambling-addicted Cecil. At the point when he becomes discouraged about his mission, Sarah proposes to elope. Christopher agrees. They share a kiss when he arrives at the meeting place, but Christopher decides at the last minute to pursue one final lead. Sarah leaves without him. They never see each other again.

He is an ethical man driven by his sense of justice. In his later years, he concludes that although this has led him to lead a rather lonely life, it has also allowed him to be at peace with himself.

Akira

Akira, the Japanese boy that lives next door, is Christopher's childhood best friend. He is a little dominating and perhaps also a tall-taler. He is, however, a compassionate and loyal friend. When Christopher's father disappears, Akira conjures up a game where they both become the detectives that rescue him. He is also sensitive enough to include in the pretending, the fact that Christopher's father is found living a luxurious captive life. He is sent to go to school in Japan at one point, but comes back shortly afterwards, having been ostracized by classmates, teachers and family, for not being Japanese enough. Christopher thinks he has found him when he revisits Shanghai, but whether he is correct or not is ultimately unclear.



Sarah

Sarah is also an orphan driven by a mission of her own. Her mission is to find the man who will contribute to society in a grand way and support him such that he can be at his maximum potential. This drive sometimes makes her behave in an arrogant or eccentric manner. Christopher is attracted to her from the beginning, but is also resentful towards her for her manipulative manner. Whether she is ultimately attracted to him or is trying to use him is unclear.

Jennifer

Jennifer is the adopted daughter of Christopher. She is the apple of his eye. She comes into his life when she is ten-years-old. From the beginning, she is charming, optimistic and mature beyond imagination. As a young adult, there is reference to her attempted suicide and unhappiness at being 31 without a husband or children. In her characteristic optimism, she tells Christopher that she will find a nice man and have a family, if Christopher promises to come live with them.

Christopher's mother

Christopher's mother is idealistic and judgmental. She campaigns strongly against the opium trade that ravishes the Chinese population. This fact causes a strain on her marriage. She is also very strong-willed. This strong will becomes her demise, for when she admonishes the war lord for his deplorable behavior, he finds it attractive and decides to kidnap her. She is a gentle and playful mother to Christopher, however.

Christopher's father

Christopher's father makes a living working for a trading company that is involved in the profitable business of opium trade. He knows that his wife holds him in contempt for this, but is unable to find a way to financially support his family without the company. Possibly because of his alliance to his mother, Christopher is also unable to bond with his father. One day, Christopher's father disappears. He had not, as Christopher had been led to believe, been kidnapped for standing up to his employer. He had simply run away with his mistress to Hong Kong.

Uncle Phillip

In Christopher's youth, he looked up to Uncle Phillip as more of a role model than his father. This is due to the fact that, unlike his father, Uncle Phillip did quit his job at the trading company and start a non-profit organization for the Cause and hence had the respect of Christopher's mother. After Christopher's father's disappearance, however,



Uncle Phillip betrays the family by condoning his mother's kidnapping in exchange for Christopher's life.

Sir Cecil

Sir Cecil is the one who is honored at the Meredith Dinner. He is well renowned for his contribution in world affairs, especially for his involvement in the League of Nations. He is considerably older than either Christopher or Sarah. He is passionately idealistic in both his speech at the dinner and in the private conversation he has with Christopher later. Sarah eventually marries him, because she thinks he is a man that can "make a difference." Her hopes are that if she supports him, he will have the strength to accomplish one more great deed. The two go to Shanghai, but when they get there, Sir Cecil becomes addicted to gambling and opium.

Mr. McDonald

Christopher suspects Mr. McDonald of being a senior intelligence man and is frustrated with his "front." As it turns out, Mr. McDonald is actually a ploy to keep Christopher occupied.

Mr. Grayson

Mr. Grayson is the actual senior intelligence man, but he does such a good job, that Christopher takes him to be a public relations man that keeps harassing him about his parents' welcoming party.

Morgan

Morgan is an old schoolmate of Christopher's, who is living in Shanghai at the time Christopher gets there. They were never friends, so Christopher doesn't think to look him up. However, Morgan finds him. It is Morgan who takes Christopher to his old house. His relationship to the people who live there is not clear. At the end of the evening, he and Christopher part in discord with each other.

