

The Yellow Eyes of Crocodiles Study Guide

The Yellow Eyes of Crocodiles by Katherine Pancol

(c)2017 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Yellow Eyes of Crocodiles Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1 - 3.....	6
Chapters 4 - 9.....	11
Chapters 10 - 14.....	18
Chapters 15 - 17.....	26
Chapters 18 - 22.....	32
Characters.....	36
Symbols and Symbolism.....	44
Settings.....	48
Themes and Motifs.....	50
Styles.....	55
Quotes.....	57



Plot Summary

The following version of the *Yellow Eyes of Crocodiles* was used to create this study guide: Pancol, Katherine. *The Yellow Eyes of Crocodiles*. New York: Penguin Group, 2013.

When Josephine Cortes discovers that her unemployed husband is having an affair, she gathers her courage and kicks him out. Amid worries about her family's future, she flat out refuses assistance from her cold hearted, money grubbing and wealthy mother and determines to make it on her own. Her meager earnings as a historical researcher are supplemented with translation work procured for her by her kind brother-in-law Philippe. Josephine's wealthy sister, Iris, on the other hand is bored with her life. Her daily existence of shopping and lunching with the elite wives of Paris has lost its charm and she is worried that her husband may also be having an affair. At a dinner party one evening, Iris spins a tale about her efforts to write a historical novel and peaks the interest of a prominent publisher. He presses her to produce, so Iris appeals to Josephine to ghost write the novel, offering her all the monetary gains in exchange for her own name on the cover. Desperate for money, Josephine agrees even though the deception concerns her.

Iris's concerns about her husband are unfounded, but he is having secret meetings with someone. Knowing that his wife has been harboring affection for her former lover, the famous film director Gabor Minar, he is working on a plan to end the emotional love triangle forever. Through an elaborate plan, Philippe arranges meetings and agreements so that Gabor and Iris meet at a public gala following the New York film festival. Iris is thrilled to be seeing her love and has fantasized that they will be together again one day. To her great shock, he greets her warmly and then introduces his wife. Iris is shaken to the core and devastated that her heart's desire is unavailable to her and she becomes withdrawn and miserable. Philippe is happy to finally be rid of the "ghost lover," and ready to move on with his own life.

Meanwhile, Antoine Cortes has finally decided to apply himself to something and runs off to Kenya with his mistress, Mylene, to raise crocodiles. The venture is filled with disappointments and frustrations. The farm's Chinese owner, Mr. Wei does not pay Antoine for months and the couple slowly eats through Mylene's life savings. Out of boredom, Mylene begins a cosmetics business, selling French-made goods to the Chinese women whose families work at the farms and eventually develops a partnership with Mr. Wei. Antoine continues to struggle however, finding it difficult to make payments on his business loan and missing his wife and daughters back in France.

Josephine keeps busy writing the novel and living off the book advance payment from the publisher. She creates a twelfth-century heroine who desires to live a simple life in humility and obedience to God, but is forced into marriage to a wealthy count. Her husband soon dies, leaving her a wealthy widow and at the mercy of lecherous men. Throughout the novel, Florine, as she is named, becomes a strong and independent



woman, wealthy despite her desires, and a wife and widow several times. She finally finds happiness and true love in a final marriage to a simple man and the two spend her wealth helping others. Josephine works long hours at the library researching and writing and meets Luca, a handsome man who is also doing research there. The two have much in common, but Josephine feels insecure because she sees herself as unattractive. Josephine completes the novel in several months and the publisher is thrilled with the manuscript. Iris takes over the show and begins to market and sell the book using all her flair.

As Josephine works through her writing process she relies on the encouragement of Shirley, her friend and neighbor, who has secrets of her own. The English woman moved to France with her son Gary and refuses to tell Josephine about her family background or anything about her past. In time, Josephine's children and some other neighbors see photographs of Gary on the internet playing with the royal princes William and Harry when they were children. Josephine also sees Shirley standing in the shadows near Queen Elizabeth during a televised event at Buckingham Palace. Shirley continues to reveal nothing until one day when a stranger arrives on their doorstep and she decides to take action. After retiring to safety on the remote and private island of Mustique, Shirley tells Josephine that she is the illegitimate daughter of the Queen and that the strange man threatens to expose the truth to the world. She finally feels a sense of peace as she turns to British intelligence to keep their eye on the man rather than handle him on her own.

Elsewhere in the family, the sister's step-father, Marcel Grobz is having an affair of his own. For years, his wife, Henriette, has been cold in bed and had even outright refused him a child. He has found pleasure in the arms of one of his employees, Josiane Lambert, a woman who enjoys the benefits of a having a rich lover, but also truly loves Marcel. Marcel would like to divorce Henriette but she has the legal right to half of his fortune and is on the company's board as CEO. On her side, Henriette wants to ensure that her financial position is secured so she finds evidence that Marcel is indeed having an affair. But the joke is on her, since Marcel has planted the false evidence in order to throw her off the trail of the real situation. The only problem is that Josiane believes it to be true as well and leaves Marcel just as she discovers that she is pregnant with their child. Through a twist and turn of events, Josiane learns the truth; Marcel has planted false evidence and he has orchestrated a big business deal in which he is able to reorganize his company and write Henriette out of his business affairs and life for good. Josiane returns to Marcel and the happy couple joyfully welcome their newborn son. Henriette is left wondering what happened and how she lost it all, and almost dazed from the quick and calculating moves of her soon to be former husband.

As the novel draws to a conclusion, Josephine and Luca encounter difficulty in their relationship. Luca figures out the Josephine is the author of *A Most Humble Queen* and is angry that she does not appear to be who he thought she was. She is upset with him for ignoring her at a recent fashion show, where he was modeling on stage. Jo confesses to her agreement with Iris and Luca tells her about his twin brother, the model. The two are happy to have found each other and finally rest secured in each other's love.



Josephine plans to go back to working on her post-doctoral work and become a professor. However, Hortense has other plans for her mother. She learns that Josephine is the author of Iris's novel and wants her mother to receive not only the rights and money for the sales, but the credit as well. Despite her previous pronouncement of hatred toward her mother, Hortense is proud of her mother's hard work and care for the family. She realizes that her father did nothing to support them during the last several years and she wants to secure their future. She arranges an interview on national television and announces that Iris did not write the book. Although the news is sure to turn the sisters' worlds up-side-down, Josephine is glad that she will be able to continue to write under her own name.

Sadly, Antoine's ending is not so happy. Despondent over the failure of his business attempt and separation from the family he loved, he enters crocodile filled waters and meets his end. The glittering yellow eyes of the crocodiles that had once seemed to promise wealth and riches proved to be his undoing.



Chapters 1 - 3

Summary

Josephine accidentally cut her wrist while peeling potatoes. Her emotional reaction was that she should just give up and die, but she pulled herself together and stopped the bleeding. She watched her husband play chess with himself on the balcony just off their fifth floor apartment. Antonio announced victory and then poured himself a cocktail, even though it was only mid-day. He watered and pruned the plants on the balcony then headed inside. He glanced at Josephine and noticed her weight gain, and longed for the early days of their marriage when she was slim and their girls were little. He told his wife that he was leaving for a walk and not to wait for him to have lunch. She questioned him about his search for a job and chastised him for not being willing to take whatever he could find in order to help pay the family's bills. Then she confronted him about having an affair with the manicurist down the street. The two argued and Josephine told Antonio to pack his bags and leave.

Antonio took his time packing, hoping that Josephine would relent and ask him to stay. He had once been a well-paid salesman for an American gun company and took wealthy clients on hunting trips to Asia, Africa and South America. When the company's ownership changed, Antonio lost his job. He did not know what else to do, feeling that he was too talented to take just any job, so he sat at home and the family lived off their savings. Josephine worked part-time doing research for the National Center for Scientific Research on twelfth-century women. He finally asked Josephine what she would tell their daughters about his departure. She said she would tell them that Daddy needed time to himself because he is not feeling well. After he left, Josephine sobbed and thoughts raced through her mind about how insecure her girls would feel and whether she would be able to take care of them on her own and handle all the details of life that were once Antonio's responsibility.

A phone call from her sister, Iris, jolted Josephine out of her fear. Iris asked about Antonio's hunt for work and then reminded Josephine of their bi-weekly dinner with their mother. When she asked if Antonio would be coming, Josephine broke down and confessed that she had just kicked him out of the house. Iris pledged her support and finished the call with a tongue twister about crocodiles that the two girls used to recite as children. The author takes some time in the middle of their conversation to interrupt the plot flow and provide background information on the sisters. Iris was elegant and seductive. She had started out with a promising movie career and was involved with an actor, but then suddenly left it all to marry Philippe Dupin, a corporate lawyer with an international business practice. She had one son and lived a life of leisure. Josephine always felt that she was the odd one in the family, continually with her nose in a book. Her mother never thought much of her academic achievements, receiving a doctorate degree, or being hired by the National Research Center.



Josephine's daughters, Hortense and Zoe, arrived home from school for lunch. Zoe was excited because Max, a neighbor boy invited her over to watch a movie. The two girls fought over the boy's invitation. Hortense asked where Antonio was and Josephine told them that he had left and would not be coming back home. Josephine tried to console her daughters and assured them that they were still loved by both their parents and that Antonio would still be their Dad. After Zoe left the room, Hortense then revealed that she had known about his affair with Mylene for some time and that in fact so did most of the neighborhood. After lunch, Josephine went to her neighbor Shirley and told her that she kicked Antonio out and was worried that she had made a mistake. She was fearful of being on her own and if she could handle everything. Shirley was the one who had told Josephine about Antonio's affair. She consoled her and encouraged her to face her fears and identify the one big thing that was terrifying her concerning her future.