Osbourne

Osbourne is one of Christopher's friends, who he runs into in London. He is famous for being "well-connected." He is the one who brings him to the party where Christopher sees Sarah for the first time. This is the extent of his role in the story.



Objects/Places

The house and garden in Shaghai

This is where Christopher played for hours on end with his best friend and next door neighbor, Akira. This is where Christopher has vivid memories of playing the detective game that Akira invented after Christopher's father's disappearance.

The magnifying glass

This was originally given to him as a joke gift on his birthday by his school friends. They were chiding him for his abnormal interest in detective work. However, he became immediately engrossed with it, alarming his friends. Not wishing to seem strange, he tries to play it off as a joke, but does not succeed. It becomes one of his most valued tools, even after he becomes a successful detective. He even takes it to Shanghai, where he takes it out to examine the amputated limb of a dead woman.

Opium

Christopher's mother is an activist campaigning against opium trade in China by the British trading company where Christopher's father is employed. Uncle Phillip resigns from this company in protest of the opium trade and gains much respect from Christopher's mother and consequently Christopher. Christopher's father is unable to do the same and is therefore held in contempt. This eventually drives him to run away with his mistress and Christopher's mother is kidnapped by a Chinese war lord whose support the Campaign has solicited, but whom she chastised vehemently.

Bus

Sarah and Christopher ride on a bus around London the way Sarah used to ride with her mother when she was alive. This is when Christopher first starts to speak of Shanghai and Akira.

The Magic Lotion

This is the lotion that Akira and Christopher steal from a servant's room. The servant is one that Akira is deathly afraid of, because he believes him to have supernatural powers. As a way to test his courage, Akira comes up with the plan to take the lotion while the servant is out of town. However, he is terrified of returning it, so Christopher promises to go with him. On the day the lotion is to be returned, Christopher's father disappears and Christopher is not allowed outside of the house.



Tea Room at Akira's House

This is the room in Akira's house that is a recreation of a Japanese room. It is here that they hatch the plan to steal the lotion.

Cathy Hotel, Shanghai

This is where Christopher stays upon his return to Shanghai.

Gramophone Shop

This is where Sarah arranges to meet Christopher to elope.

The House Across from Yeh Chen's House

This is the house where Christopher believes his parents are held captive.

East Furnace

The Lieutenant tells Christopher to use this as a guide to find Yeh Chen's House. The Japanese soldier, that Christopher believes to be Akira, helps him find it.

Rosedale Manor

This is the convent in Hong Kong where Christopher finally finds his mother, deranged, but still loving him.



Themes

The Problem with Memory

Ishiguro delves into the mysterious nature of memory. Throughout the whole story, Christopher is consistently frustrated with the unreliability of his memory. He finds himself doubting what is fact and what his mind has fabricated. He also finds that he is unable to recall what he clearly remembered a few years ago. So, in trying to solve the mystery of his parents, he has very little to work with. On the other hand, at random moments, he recalls details that he had long forgotten.

The profound effect of memory in the way it shapes one's life is also explored. For example, he remembers his mother standing-up against the health inspector. Even he admits that he is unreliable about the details of the memory. However, whatever remained is enough to uphold the image of his mother as a brave heroine. Because of this and because he remembers his mother as a crusader against opium trade, he is certain that his mother's disappearance was a conspiracy on the part of the British trading company, his father's employer.

He also has a memory of his father telling him "Today, because of your mother, I'm someone much stronger. Someone, I dare say, Puffin, you'll one day be proud of." This memory, in conjunction with the memory of his mother saying, "Whatever happens, you can be proud of him (the father), Puffin. You can always be proud of what he's done," leads him to believe that his father too, had stood-up against opium trade and hence been eliminated by the great British trading company. Both memories prove to be misleading, for his mother was kidnapped by a Chinese warlord to be his concubine and his father ran away with his mistress. He believed in the mythological tale of his parents long enough, that it shaped the whole of his being.