Meanwhile, Iris was having lunch with Berengere Clavert, a friend who she met with regularly for lunch. Berengere was recovering from a recent breakup as well and decided to share some gossip. She told Iris that rumors were going around that Philippe was having an affair with a young man in his office. Iris pretended to hold it together, but brushed back tears as she drove home.

The scene shifts to two new characters, Marcel Grobz and Josiane Lambert who are in bed, having an affair of their own. Marcel is a businessman and Josiane is his assistant who has wormed her way into his heart and bed. She spoke to him about his business and asked him to consider promoting one of the workman, Bruno Chaval. She was concerned that he might leave the company and go help the competition. Marcel agreed to consider the situation, but he was worried about Chaval and decided to keep an eye on him. He was worried too that Josiane might be interested in the younger man and that his own sexual appetites would no longer be satiated by the younger woman. Marcel did not have much to do with his own wife, Henriette, whom he had also first hired as a designer before marrying her. Here the author revealed that Henriette is Josephine and Iris's mother and that she has a lot of control in his company. Although Henriette is also his sole beneficiary, Marcel assured Josiane that she was well provided for in his will.

Following her lunch date, Iris returned home to glass of whiskey to contemplate her options concerning Philippe. She decided to stick with him and pretend that everything was fine, not wanting to give up her lifestyle and worried about starting over with someone else at the age of forty-four. She then got ready for the evening family dinner. Meanwhile, Josephine and her girls drove to Iris's home. She told the girls not to mention anything about their father's leaving to their grandmother, Henriette, but Hortense announced that she had already told her everything, figuring that they could get money from her, or at least Marcel. Josephine and Hortense argued about how they would make ends meet; Hortense did not think her mother could ever make enough money with her job and Josephine was determined to make it own her own without asking anyone for financial help. She was also upset about Hortense's lack of respect toward her. Hortense screamed that she blamed her mother for making Antonio leave because she had become ugly and boring and now they would end up poor.



At the family dinner, Hortense was very social with Iris and Henriette and flattered Marcel about his looks. Marcel chatted with Josephine and said that if Antonio was still looking for work, he would find a position for him, although he thought she would be a better employee. Henriette then took Josephine aside to discuss her future without Antonio. Josephine insisted that she would be able to make ends meet on her own, but her mother laughed at the idea, thinking very little of her daughter's job. Henriette boasted about her own success in raising two daughters and her own hard work, but Marcel silently thought about all the extra money he slipped her and how she really only survived because he had taken care of her. Josephine yelled at her mother and told she knew that their only way they made it back then was because Henriette had slept with and then married Marcel for his money. She stormed out of the room and bumped into Hortense who had been listening at the keyhole. Josephine went into a nearby room and encountered Philippe who was talking quietly on his phone. The two chatted awkwardly at first, but then Philippe hired her to do translation work for him at his company. He asked that she keep their arrangement a secret. When Josephine returned to the living room, Hortense was sitting on Marcel's lap trying to undue her mother's damage.

Analysis

Part I of this novel serves to prepare the reader for everything that is to come by introducing the large cast of characters, creating a web of tangled relationships and hinting at the novel's themes. The author begins by juxtaposing the drabness of her main character with the description of the kitchen sink in the first paragraph in order to highlight Josephine's struggle with self-confidence. The action in the first scene is rather dismal as Josephine reacts dramatically to accidentally cutting her wrist with a potato peeler. She feels like dying, but why would she want to die because of small accident? The reader soon discovers the cause of the distress to be her failing marriage and the myriad of fears that she must face in order to pursue a life on her own. Josephine feels ill equipped to be in charge of everything for her two daughters and is lacking in self-confidence. What she feels inwardly is displayed physically in her lack of style and polish. Over the years she has "let herself go," and both her husband Antonio and her daughter, Hortense, are turned off by her dowdy appearance. Antonio can no longer stand her "shapeless, colorless clothes, her bad skin, her limp brown hair," (9). Josephine herself confesses her inability to make herself attractive. She tells her neighbor Shirley, "I feel ugly. I keep telling myself no man will ever fall in love with me again. I'm fat. I don't know how to dress or fix my hair. And I'm just going to get older," (31). These descriptions are sharp contrasts to the burst of color that Josephine sees in the kitchen sink as blood drips from her cut wrist. "She looked at her blue veins, the red streak, the white sink, the yellow plastic colander where the peeled white potatoes lay glistening," (3). Everything in the world around her is full of life and color, but her internal, emotional world is drab and filled with fear.

Yet despite her apparent lack of confidence, Josephine is a smart and independent woman. She has earned a Ph.d., passed a prestigious teaching exam, works for the National Research Center and speaks four languages. Most importantly for her, she is



determined to make it own her own and not seek financial help from her mother or Marcel. Even though her mother likes to act as if she made it all on her own, Josephine knows very well that all the niceties they had as children were possible because her mother was sleeping with Marcel. As she tells her mother, "If he'd been poor, you wouldn't have given him the time of day, and we both know it....You were just plying the world's oldest profession," (58).

The idea of marrying for money versus love appears to be established as a theme in the novel. Throughout this first section, the author introduces many of the main characters scene by scene, revealing at least three affairs and again as many strained marriages as a result. A bit of each character's backstory is revealed along with something of their personalities as well as a great deal of information about the relationships and connections between the various characters. In most of the relationships it appears that connections are made for money or sexual gratification rather than love. Henriette marries Marcel because she needs to be able to support herself and her two children. She has Marcel wrapped around her finger, because he is intensely sexually attracted to her. Once they are married and she has legally secured half of his property, Henriette cools off toward him, driving him into the arms of another woman. Josiane, warms up to Marcel sexually and while she seemingly enjoys being with Marcel, she too is hoping to secure some financial stability from the relationship. She is upfront with her lover concerning this, "Marcel, if anything should ever happen to you, what would become of me? Are you sure you're leaving me something in case you --," (44). And while Marcel is fully aware that Henriette married him only for his money, he is also not sure if he can trust Josiane. Her recommendation of a fellow worker has him worried. "I also have to make sure the punk doesn't replace me in Josiane's bed. She's thirty-eight; she must think about younger guys," (42).

Having learned from her grandmother, Hortense is well on her way to using people and men for money as well. She knows exactly where the money is in the family and she is determined to go after it. She flatters Marcel every chance she gets and is sure to confide in Henriette as well. She has no confidence that her mother can provide for the family and tells Josephine as much. Her plan is to "kiss Henriette's ass so she'll give us money. I don't want to be poor! I hate poor people!" (51).

Choosing a relationship for the sake of money is also the priority for Iris. When she hears from a friend that her husband, Philippe is likely having an affair, she considers her options. She is very used to a life of luxury and does not want to give it up. She is concerned for her reputation as well. If she leaves Philippe, then a big scandal will ensue. Philippe will lose his business stature, which will affect his income and therefore affect her financial and social status too. As a result, she decides to let it all slide and "practice pretending" that all is well, (47).

Even Antonio is seeking the good life without making much effort. His previous job afforded him time away in adventurous places in a role that left him admired and viewed as an expert by his customers. He was able to travel and had affairs where ever he went (11). After he loses his job, he still wants to live the same way, but has no interest in working and is not willing to take just any job. Everyone in the family feels that



nothing is seemingly good enough for him. Antonio says that he is holding out to start his own business venture, an idea that he has shared only with Mylene. With a bit of mystery, the author only reveals that Tonio has not yet taken any of Mylene's money, but is waiting for "a more impressive partner," (12).

There are a few other instances where the author holds out a bit of mystery and perhaps foreshadowing of events to come. There are questions surrounding Josephine's arrangement with Philippe; why does he wish it to be a secret? Also, there are several references to crocodiles, leaving the reader wondering what role they will play in the novel. In addition to Iris's reference to their childhood tongue twister, Antonio tells the girls tales of himself wrestling crocodiles and in a restaurant a woman waits for a "tasty piece of gossip like an old crocodile lurking in a swamp,"(32). The symbolism of the crocodile and its place in the novel will obviously be important, so the author places references throughout this section in order to keep them prominently in the reader's mind.

One final interesting literary device is the author's allusion to Andre Chenier, a French poet who lived during the Reign of Terror following the French Revolution. The poet was said to calmly be speaking of poetry and writing as he was led to the guillotine. The author speaks similarly of Iris as she waits for her friend Berengere to tell her the details of Philippe's affair. As a French novelist, the author chooses to reference this French figure with whom readers may be familiar. Like the poet, Iris's world is about to end, not literally, but in a very real sense in terms of everything practical. Yet, she is going to hold her head high and behave as if she is not phased by it.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Antonio not look for a job?

Discussion Question 2

Where does Hortense get her attitudes and learn her skills of manipulation?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Josephine's internal conflict between self-confidence and fear. Is she a strong, smart, independent woman or is she the "ninny" some people seem to see?