Disillusionment

Even years after his parents' disappearance and his departure from Shanghai, Christopher has maintained in his mind a mythological Eden of his childhood. In this fairy tale world, his parents are noble; his friend is his eternal ally against the kidnappers; the detectives are the finest in the world; and Shanghai is beautiful. Despite his success and fame he has gained in London as a detective, he continues to believe that the Eden is still waiting for him; if he can find his parents. He also starts to believe that the world is dependent on him to solve this case and that somehow, all the turmoil around the world is caused by the evil lurking behind his parents kidnapping. Therefore, he had a social obligation to solve this mystery as soon as possible.

The illusions that he cannot let go of lead him deeper and deeper into more illusions. Finally, everything collapses. He eventually returns to Shanghai to solve the mystery, only to find that the Shanghai of his youth is gone. His childhood belief, that Inspector



Kung was the best detective in the world, shatters as he finds him drunk and decrepit. However, because his illusions are so unshakable, he still solicits information from Inspector Kung.

Eventually, Inspector Kung gives him a lead and Christopher abandons his one chance at love and happiness to pursue this. In this pursuit, he finds Akira and drags him with him. When he thinks he does find the house that Inspector Kung was talking about, he doesn't find his parents there. That is when the illusions start to dissolve. He realizes that the man he has been dragging along is most likely not Akira and the lead Inspector Kung gave him was the delusions of a senile man.

Eventually, he is able to talk to Uncle Phillip, the one man who does know the truth. From him he learns what really happened to his parents. The disillusionment does not crush him. If anything he feels a relief that now he can start living his life as it really is. However, the long years of being obsessed by his past have paid their toll. He loses the woman that he loves and spends his old age in peace, but alone.

Loneliness

Loneliness pervades this work. There is, of course, the inherent loneliness of the orphaned Christopher, which, strangely, Christopher seems unaware of. He takes offence when someone takes pity on his situation. He claims that he had never felt lonely. This story is told from the point-of-view of Christopher, so the only hint we have that his perception may not be the reality is by other people's stray comments about his youth. Even then, Christopher emphatically denies the legitimacy of these claims and blames them on other people's need to believe fictitious renditions of the past.

Christopher is not the only one in the story who is alienated. Akira is alienated from his country, because he is not "Japanese enough," which makes him fear his alienation from his family. Christopher's parents are alienated from each other and don't speak to each other for weeks. This eventually ends in his father running away with his mistress. His mother is kidnapped by a warlord. She ends up pining for Christopher the rest of her remaining days. Sarah, another orphan, finds herself unhappily married to a drunken gambler in Shanghai. She finds herself abandoned by Christopher, too. Eventually, she marries a Frenchman and is thought to have been happily married by those who knew her, but Christopher (perhaps for self-serving purposes) remains unconvinced. Even the sweet Jennifer, who is described by Christopher to be incredibly optimistic as a child, is found later in life to be disappointed that. It is also insinuated that she had, at one point, attempted to commit suicide.

Sarah appears to have been Christopher's one and only love. After he inadvertently relinquishes eloping with her, he never has another opportunity for romance again. In the end, he finally admits that he is a little lonely, albeit content. There is hope, however, as both he and Jennifer imagine a day when she finds a nice man, has a few children and Christopher comes to live with them to be her children's uncle.

Style

Point of View

The whole story is told in the first person, with Christopher Banks as the narrator. This perspective is critical, because Ishiguro's intention is to show the unreliability of memory and the misperceptions of self. There are several times in the book when Christopher is annoyed, because someone from his past describes him as being other than whom he remembers himself to be. Christopher perceives himself to be one who, for the most part, has been able to keep up a good front, always maintaining respectability. This is challenged by people making off-hand remarks. He is immediately offended by them and explains it away as being a product of the other person's need to protect their self-image.

It does become apparent, however, that Christopher does in fact lose his demeanor from time to time. The first person narrative allows the reader to know only as much as the narrator knows at all times. This allows us to feel the same sense of betrayal and disappointment that Christopher does at the end. Throughout the whole story, it is apparent that what Christopher believes to have happened to his parents shapes his life and the priorities in his life. When the reader, along with Christopher, discovers that everything he believes is actually an illusion created for his sake, the effect is surreal. For despite the fact that the memory is false, the reality is undeniable. This raises the whole question of what is true, fact and fiction.