Vocabulary

chagrined, perusal, schoolmarm, dawdled, withering, nonchalance, verities, prestigious, dunce, imperial, magnanimous, ostentatiously, insatiable, kilim, ninny



Chapters 4 - 9

Summary

Josephine worked hard all through the summer months, translating documents for Philippe and was well paid. She was able to pay all the school bills on her own. She also picked up a job translating from English a book on Audrey Hepburn for a publisher. She knew she could work better if she had a computer, but did not have enough money yet to purchase one. Antonio picked the girls up for a month during the summer and Josephine saw a red-shirted elbow sticking out of the car window. She realized that her marriage was really over and that Antonio had truly moved on to another woman. Iris mentioned that Antonio told the girls that they would be seeing more of Mylene and that the two would be starting a project of some kind in the fall. She also said that Zoe cried much of the month that the girls visited at her beach house. Meanwhile at work, Josephine had run into a good looking man at the library and found herself attracted to him. A few days later she was helping Shirley make a cake delivery when they saw the man on the street. Suddenly, a beautiful blonde woman ran up to him and he kissed her. Jo felt suddenly disappointed, but Shirley encouraged her to pursue the man anyway and told her to think positively.

The scene switches again to Marcel's workplace. Josiane received a phone call and learned that her mother suddenly passed away. While she sobbed, Henriette appeared and coldly dismissed the girl. Marcel arrived and was surprised to hear that his wife was waiting for him in his office. Meanwhile, Bruno Chavel joined Josiane in the breakroom where she went for a cup of coffee. Josiane expressed her concern for their position at the company and Bruno took her in his arms to comfort her. Suddenly, Marcel and Henriette came out of the office and saw the two together. Marcel was heartbroken.

Hortense and Zoe received a letter from Antonio and learned that he was in Kenya managing a crocodile farm. He lived in a large house with a pool and oversaw the Chinese workers. He also sent a letter for Josephine which she did not immediately read. Zoe ran off to read up on crocodiles in some books, and Hortense asked Josephine about possibly purchasing a computer. Josephine promised to find a way to make it happen by Christmas.

Meanwhile, Iris attended a dinner with Philippe and chatted with a famous publisher. In order to impress him, she said that she was writing an historical fiction piece set in the twelfth century using information she had often overheard from Josephine. He was very interested and wanted her to contact him when she was ready to show her work. Iris felt wonderful, having played a part and doing something more exciting than her usual nothing. That night she and Philippe headed straight to bed without having sex, a routine that had become normal. She again lay awake fantasizing about what life would be like if she were with Gabor. Young Alexander came into his parents' room asking to sleep with them to Philippe's disgust. Iris put him back to bed, but told him that he must soon grow up and not give in to his fears.



In a separate scene, Josiane attended her mother's funeral and acted well off in front of her relatives, even though she felt totally alone since she had just lost everyone she loved. She cried hard, mainly for herself, remembering all the abuse she suffered as a child. Following a relative's snide comment, Josiane got the idea to win Marcel back by having a baby with him, since it was the one thing she knew he desperately wanted. She only had to convince Marcel that Chaval meant nothing to her.

A few weeks before Christmas, Josephine and the girls joined Iris at her health club pool in Paris. Josephine felt awkward and overweight in her swimsuit and horrified that Hortense was wearing a skimpy bikini that Iris had purchased over the summer. Iris told Josephine to light up and not be such a prude or to let people walk all over her, the way she always did when the two sisters were growing up. Over tea, Josephine learned that Iris was supposed to be writing a book based in the twelfth century for a well-known publisher. She offered to help Iris with notes, but Iris said she would come up with some way out of her lie. Meanwhile, while playing in the pool, Alexander asked Zoe if two people no longer loved each other if they had stopped making love. He told her that his father had been sleeping in the study for the last two weeks and it scared him, because he was not sure what would happen next. Zoe told him that his parents would probably get divorced, but she was determined to find a way to keep them together, since they were the only other family she had. She was going to ask Max Barthillet what to do.

In Kenya, Mylene and Antoine woke up one day to a young crocodile staring at them in their bed. Bambi was Tonio's manservant's pet and was escorted back to his pen. Antoine was working hard at the farm, but was not being paid by Mr. Wei, the Chinese owner. He was worried because he had taken out a large business loan back in France and had not yet been able to make any payments on the loan. He learned from some of the other croc farmers that perhaps Mr. Wei was not to be trusted. After three months, Mylene was also beginning to become bored with their life in Africa because she did not have anything to do.

With days to go before Christmas, Josephine turned in the English book translation to the publisher who was pleased with her work and offered her more jobs. Her check was for four times the amount of what she made in one month at the Research Center. She deposited the money right in the bank and then went shopping for the girls' Christmas gifts, buying an expensive computer among other items. At home, she received a phone call from the bank manager who informed her that her deposit was timely because she was three months overdrawn and that her name was on her husband's bank loan as a co-signer. She then remembered that Antoine had put papers in front of her to sign, but she was not aware of what they were about. She promised that she would be making more money soon. She went onto her balcony and prayed to the stars to give her someone to love and someone to love her.

At the Casamia warehouse, Rene, Marcel's friend and employee, was worried about Marcel and his dark mood. He saw that Josiane looked poorly as well. He confronted Marcel and told him that Josiane was just as upset and that she still loved him. He then tricked the two lovers and locked them in his office so that they would be forced to work things out. The two made up and Marcel suddenly asked Josiane to bear a child, an



heir, for him. She agreed after she was assured that the child would be recognized as a full heir and not be a bastard child.

In another scene, Iris was battling a crowd of shoppers to buy more of what she did not need. She ran into one of Philippe's business partners and the two women went for coffee. Caroline told her that she had met Josephine that summer and in so doing spilled the beans about her translation work and the work for the publisher. She also told Iris that from her perspective, Philippe adored Iris and seemed proud that she was writing a book. With the distraction of this news, Iris forgot to pick Alexandre up from school for his dentist appointment. Days later, Iris met with an agent from the private detective agency she hired to spy on her husband. He gave her the report of all his meetings and she was relieved to hear that there were no clandestine meetings with anyone for romantic purposes. However, Philippe had met with a man who flew into Paris to meet with him; they talked over papers, photographs and newspaper clippings, but the detective was convinced that they were not business meetings but of some other nature. The author then slips in the fact that Philippe began to sleep in his wife's bed again, so that Alexandre would no longer worry about his parents, but his voice sounded contemptuous. Following the meeting with the detective, Iris became determined to regain her husband's esteem.

On Christmas Eve, Zoe poured her heart out to her mother. She was upset that she was not on Max Barthillet's list of girls who had exploitable vaginas. Josephine said that was a good thing and tried to steer her daughter away from wanting to spend time with Max. She continued to worry about the influence the boy had on her girls. She then went to the salon with Shirley to get her hair colored and cut. While there, she saw a photo of the handsome library guy in one of the magazines and realized that he was a model and that the encounter he had with the blonde women in the street was actually a photo shoot. While walking home, Josephine asked Shirley why she did not have a man in her life and why she kept her hair short. Shirley refused to give an answer. Suddenly, the women were attacked by three young men who tried to grab their purses. Shirley suddenly became violent and defended them with punches and roundhouse kicks. Two of the attackers ran off, but Shirley proceeded to tear the clothes off the third who lay sprawled on the ground. She sent him home in his underwear. Josephine was dumbfounded and realized Shirley had reasons that lay behind her secrets. Shirley and her son, Josephine and her girls, and Max Barthillet, who was locked out of his apartment, spent the evening at Shirley's place where everyone enjoyed dinner and holiday festivities. Zoe and Max watched videos, Gary showed Hortense how to use her new computer and Josephine relaxed with her family. The following morning Jo and the girls boarded the train for Iris' chalet for the rest of the holiday. Josephine noticed Marcel helping his mistress onto the train in another compartment. Later in the dining car, Iris talked Josephine into ghost writing her book on the twelfth century; the name on the book and the publicity would be Iris's job and Jo would write the book and get the large sum of money that had already been promised. Josephine agreed to write it because she thought of all the loan payments she could make.



Analysis

In this second section, the plot lines thicken as the story shifts from simple character descriptions to a look at actions and motivations. Problems are beginning to arise for several of the characters and the author stays true to the character's personas as each one attacks their respective hurdles.

Josephine is doing well, working hard and getting on her feet financially, but true to character, is still letting people take advantage of her. She is anxious even though she has earned enough money to pay her bills. Because she is so busy working and striving to prove that she can make it, she is not being smart about her work. She does not ask about how much money any of her jobs will pay her or even think to negotiate a better deal. She just blindly does the work and accepts the check when the work is completed. Because she is making more money than she ever has before, she thinks she is being paid well. But as Caroline, Philippe's associate tells Iris, "She doesn't charge much either. Just takes her check and practically kisses your feet on the way out the door. A little worker ant, quiet as a mouse,"(145). If she took some time to research translation rates, she could probably charge more money and do better for herself. She also lets her sense of responsibility take over her sensibility when it comes to Antonio. As soon as she hears about the overdrawn bank loan, her thought is to take personal responsibility for it. While it is true that legally her name is on the loan as a co-signer, she had no real knowledge of the deal. Even the banker, Monsieur Faugeron, is aware that Josephine had no prior knowledge of the loan. When he informs her that she is listed as guarantor on the loan, the author writes, "Jo's silence told Faugeron a great deal. 'You must have signed some papers, Madame Cortes. Try to remember,'" (128). Still, Josephine assumes responsibility and works out an arrangement with the banker for monthly payment. The thought never crosses her mind to contact Antonio and let him have it or to try to force him to do something about getting the money and making the payments himself. She merely decides to work harder, in reality for Antonio's dream. He knowingly took advantage of her. As the author wrote concerning how the couple used to manage business details, "When it involved paperwork, he would point and she would sign. He'd laugh and say, 'I could get you to sign anything,'" (67). So when Antonio passed papers to Jo over the summer and she signed them without looking at the details, she allowed him to walk all over her (67). Additionally, because of this huge financial burden, Jo also allows Iris to talk her into writing her novel. Josephine feels that it is "fraud," but because she is thinking of the thirty loan payments the job represents, she is agrees to it all (176). She has not yet learned to stand up for herself or require others to give her the respect or financial remuneration she deserves. For his part, Antoine is still not willing to step up and be a responsible man. He has run off to live some kind of dream and put his family at further risk. The plan is not going well and he does not even have the nerve to push the owner, Mr. Wei, for answers.