Setting

The setting is mostly in Shanghai, but at two different times. One is the time during Christopher's childhood, which is painted in an idyllic manner. The description of his childhood Shanghai begins with a description of the garden. In this garden, he remembers having spent long hours playing games and having harmless quarrels with Akira. As a child, he is also under the watchful gaze of his nanny, Mei Li. The Shanghai of Christopher's youth is safe and protected. However, his home is still very solemn, for there was always the presence of "The Cause." This sense of purpose, that he breathed in as he grew-up in his Shanghai home, shapes the person he becomes as an adult.

When Christopher returns as a successful detective, it is to a Shanghai in the midst of the Sino-Japanese War. He is revolted by the corruption that he witnesses amongst the Shanghai elite and the destruction that ravishes the city. He does not find anyone he can trust and he cannot find Akira, whom he still expects to find. Apparently, Shanghai is rejoicing at his arrival and he senses their expectation of him as the one who will put everything to rights. This perceived expectation creates a surreal effect, for while he is hailed as the great savior, he feels hindered in his investigation and furthermore, nobody seems to truly care about the state of affairs.



In between the two settings in Shanghai, there are also glimpses of London society life that are needed to establish his relationship with Sarah Hemmings and his road back to Shanghai.

Language and Meaning

The language is proper. This is fitting for many reasons. First, the characters are from England in the 1930's, so the dialogue is very formal. Second, Christopher, who is the narrator, is a very serious character. He is not prone to slang and informalities. He is raised in an upper-middle class environment, receiving his formal education at boarding schools and Cambridge. He is educated and cultured and this is conveyed in his language. However, several times throughout the story, Christopher does lash out so inappropriately that even he feels remorseful later.

There is a lot of dialogue in this book and it is in these direct quotes that we see the volatile nature of a character. This is true not only of Christopher, but also of Sarah, both of Christopher's parents and Uncle Phillip. The direct quotes are also necessary to convey the fact that Akira is not a native English speaker. His limitation in English is a topic that comes up often. Mostly, it shows his obstinacy to admit when he is wrong.

The tone of the story is very grave and carefree moments are reserved only for Christopher's childhood. Even then, it is not a norm, but a rarity. Power struggles are played-out in the tone used; and it is made evident that the one who maintains his calm retains the power.

Structure

The book is made of twenty-three chapters separated into seven parts. The first part is three chapters, 49 pages. The second part is six chapters, 78 pages. The third part is two chapters, 24 pages. The fourth part is two chapters, 22 pages. The fifth part is two chapters, 24 pages. The sixth part is 7 chapters, 100 pages. The last part is only one chapter, 15 pages.

The parts are divided by locations and dates. The first takes place in London on July 24th of 1930. The second takes place in London on May 15th of 1931. The third takes place in London on April 12th of 1937. The fourth takes place at Cathay Hotel, in Shanghai, on September 20th of 1937. The fifth also takes place at Cathay Hotel, in Shanghai, on September 29th of 1937. The sixth also takes place at Cathay Hotel, in Shanghai, on October 20th of 1937. The last chapter takes place in London on November 14th of 1958.

Part 2 is long, as it recounts Christopher's childhood in detail. Part 6 is also long, as it tells of the actual adventure he encountered in looking for his parents. The last part is more of an epilogue. It is dated twenty-one years after Part six. Christopher is older, his glory days behind him. The bulk of the story takes place in 1937 and is written almost as a journal. He actually mentions the act of writing from time to time. The words, "today"



and "last night" are mentioned and the story stays anchored in the actual chronological date of the parts.

It is essential that this book is broken down into parts, for these separate parts create a way for the story to be told at different times and places. Since the whole book is told from the first person narrative, in order for the narrator to have a different perspective, there has to be a change in time and place.