The one thing that is in Jo's favor, is her commitment to love rather than money. Unlike almost all the other characters in the novel, she does not see money as the most important thing in life. For her money is necessary in order to live and provide for one's family, but what she truly desires is someone to love and to be loved by another.



Following the discovery of Antonio's deceit about the loan, she goes onto the balcony and prays to the stars asking them to send her someone to love. Love and desire, which she describes to Zoe, are the things she seeks. She tries to teach Zoe that she should not settle for someone like Max who apparently just wants to get into girls' pants, but that she should wait for real love. She describes desire and waiting for love to find the right time. "You wait, and the day he kisses you fireworks go off in your heart, and fill your head, and you feel like singing and dancing, and you fall in love," (152).

Marcel also begins to choose love over money as he throws caution to the wind and asks Josiane to bear him a child who will be the heir to his fortune. Following weeks of separation and emotional angst between the two, their friend and workmate, Rene, gets them back together. Josiane is excited to have Marcel back, but not just for the sake of the money, but because she seemingly really does love him. None of the details are laid out in this section, but it appears that some degree of happiness and actual love may develop for these two characters.

By comparison, the author creates mystery concerning Philippe and his feelings towards Iris, suggesting that when fear and concern over losing one's social position take priority in a relationship, dishonesty will take the place of intimacy. Philippe and Iris have become distant in both their communication and physical intimacy. Philippe works long hours and Iris realizes that at dinner parties she is no longer expected to be a part of the conversations, but just be there as decoration. At night, the two usually go to bed without having sex. At one point, Philippe even stops sleeping in the bedroom with her, but chooses to stay in his study. In addition, Iris has heard rumors about an affair that he may be having, and his lack of interest in her sexually would attest to that fact. Because she is afraid of losing her life of comfort, Iris does not want to confront her husband about the affair. But she does want to find out if it is true, so she hires a private investigator to follow Philippe and report on his actions. Even though she discovers the rumors to be false, new questions are raised. Who is Philippe meeting with and why? Despite the detachment, several other points in the section contradict the idea that Philippe no longer loves Iris. When Iris meets up with one of Philippe's associates, Caroline talks about how much he loves his wife. "He's your husband and he adores you! When he talks about you his eyes light up like the Eiffel Tower. You dazzle him," (146). Caroline also mentions that Philippe appears to be very proud of the fact that Iris is writing a novel. All this seems strange to Iris. She is also concerned that her husband never told her about Josephine working for him. If he adores her so much, why is he keeping secrets from her? The reader is left to question what Philippe is thinking as well. If he speaks adoringly of his wife at work, why is he so cold to her at home? Is it all an act? Why did he ask Josephine to keep her translation work a secret from everyone? Interestingly, Josephine confirms the idea that Philippe loves Iris. When she and Shirley are discussing the couple, the idea of divorce comes up. Josephine says, "He'll never dump her. He's madly in love with her," (156). Josephine has spent more time with Philippe since working for him and the two have had some interactions that convince Jo of his marital fidelity. The author suggests that there is a clear reason to believe it, but the reader is not given any further information, leaving an air of mystery. And while others may be convinced, Iris and Philippe are left in a dishonest muddle; neither talks openly to the other and disdain and coldness still exist on the surface.



Also in this section the author introduces a new theme, hinting at the issue of sexual abuse by making brief references into Shirley and Josiane's past experiences. Just as the recognition of such personal violations are often not discussed or dealt with openly in real life, the discussion of it in the novel is quickly tucked away and not brought into the open. When Josiane returns home for her mother's funeral, the author only briefly mentions her crying about being all alone. "I'm eight years old, and Grandpa is quietly sneaking into my room while everyone is asleep. Or pretending to be asleep," (97). A direct statement of abuse is never made, but the inference is clear that Grandpa was up to no good and everyone else in the family was aware of it, but chose to not confront it. Likewise, Shirley intentionally refuses to answer specific questions that Josephine asks concerning her past life in Scotland or about Gary's father. The only clue that she gives is that "long hair can get in your way," (165) and that hair length is somehow related to why she was not with a man. After Shirley unleashes her wrath on the three muggers who attack them, she admits that her fighting ability is also why she does not have a boyfriend. The author does give one other clue that Shirley is familiar with fighting as Shirley allows Josephine a few minutes to collect herself before they head home. "Don't worry about it. That was your first fight. You get used to it after a while," (167). Again, without significant details, readers are told that Shirley has experienced abuse and has learned how to handle it in her own way.

Pancol also makes several references to significant symbols that she establishes within the text. In the previous section, she has mentioned the white camellia on Josephine's balcony. Because the flower represents the relationship between Antonio and Josephine, the reader should consider what trouble is about to occur between the two characters. Antoine lovingly cared for the flower daily. When he left, he asked about who would care for the plant after he was gone, giving testament to the fact that he cared more about the well-being of the plants outside than he did for the welfare of his own wife and children. For the last year he had not cared to provide for them, but he did take care of the camellia. Now, at the very beginning of this section, the white camellia is mentioned again. It is a brief, one sentence statement, but its presence means that it is important. "The white camellia gave her a lot of trouble" (65). As Josephine soon discovers, Antonio has put her on the hook for his personal loan and her trouble begins.

Additionally, the references to crocodiles also continue, but with more significance as the reader learns that Tonio has gone off to manage a crocodile farm. The full meaning of the crocodiles yellow eyes is not revealed, but there are frequent references to them. Tonio sees the other croc farmers looking at him through the "slits of their yellow crocodile eyes," (123) and Iris purchases a pair of crocodile skin boots on her shopping trip. And perhaps the most obvious mention of crocodiles is when Iris promises Josephine that she will only have to help her in her lie and write a book this one time. She promises, somehow aware that if she goes back on her word she will live to regret it and "big Cruc" from their favorite tongue twister will "crunch" her (177).

Discussion Question 1

What clues are given that Iris is becoming restless with her life?



Discussion Question 2

Josephine's reaction to hearing about Antonio's loan is to make arrangements for paying on the loan in his place. What could she have done differently? Should she have had a different response?

Discussion Question 3

There are hints of sexual abuse in the past for Josiane and Shirley. Why does the author not state these incidents outright and gloss over them?

Vocabulary

magisterially, condescension, sentimentality, chador, mise-en-scene, superfluous, discomfiture, photogenic, haranguing, tacitly



Chapters 10 - 14

Summary

As the third section begins, the reader finds Josephine in the early stages of trying to write the novel for her sister. Iris had purchased a laptop for her so that she could work more efficiently. She dealt with writer's block as she stared at the blank screen and mentally ran through all the possibilities for characters, names, story lines and settings. Her mind was preoccupied with how to write the novel while trying to pay the bills and take care of the girls. One afternoon, she got some money out of her purse for Hortense and the magazine photo of the man from the library, Duffel Coat Man, fell to the floor. She decided to write him into her story too. At night she watched the stars from the balcony and remembered her father telling her how important she was to the family, even if she was the last star on the handle. Shirley suspected that Jo was keeping a secret from her and Josephine eventually slips and tells her about writing the book for Iris, even though it is supposed to be a secret. Shirley had been talking about a movie that she'd watched where a woman tries to marry the simplest man rather than chase after money. But the man becomes rich, dies and leaves her a wealthy widow, a scenario that happens repeatedly throughout the story. Josephine became excited because the story line was similar to what she wanted to put in her novel. Shirley also pressed Jo to ask Iris why it was so important for her to have the book written under her name.

Meanwhile, Antoine was feeling badly that things were not going well with the crocodile farm business. He still was receiving no pay from Mr. Wei and he was living off of Mylene's savings. He sat in the dark one night drinking and thinking about his life. The crocodiles' yellow eyes stared at him from the water. He felt like a coward, because he had not told Josephine about the business loan and was not able to make any payments on it. He was surprised at how strong both Mylene and Josephine had become; Mylene adapting well to Africa and making the most of it and Josephine carrying on without complaining to him about the loan. One of the crocs began to approach the fence near the porch and angrily banged against it. Antoine became angry with his situation and determined to go back to Paris to set up a plan with the banker and visit his family.

Iris and Josephine met to discuss the book. The publisher loved the first fifty pages and gave Iris an advance which she passed on to Josephine. Jo was worried about how to handle the taxes, but Iris told her not to worry. Iris was looking forward to all the fame she would get from the book's success as she was tired of being simply a rich, boring wife. She also wanted to attract Philippe's attention again because she was afraid that he wanted to leave her. She asked Jo about the concept of the degrees of humility that the book's main character, Florine, adheres to as she strives toward self-denial and God. Iris told Jo that she had about seven months to write the book and reminded her that she was to tell no one about the book if their plan was going to work.



Meanwhile, Josiane and Marcel were having difficulty conceiving. Marcel became extremely attentive to Josiane, sending her on a mountain holiday and checking on her health. He also tried to make himself appear younger, with hair implants, facial creams and dieting. He quit smoking and ate organic food. He also began to shop for baby clothes. After many weeks of trying to get pregnant, Marcel and Josiane visited a fertility specialist and learned that nothing was physically wrong with either of them and that they just needed to keep trying to conceive.

At the office, Chaval stopped in to announce that he had been hired by Ikea to run their stores in France and he would be leaving Casamia. He also commented on running into Hortense at the office and that she was hot stuff. In his private office, Marcel met with a business associate from the Ukraine. He wanted to secure his agreement to open a factory there where he could pay low wages for manufacturing his goods. He assured the Ukrainian that he would be personally well provided for with luxury perks if he closed the deal, which he did.

Philippe was at work when John Goodfellow called and told him that they had been seen together by a private investigator. Philippe said not to worry and that he would take care of the problem. He began to think about how he spent his time and considered giving up his practice and becoming a consultant so he had more time to himself. He then put his work aside for the rest of the afternoon to spend time with Alexandre.

Antoine returned to his former home in France and visited Josephine. She was surprised at how much he had changed, looking more worn and obviously drinking. Antoine felt that everything seemed the same, familiar and comfortable. He had tried to talk to Faugeron about the loan, but the banker did not pay him much attention and did not seem worried because Josephine had everything under control. Josephine told Antoine he had to be positive when he was with the girls. She encouraged him to pull himself together and play it tough with Mr. Wei when he returned to Africa. She realized that she had changed over the last year and that she no longer loved Antoine, but that she had become self-sufficient and strong. Antoine took the girls out to dinner and Jo wrote, incorporating her feelings into the book. While he was out, Mylene shopped for cosmetics which she planned to sell to the Chinese women back in Kenya. Antoine suggested that he take the girls to Africa for their two week Easter break which gave Josephine lots of free time to write. She began by intensifying the plot for Florine. Rather than being forced to marry the rich Count Guillaume, Florine declares her intent to enter the convent. Her hard-hearted and money-thirsty mother insists on her marriage. In defiance, Florine shaves off her beautiful blonde locks. She is taken to see the count with a head covering of embroidery and jewels. He falls in love with her and asks her hand in marriage. She is forced to obey her parents and accepts the marriage as her first rung on the ladder of humility. Meanwhile in Africa, Mylene and Hortense got along well and Antoine enjoyed spending time with Zoe. During a talk about the crocodiles and all their babies, Zoe asked if he and Mylene were going to have babies, because she did not want any other children in the family. Antoine was also shocked to see how much Hortense looked like a woman and was uncomfortable with how sexually she behaved. Shirley, who had accompanied the girls on the trip, told him it was just the beginning.



Back home, Henriette was looking to catch Marcel up to no good. He had mistakenly called her darling which he had not done in years and she also found his bed empty (he slept in a separate room, claiming that his snoring would keep her awake) in the middle of the night. She went to his office and sorted through his desk where she found receipts for a hotel and expensive jewelry from the Ukrainian business associate, a photo of Marcel hugging a brunette woman named Natasha and a box of onesies under Marcel's desk. Henriette was thrilled that she had evidence of Marcel's infidelity which she could use against him. She also thought that he must be thinking of starting a baby clothing line in the stores.

Concerning the book, Iris began to have lunches again with Berengere so that she could practice talking about her book and creating an image for promotion purposes. Josephine also suggested lots of books to read so that she was knowledgeable about the time period. Josephine continued to work on the novel in the local library, killing off Florine's first husband and creating a new problem for the young widow. Jealous neighbors threatened to abduct her and steal her wealth, so she secretly marries a young troubadour named Thibaut. She noticed that Duffel Coat Man was sitting at the far end of her table and she patterned Florine's new lover after him, drawing inspiration from him. At the end of the afternoon, she quickly packed up her things and followed the handsome man outside to the bus stop. They talked on the bus and Josephine learned that he was writing a book on the history of tears for a foreign publisher. When she arrived home, there was a crowd outside her building because the Barthillets had been evicted. Josephine invited them to stay with her that night since they had nowhere to go. Shirley also asked Jo to keep an eye on Gary since she had to suddenly go to London for a job. She was a bit concerned because Gary was increasingly obsessed with Hortense and wondering when he would be able to have sex with someone.

In the evening, Hortense and Josephine had a fight about the Barthillets staying in the apartment. Jo got angry and slapped Hortense because of her disrespectful comments and selfish attitudes. Later, everyone talked about watching the English Royal Family's ball on TV. While watching, Josephine noticed a blonde-haired woman standing discreetly behind the queen, who she believed was Shirley. Everyone agreed that it looked like her, but Gary said it was not his mother. She was determined to get the truth from Shirley when she got home. Her anger with everyone fueled her writing and she was able to kill off Florine's second husband and move on to a third. Duffle Coat Man, who she continued to see at the library, commented on her passion for writing and mischievous look. Josephine learned that his name was Luca, he was Italian and had no family. He invited her to a movie and she eagerly accepted. She cried during the movie and afterward they walked through the city. When he left her at the front door of her building, she felt depressed that she was alone and that nothing more romantic had happened. Inside, everyone was still awake, looking at pictures on the internet. Josephine looked and saw photographs of Gary as a little boy, vacationing with the English princes, William and Harry and being led around on a pony by Prince Charles. She also learned that Shirley had returned home. Hortense continued being disrespectful and said that Luca was probably a library geek, because no one else would be interested in her mother.



In the morning, Josephine went to see Shirley and confronted her about what she was doing in London. Shirley admitted that it was her standing by the queen but would not tell Josephine any other details because she wanted her to be kept in the dark for her safety. She said she had come to France to hide and not have to worry constantly for her safety. She had met up with her former lover, as she always did when in England, in a hotel by a park. They had spent several days together before she returned home. Her lover was also in hiding and never came to France, in order to keep her safe. Shirley told Jo that she would be able to deflect any questions from the others about her being on TV or the photos of Gary with the Princes. She was also a bit concerned that Jo let it slip to Luca that she was writing a book. Josephine also talked about how she was more confident as a person and no longer fearful of life.

On a side note, Josephine was frustrated by Christine's lack of motivation to find a job or try to support herself, but instead spent her days on the internet looking for men on dating websites. She had decided to find a rich man to support her so she would not have to work and said that Max could figure out how to survive on his own. She went out on a date one afternoon after she had Hortense dress her so she would look good. But Christine became worried because the man, Alberto, had not yet tried to sleep with her.

Josephine continued to write Florine's story. Her fourth husband was Guibert the Pious, a fierce and false preacher who subjugated Florine, forcing her to wear sackcloth and perform hard labor in order to remain pious and humble. Florine was taken with him because she was sure that her devotion to such a man would lead her closer to God. After marrying her, Guibert refuses to consummate the marriage, cuts off her long golden hair and tried to get Florine to give him her gold. A faithful servant, who had fled the home, returned with some knights and killed Guibert. They discovered among his things, lots of gold which he had stolen from several other women he had similarly deceived and then murdered. Josephine realized that once again her heroine was rich, but lonely, just as she would soon be if her relationship with Luca did not go any further. She conceived the end of the story in her mind; Florine would marry one last time, but this time to a neighbor and they would live a simple quiet life in a cottage, until her husband discovered a vein of silver ore and they become rich once more. Josephine was glad to come up with the ending, but was sorry to have to give the story over to Iris. As she finished her work for the day, she read an email from Antoine who wrote about finally getting paid and that Mylene's cosmetic business was taking off. She also gave an ultimatum to Christine to be out of the apartment by month's end.

The various children were busy as well. Hortense began her internship with Marcel and was trying to hide her interest in Bruno Chaval. She also began to go out after work and behave sweetly to her mother in order to get her to agree. Iris began to take the three younger kids out to museums and parks every day so that Josephine would have quiet time to work on the novel. Zoe told Alexandre that they had seen pictures of Gary online and that he was a Prince. Alexandre did not believe her and was annoyed that she wanted to copy Hortense and hung out with Max.



Josephine completed the novel and she and the girls went to Deauville to spend some time at Iris's beach house. Iris delivered the manuscript to Serrurier and the sisters waited to hear the response. In the early mornings, Jo and Philippe chatted. One morning, he asked her what she was like as a child and Josephine said she was the same as now. Recently she had been remembering childhood scenes, like when she was in her father's arms and he was yelling at her mother, "You're a criminal!" She hoped she would remember what it all meant. Philippe and Iris went out for drinks one evening and he realized that had woken up and no longer saw Iris as the center of his universe. He did not know if it was because of his meetings with John Goodfellow or something else. Meanwhile, Hortense spent many evenings going out with friends. Also, while doing laundry, Carmen found a cell phone in her jeans and Josephine wondered how she got it, since she had not bought Hortense a phone. Also at the beach house, Iris reported to Josephine that their mother thought Marcel had a mistress and was glad that she had incriminating evidence against him if he tried to divorce her. Josephine, however, thought that Marcel had a perfect right to fall in love with someone else, since Henriette was no picnic to be with; mother and daughter still had not spoken or seen each other since the big blow up. One morning, Jo went for a run and came back to the house to the news that the publisher loved the book. Iris said it was now time for her to take on her role and become a "writer." Iris, Philippe and Josephine went out that night to celebrate the book. Philippe asked what the title was and Jo said she had never even considered a title. Iris tried to cover over the slip, but Philippe had already caught other clues and realized that Josephine was the secret author. He was seething with anger toward Iris, but put on a cheerful outward face and continued the celebration.