The most obvious example is Part 7. It is separated into a whole part, despite the fact that it is only one chapter of fifteen pages. These last 15 pages are told from the point of view of an aged Christopher. Twenty years after returning to Shaghai, it is evident that he has found a kind of peace he was unable to grasp when he was younger.

A less obvious break is between Part 5 and 6. They are both written in Cathy Hotel, Shanghai. Part 5 is written on September 29th of 1937 and Part 6 is written on October 20th of 1937. Part 5 describes his return to the old family house. The fantasy that he will easily find his parents and live happily ever after is still maintained. However, less than a month later, in Part 6, the prospects are so depressing that Christopher decides to abandon everything and move to Macao with Sarah. In Part 6, Christopher is changed and because of this, he is going to embark on a whole new adventure.

Setting the framework of the book to have six different parts efficiently allows different perspectives from the same first-person narrator. The parts are not divided equally by quantity or space in time. For this reason, the breaks are part of the organic make-up of the story.



Quotes

"My goodness, you were such an odd bird at school." Part 1, Chapter 1, pg. 5

"I won't waste all my love, all my energy, all my intellect - modest as that is - on some useless man who devotes himself to golf or to selling bonds in the City. When I marry, it will be someone who'll really *contribute*. I mean to humanity, to a better world. Is that such an awful ambition?" Part 1, Chapter 2, pg. 49

"In fact, it has always been a puzzle to me that Osbourne should have said such a thing of me that morning, since my own memory is that I blended perfectly into English school life." Part 1, Chapter 1, pg. 7

"All these people here, Puffin. All these people. Ask them and they'll profess to have standards. But you'll see as you get older, very few of them really do." Part 3, Chapter 6, pg. 88

"But more than anything else, I recall a kind of relief; an odd feeling that from the time I had first laid eyes on her all those years ago at the Charingworth Club, a part of me had been waiting for this moment; that in some sense, my whole friendship with Sarah had always been moving towards this one point and now at last it had arrived." Part 3, Chapter 11, pg.153

"Here, in other words, at the heart of the maelstrom threatening to suck in the whole of the civilized world, is a pathetic conspiracy of denial; a denial of responsibility which has turned in on itself and gone sour, manifesting itself in the sort of pompous defensiveness I have encountered so often." Part 4, Chapter 12, pg. 173

It struck me as most curious how, only a day earlier, the piece of information I had just received would have constituted something utterly central to my life. Part 6, Chapter 17, pg. 233

Then we were kissing - just like, I suppose, a couple on the cinema screen. Part 6, Chapter 17, pg 237

"I thought I had. I thought he was a friend of mine from my childhood. But now, I'm not so certain. I'm beginning to see how, many things aren't as I supposed." Part 6, Chapter 21, pg 296

"Well, Colonel, it's hardly a foreign land to me. In many ways, it's where I've continued to live all my life. It's only now I've started to make my journey from it."

"Since this encounter last week, I have brought out and read again several times Sarah's letter - the only one I ever received since our parting in Shanghai all those years ago. It is dated 18th May 1947 and has been written from a hill station in Malaya." Part 7, Chapter 23, pg. 334



"But for those like us, our fate is to face the world as orphans, chasing through long years other shadows of vanished parents. There is nothing for it but to try and see through our missions to the end, as best we can, for until we do so, we will be permitted no calm." Part 7, Chapter 23, pg. 335



Topics for Discussion

What words would you use to describe Christopher?

Explain the dynamic between Christopher and Sarah.

Throughout the book, minor characters appear that make stray comments about the image they have of Christopher as a youth. Why do these comments upset Christopher?

Why is it that Christopher is unable to solve the mystery of his parents, despite his evident ability to solve other more difficult ones?

Jennifer's suicide attempt is insinuated towards the end of the book. Christopher's description of her as a girl does not prepare us for this. Do you think this shows a blindness, on Christopher's part, or a change that had occurred in Jennifer? Explain.

Do you agree with Christopher when he explains his life on pg. 335-336, "But for those like us, our fate is to face the world as orphans, chasing through long years the shadows of vanished parents"? Why or why not?

In the end, Christopher is forced to see that he had been living a life based on illusions. Do you find this to be a human condition shared by many?