Analysis

The heart of the novel is contained in this section as the author continues to develop each main character's arc, as individuals make choices to either grow and adapt to new circumstances or continue to follow their familiar path of behavior. Josephine has committed to writing the novel for Iris and is embarking on a new adventure. While she had written many academic papers before, a novel is different and she must work through how to tackle the task. Here the author gives the reader insight to the working world of a writer as they plan and conceive the concepts for their work. Josephine wonders, "Mix one cup of love with a dash of adventure, a few ounces of historical references, and two pounds of sweat" (182). Pagnol introduces the reader to Josephine's struggle with writer's block and the creation of characters and plot developments. She grows attached to her characters and some become friends, like Thibaut who she patterns after Luca. As the author writes of Josephine, "She was already so attached to her story -- to Florine, and to her parents and her husbands. In bed, she would go over their names, the color of their hair and eyes, their personality traits (202). She also learns that she can funnel her emotions into her writing as well, directing her anger against the cruel priest-husband and dispatching him without regret. She learns quickly and becomes passionate about writing and in so doing, she finds herself and develops a new inner strength. As she tells Shirley one day how writing has displaced her fear, Josephine says, "I've learned that happiness doesn't mean living a safe life without screw-ups or mistakes, without taking risks. Happiness means



accepting effort and doubt, and keeping on moving forward, overcoming obstacles" (269).

This new strength and willingness to improve on flaws is a major theme within the novel as Josephine's change is noticed by others, even from afar. In Africa, Antoine is feeling cowardly because he never even told Josephine about deceiving her and getting her to co-sign the business loan. He is impressed that she did not complain to him and realizes upon his brief return to France that she has been working hard and paying on the loan herself. From her new position of confidence and strength, she gives Antonio advice, telling him to pull himself together for the sake of their daughters and not mention any of his business failings in front of them. She tells him to play hardball with Mr. Wei and force him into paying his salary. She also tells him to ease off the drinking that is beginning to take over his life. Previously, Josephine's advice or requests to look for a job seemed like a broken record to Antoine, but now they appear to be good advice that he is willing to follow. The change he sees in Josephine inspires him to make changes in himself as well. He asks her what she thinks the formula is for people to succeed. She replies, "I don't think there's any formula. Nobody succeeds all at once. You set one stone on top of another and you keep on going. When you go back to your crocodiles, try to take things as they come, one at a time," (216). Antoine follows through and goes on strike upon returning to Kenya, forcing Mr. Wei to pay him.

Josephine also takes her own advice. She pays more attention to her own physical appearance. She tries to eat healthier and gets her hair highlighted. And whereas previously others thought she was being a pushover by allowing Madame Barthillet to stay with her, Jo puts her foot down and gives Christine an ultimatum. Following weeks of freeloading and exhibiting a complete lack of trying to get her life together, Jo kicks the woman out of her apartment. She stands up for herself and her daughters and tells Christine it is time to move on.

Another character who is changing is Philippe as he decides to become a devoted father and spend less time in his intense job as a lawyer. He realizes that his son, Alexandre is growing up and needs a father who is present in order to guide him into responsible manhood. Previously he had wanted to impress Iris and build a home and successful career of which she would be proud. But he is tired of her manipulative and snooty ways and is tired of working so hard. He has made his mark and built a successful career and feels that it is time to slow down. He comes home early every evening and helps Alex with his schoolwork and takes him to ball games and museums. In some ways, he is like the Florine, in Josephine's novel. He has wealth, but what he longs for is a simple life devoted to someone he loves. And as he puts it, he has woken up (289) and he realizes that Iris is no longer the center of his universe.

One character who is developing, but definitely not for the better is Hortense. Following in the footsteps of her aunt and grandmother, Hortense is fervently interested in money. From the very beginning she stated her intent to not be poor, and as she pushes full ahead into her teenage years, she copies their actions. Both Henriette and Iris were able to secure marriages to wealthy men because of the bearing and attractiveness. They knew how to hold themselves and use their feminine charms to get everything



they wanted. Hortense does the same things. She is aware that she has a shapely body and moves in a way to attract attention. On the beaches in Kenya, Antoine sees his daughter's behavior and looks around to see if there are any other men watching (228). In contrast, Hortense is embarrassed by her mother's discomfort with her own body at the spa pool. As she tells her mother later, she is tired of her "hangdog" look and hates everything she stands for. Hortense is focused on the external and has the goal of attracting the kind of man that will ensure a life of luxury, just as her grandmother and aunt have done. She has also mastered the art of manipulation. When she begins to exert her independence and wants to go out with friends, she suddenly becomes very nice to her mother, despite her earlier extremely disrespectful behavior. She calls her mother to ask permission to stay for an after work party at Casamia and kindly says, "Mom, sweetie, please don't spoil my fun," (278). Later when the family is at the beach house she again asks to go out, "Can I please, Mom, sweetheart? You're looking all radiant tonight," (295). But Jo is no dummy and sees through her daughter's sweet talk and wonders what she is hiding behind the syrupy speech. Yet, although she is aware of Hortense's deceit, she does not know how to deal with it. When she and Carmen discover a cell phone in Hortense's jeans, Jo does not want to "fire the first shot," (290) so she does not confront Hortense but waits until she shows her hand. She is still unsure of how to manage her teenage daughter's desire for freedom and thinks that "manage" and "Hortense" are "two words that really didn't go together," (278).

A second theme within the novel is a look at the interplay between love and money within a marriage and the damage that pursuing wealth has on a relationship. For example, several women in the story are concerned about maintaining or improving their financial position by securing their relationships. Josiane wants to secure her position with Marcel because she does want to be with him and truly loves him. But she wants to be assured that the baby they are trying to conceive will have a rightful place in Marcel's family. She is a bit worried about giving him what he wants, and then being cut off herself. Henriette is also concerned about being cut from Marcel's money. She however, has no affection for her husband, but only wants his money. She initially only married him in the first place in order to provide a secure life for herself and her two daughters after her first husband passed away. She is thrilled to find what she believes to be evidence against Marcel. If Marcel were to try to divorce her, she will cry foul and take him for everything he has. It in no way bothers her that he has a mistress, she only cares about getting her cut of his dynasty. Similarly, Iris chooses to stay with Philippe and tries to get him re-interested in her by "writing" her novel. She also does not love her husband, but wants to stay connected to the money. By contrast, both Josephine and her novel's heroine chose love over money. They prefer to work hard and grow as individuals rather than rely on the wealth of another.

Also, in this section, Pagnol continues with several items of mystery in the novel. The reader continues to wonder what is going on between Philippe and the man he has been secretly meeting. In this section the author reveals that the man is named John Goodfellow. However, it is still unknown what the two men meet about and what Philippe is planning. He reflects on something that Iris tried to do 15 years earlier, (295) but the reader is given no other clues as to what that might be. Additionally, the author reveals more of the secret story behind Shirley's life. Following the trip to England and



being seen on TV by Josephine and the kids, Shirley finally confesses that she does have some connection to the royal family. But Pancol, keeps the intrigue going by not telling the reader much more. Saying that it is safer for everyone to not have all the information, Shirley clams up and the reader, like Josephine, is left to wonder what happened back in England and to guess the identity of Gary's father. She tells Josephine that someday she will most likely figure things out on her own, giving the reader hope too that they will learn more by the novel's conclusion.

A final bit of intrigue surrounds Josephine and pieces of childhood memories that she becomes aware of from time to time. She sometimes remembers her father carrying her in his arms while yelling that Henriette is a criminal. She cannot remember what happened that day, but only knows that her parents became distant from one another afterward. Josephine believes that someday she will discover the meaning behind the memory and the bit of foreshadowing tells the reader that the explanation will be forthcoming for them as well.

The author concludes the section with the central plot line of the novel's journey as it goes to publication amid great praise from the publisher. Iris is thrilled to take on her new role and ready to spring into the limelight, while Josephine is sorry to let her baby go.

Discussion Question 1

How does the author use mystery to create dramatic tension surrounding both Philippe's actions concerning Iris and Shirley's identity?

Discussion Question 2

Josephine is developing more self confidence and emotional strength. Has she learned this lesson as she deals with Hortense? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Is Josephine behaving foolishly to allow the Barthillets to stay in her apartment or is she acting kindly?

Vocabulary

candor, doldrums, swindle, congealed, choucroute, concocted, abnegation, proffered, conspirators, repository, scullion, wimple, pareo, laudable, ergot, fait accompli, tirades, hangdog, nymphet, fanaticism, lopsided, troll, aggrieved, conspiratorial, voluptuous, embezzling, incriminating, gaffe, mordant



Chapters 15 - 17

Summary

The novel was published and Iris began to sell the book with drama and style. During an interview on national TV she agreed unflinchingly to have her long black hair cut off and in so doing identified with her novel's heroine, Florine, who cuts her hair rather than be forced into a loveless marriage. The ratings soared as did Iris's popularity as an author. The books sold wildly and Iris soaked up every minute of the fame the book provided. Josephine meanwhile struggled with keeping the secret in light of the novel's popularity. She and the girls watched the TV appearance at Shirley's apartment over dinner. A cellphone rang and Jo wondered whose phone it was. Finally, Hortense admitted to having a phone that she said a friend had given her because his parents were very rich and he had two phones. Josephine told her to return it and that she would buy her a phone.

As fall arrived, Josiane received the news she had been waiting for as she discovered that she was finally pregnant. Suddenly, Henriette arrived on the scene and asked to speak with Josiane in confidence. She wanted to know if she knew anything about Marcel seeing another woman and showed her the photograph of the brunette woman that she had previously found in Marcel's desk drawer. Josiane tried to not visibly react and asked to photocopy the picture. She told Henriette that she would check in the files to see if she could identify the woman. Inwardly, she was seething with anger toward Marcel that he seemingly had another lover on the side. In other covert operations, Hortense was sneaking around with Bruno Chaval. She was taking advantage of his infatuation with her and using him to drive her around shopping. He pressed her to have sex with him, but she put him off and threatened to leave him if he kept pushing it. Inside the apartment building, she used a janitor's closet to change out of her skimpy, sexy clothes and redressed in more modest clothes before going home.

In Africa, Antoine's problems had not improved. The crocodiles were becoming picky eaters and the females that were recently shipped to the park for breeding were all nearing menopause. Production levels were way down and he worried about the future of the farm. Mylene, however, was becoming highly successful in her cosmetics business and Mr. Wei had offered to become a business partner and investor in expanding her boutique. She had worked out a contract, using a business contact provided by Marcel. Antoine was disappointed that Mylene had not thought to include him in the deal and questioned the depth of their relationship.

The author swings back to discussing the book and some of the characters as they continue to deal with its success. Philippe snuck into Iris's study and read through her notebook of newspaper and magazine clippings about the novel. He was disgusted with how she paraded around flamboyantly advertising the book. He also saw a clipping she had on Gabor Minar, reinforcing his belief that she still had feelings for her former lover. He was at peace with the knowledge that he no longer loved her and was waiting to



execute one last move before he left her for good. One evening he completed his plans over the phone as he talked with John Goodfellow confirming that they should move forward with the plans for New York City. Alexandre and Zoe overheard his conversation because they were playing and hiding in a large armoire in Philippe's study. They learned that Philippe believed that Josephine had actually written the novel, not Iris. He then suggested to Iris that they attend the upcoming New York Film Festival where Gabor Minar was scheduled to be the honored guest at a dinner one evening. Philippe and Iris were seated at the same table as several actors and soon Gabor arrived. Iris was enthralled to see him again and Gabor was surprised and delighted as well. He then proceeded to introduce his wife. Iris was stunned and learned that he had three children as well. She did not speak for the rest of the evening. The next morning, Philippe met with Goodfellow and thanked him for all his work and said goodbye. He and Iris returned home and he waited to deliver his final blow.

Josephine continued to struggle as Iris received all the glory and praise for her novel. She was thrilled that people were reading her book, but disappointed that she could not claim it as her own. Philippe asked her to complete another translation project, but she turned him down, saying that she needed to get back to her research dossier. Philippe questioned her choice of words and Josephine realized that she needed to be careful with choosing her words, although he was now convinced that Josephine was the true author of the novel.

Josephine also came to a realization concerning her childhood. While attending a fashion show with Hortense, she recognized one of the models as Luca. She waved to him from the audience and he looked directly at her, but completely ignored her as if he did not know her. She was deeply hurt and could not understand why he would treat her that way. She went to gather herself in the restroom, filled the sink with cold water and plunged her head in the basin. Holding her head down underwater, memories of the past came flooding back and she clearly remembered what happened many years prior. She and Iris had been swimming in the ocean with Henriette when the current changed and began to pull them out deeper. Henriette could not swim in with both young girls in her arms, so she pushed Josephine off and swam into shore with only Iris, leaving Jo to fend for herself. Josephine gathered her strength and swam to the breaker where a wave picked her up and deposited her on the shore. Her father picked her up and screamed, "You're a criminal," at his wife who had just chosen to sacrifice one child for the other. Josephine composed herself in the restroom, realizing the truth but feeling secure in the knowledge that someone was watching over her that day and every day since, making her stronger. She could let go of the past and her mother's neglect and completely move on.

Josephine and Shirley chatted about Jo's recent discovery of the past while they had their hair done at the salon one day. Once again, Jo asked Shirley to tell her more about her past and Shirley refused, repeating that it could put her in grave danger. As they arrived home, they saw a man dressed in black sitting on the steps outside the building. Shirley spoke quickly, to Josephine and told her to speak in French and please watch out for Gary as he came home and keep him at her house for the night. Josephine did as Shirley requested, hiding Gary and filling him in on the situation. Shirley invited the



man, named Jack, into her apartment. Later the next day, Shirley came over to tell Jo that the coast was clear and the man had left. She had told him there was an undercover agent living in the building and that he should not come to the apartment anymore. Shirley announced that she decided to move to Mustique, a small private island in the Caribbean where she owned a house. She invited Iris and the girls to spend Christmas there with her and then asked if Josephine could keep Gary until the end of the school year so he could finish out his schooling. Shirley said that for the time being she was safe, but that it was important that she move on.

Things were not good for Marcel as he arrived back home from a month long trip to China. Upon arriving at the office, he met with Josiane's fury about the brunette in the photo. Marcel soon understood why she was giving him the cold shoulder. He had known that Henriette was snooping around his office and purposely planted the photo to give her false evidence. He also thought that then she would never suspect their relationship if Josiane got pregnant and began to show. Suddenly, Josiane realized that Marcel was not planning on leaving Henriette anytime soon and stormed out of the office with her suitcase and did not even say goodbye to anyone. Marcel had not been able to reveal that he had been working on a huge deal in China to buy out a Chinese corporation that left all the European competition behind. The reorganization of his finances and company enabled him to write Henriette out of the business and enabled him to be free of her. However, he could not tell anyone until the deal closed. As soon as it did and word got around he was sure that Josiane would come back to him. He rented a beautiful apartment in an exclusive building next door to Casamia and prepared everything for Josiane and the baby. Nearby, Josiane was drowning her sorrows with fancy meals and clothing purchases all at Marcel's expense by using the credit card he had given her. One evening, she ran into Chaval at the hotel bar and learned about the buyout. She then understood that Marcel needed to protect his financial situation first before he could leave Henriette, or she would take half his money. She returned to him the next day and they happily reunited.

Finally, Josephine and Luca experienced some ups and downs in their relationship. In the fall, following the novel's publication, they went to a conference on the sacred in the Middle Ages. Luca gave a paper and Josephine signed up to do a presentation as well. They enjoyed their time together and one night they almost made love, but Josephine suddenly felt insecure and stopped it. Feeling rejected, Luca did not contact her for weeks. Then suddenly, one day he called and requested that they meet to talk. He fired questions at her and asked if she was the author of *The Humble Queen*. He was very upset that she had disappeared from his life and then seemingly reappeared in the pages of the novel and that she had kept such a secret. Josephine asked why he had ignored her at the fashion show. Luca revealed that he had a twin brother who was a model, who lived a glamorous life but was always getting into trouble and expecting Luca to bail him out. The two confess their attraction for each other and happiness at finding someone who had the same interests and was down to earth.



Analysis

In this section, the author continues to explore the theme of love versus money as two men in the story decide that they have had enough abuse at the hands of their heartless wives and crush their further ability to exploit their wealth. The men have endured loveless marriages as their wives have been interested in them merely for the financial standing and comfortable lives they were able to maintain. The men choose different methods as their goals are different and designed to strike uniquely as well.

Henriette's chief love is money. From the very beginning, Marcel has known that Henriette only married him for his money. He was so taken with her that he disregarded the advice of his good friend, Rene, and married her anyway. She was never very warm to him, denied him sexual pleasures and most importantly to Marcel, refused to give him a child. She wormed her way into the company so that she owned half of the holdings and was the CEO of the board. Her hold on Marcel and the company was fairly tight and he was unable to divorce her and move onto his relationship with Josiane without losing a significant portion of his wealth. But his clever reorganization of the company in light of the secret buy out deal he maneuvered in China enabled him to free himself from her money-grubbing grasp. For Marcel, this is not only a good business move but a way to pursue the true love of his life - Josiane. He is in no way concerned about how Henriette will feel. In fact, he does not think she will in any way be affected emotionally, because she in no way ever loved him. She will only be affected as far as it concerns her bank account. Marcel is gracious, however, in his dismissal of his wife. He plans to give her a monthly stipend and allow her to live in their old apartment. As Marcel tells Ginette of his plan, "She'll lack for nothing, believe me. I won't be an asshole about it" (340).

In contrast, Philippe intends to strike at Iris's heart. While Iris is certainly fixed on maintaining a luxurious lifestyle, she has also desired a loving relationship, just with a lover from her past. For years she has fantasized about what her life would have been like if she had stayed with Gabor Minar, the now famous movie director. Philippe is aware of her desire and has carefully orchestrated a plan to crush her dreams. The author reveals that the meetings with John Goodfellow have all been to set up this sting operation, covertly manipulating directors, agents and even Minar himself to be at a chosen spot where Philippe could get the former lovers to meet again after 15 years. His plan forces Iris to publicly discover that her former lover is married and the father of three children. With hundreds of people watching, her dreams are crushed and she is emotionally devastated. Philippe gathers a secret pleasure as he watches this happen; Iris has no idea of his role in the revelation. Philippe's success is known only to himself, but he derives great pleasure and a sense of power over Iris, knowing that he dealt her a crushing blow. On the trip home he thinks, "I know everything, Iris...I know because I arranged it all," (356). He is angry that she never gave herself to their relationship and very clearly wishes to hurt her as punishment rather than merely confront her.

Pancol also finally puts together the pieces from Josephine's past, highlighting her newfound strength and ability to do battle with life's hardships. In a bathroom scene where Jo plunges her head underwater to compose herself following an outright



rejection from Luca, she completely remembers the details of the ocean scene as young child. She relives her mother's abandonment of her and her choice to save the "favored" child. But Josephine is not horrified or devastated at the discovery as one might expect. Instead, she focuses on the fact that she gathered her strength and swam and that a wave picked her up and carried her to safety. As she recalls, "You should have died that day, but you got through it. A hand reached out and set you back on dry land. So don't be afraid. You're not alone," (355). She reaffirms her belief that God is watching over her and that she does not need to be afraid of whatever life brings her way. She has come a long way from the opening scene of the novel, where a simple cut from a potato peeler sets her off to almost despair of life to being at peace with the knowledge of such a great personal rejection. As she tells Shirley later on, "I'm so much stronger now, I can let all that go. It's a gift from heaven you know" (362).

The experience also includes as comparative nod to Josephine's similarity to her novel's character as both draw closer to God. Florine strives to climb the ladder of humility so that she may know God more fully. Josephine works hard and quietly accepts her place in the world as it is given to her. She is thankful for the lessons she has learned in life and confident in heaven's watchful care. When Shirley asks if she still speaks to the stars, her answer is specific and defined. "I speak directly to God when I speak to them. When I have a problem, I pray and ask him to help me, and he does. He always answers me" (363).

With one final revelation and comparison, the author brings home the point that within families there are often conflicting values and emphasis on what is important in life. As Josephine and Luca meet to hash out the recent strain in their relationship, Jo discovers that Luca has a twin brother, who is very different from him in his values and lifestyle. Vittorio lives in the glamorous world of fashion, spending all his money and living so rashly that he often gets himself into trouble. In contrast, Luca lives the quiet life of a scholar who was thrilled to have found someone to share his passions. Even though mirror physical images, the brothers have extremely different values.

Discussion Question 1

Is Philippe justified in his plan to crush Iris's dream of being with Gabor or is he simply being cruel?

Discussion Question 2

Is Marcel justified in his deceptive plan to mislead Henriette concerning his infidelity and write her out of his company?



Discussion Question 3

Josephine does not seem terribly devastated when she fully remembers that her mother abandoned her as a child. How has her life prepared her for this discovery and how is she able to easily move on?

Vocabulary

contemporaries, appraisingly, obsequious, schnorrer, armoire, emissary, colloquium, enunciate, nonchalance, guilt, homage, crumpet, clandestine, beatific, eminent, steeped, penitential



Chapters 18 - 22

Summary

As the section starts, Josephine and the girls have joined Shirley and Gary at her home on Mustique Island. It was a luxurious and beautiful way to spend the Christmas holiday. Shirley finally told Jo everything about her background and her true identity. She admitted to being an illegitimate daughter of Queen Elizabeth who posed as her bodyguard from time to time in order to be in her presence without calling question to her identity. She was raised away from the palace, but was able to see her mother from time to time. When she was sent to boarding school, she rebelled and became rather wild and suddenly found herself pregnant with Gary. The father left and Shirley returned to London. She then asked to see her mother and the arrangement was made for Shirley to pose as a bodyguard. Gary was able to grow up with his cousins, the royal princes. When Shirley fell in love with another man she told him who she really was and he turned on her and began to blackmail her. The rest of her life was spent hiding Gary from him and laying low so that he would not expose the truth to the press. She now felt that she could tell Jo everything because she had decided to stop hiding and allow British intelligence to deal with the man.

Meanwhile, back in France, Iris was frustrated that book sales were slowing down and she was no longer in the spotlight. She was also depressed because learning that Gabor Minar was married. She decided that another book was needed and she began to pressure Josephine to write it. Josephine refused, because she wanted to write for herself, having experienced the thrill of success. She tried to get Hortense to pressure her mother, but Josephine firmly told her that it was not her business to get involved in. Later, Zoe told Hortense what she had overheard in the armoire that Iris did not write the book. Iris's request now made sense to Hortense and she decided that she needed to protect her mother's interests and get her the rights to the book. She just needed help.

Jo decided to go to Philippe and tell him the truth about the novel, but he kindly made it easy on her and said he already knew. He suspected the truth for a long, somewhat based on what happened with Iris fifteen years earlier when they first met. Iris had taken a play written by a group of friends, reworked it and sold it to some producers. One of the other writers found out and Philippe was called in to smooth things over and pay off the other writer with hush money. Despite her deceit, Philippe was taken with her charm and beauty and he fell in love with her and they soon married. Jo also talked to Philippe about paying the taxes on the book income, but he did not want to complicate things or humiliate Iris publicly.

Next Iris tried to stir up publicity for the book again by using some innocent photos taken with Gary and passing them off as she and her young lover. They were all over the tabloids and created a big stir. Gary was not worried about them, because he knew they



would soon blow over. Philippe however decided to take Alexandre to England to visit his grandparents.

In Africa, Antoine's croc business was failing. He became angry and started drinking again. He missed the girls and he missed Josephine and wondered if it were possible to return to France and start again. He called Josephine and discovered that she was now in love with someone else and it was too late for them. Sometime later Mylene showed up at Josephine's and informed her that Atoine was dead, eaten by crocodiles as he waded into the river.

On a happier note, Josiane and Marcel became the proud parents of a baby boy. Marcel was a nervous daddy on the way to the hospital and proud to see his heir. When Henriette called him to question why there were now two bank accounts, he happily informed her that she had been officially cut out of the company and his life. She would be provided for with an apartment and a stipend, but she was on her own. Iris was also miserable. He photo shoot stunt backfired and everyone was now mad at her and hurt. She sulked in her own and was miserable.

When Hortense found out about her father's death, she also learned that he had not been supporting the family in any way. She was even more concerned for her mother's rights to earn her book's royalties. With the help of none other than Mick Jagger, who she had met on Mustique Island, she was able to get an interview on a national television show. She proceeded to reveal that her mother was the true author of *A Most Humble Queen* and not Iris. She said that she needed to protect her mother because she had worked so hard to support her family. Josephine was happy that the truth was out in the open and that she would be able to write under her own name and get credit for it. She was also touched that Hortense stood up for her and recognized her hard work. She felt that perhaps there was love. Following the show, she and Hortense celebrate together the possibilities of the next book.

Analysis

As the final section begins, the author sums up the story arcs for each character and deals with some of the looming questions that have not been answered. Josephine along with the reader finally learns about Shirley's true identity. Shirley first gives Jo a history lesson, perhaps in order to ease her into the revelation and possibly because she believes Jo will understand and appreciate the need for secrecy since she appreciates history and all its nuances.

For many of the characters, the object of their pursuit is either achieved happily or lost tragically. Josephine and Luca, the hardworking, modest lovers are together and secure in their relationship. Marcel and Josiane are off on the new adventure of parenthood. Having "depos[ed] the tyrant," (415) Marcel is thrilled to be free of Henriette and on to his new life with someone who truly loves him. Although she may have initially only been interested in Marcel for his money, she came to love him and is thrilled that she is able to have a child with him as an older woman.



Perhaps the most touching story of discovered love is that between mother and daughter as Josephine and Hortense find common ground by the novel's conclusion. Hortense has always hated Josephine's interest in the past, her dowdy appearance and her lectures about careful spending of money. She preferred her father's flair and fun-loving take on life and felt closer to him. She was angry that her mother was not willing to be supported by Henriette or that she did not take the simplest way out of their financial predicament. But as she learns that Antoine never supplied them with any money and that Josephine was able to support them solely based on the work she did, Hortense begins to develop respect for her. She is impressed that her mother wrote a bestselling novel and she wants her to get credit for it. Perhaps because she herself has begun to see the value of hard work and has personal goals and interests, she is able to see her mother in a different light. Hortense is studying hard to get good grades to be able to get into fashion design school. She has worked with Marcel and has been on the set of several photo shoots. She is beginning to understand that there is pleasure in interesting work and that not everything has to be handed to you in life.

Not all stories end well and perhaps the most tragic is Atoine's. Although he is not a terribly bad guy, he is misguided. Rather than appreciate the gift he had in his wife and daughters, he refused to step up and take responsibility to care and provide for them. Instead he took better care of his plants and squandered his love on another woman. Not wanting to settle for a job that was not glamorous, his crazy get-rich plan in Kenya fails terribly. Even his lover is not completely sold out to him. Although she traveled to Africa with him, she is moving on with successful business deals that do not include him, and he feels abandoned and alone. As he realizes that he gave up happiness with his family he gets angry at the crocs and symbolically all of life. As he once told Jo, "It's Africa...Only the big cats survive in Africa. And the crocodiles," (215). He is unable to take it and allows the crocs to finish him off.

Finally, Pancol orchestrates the demise of Iris and Henriette. Iris fades somewhat quietly into the background as all the wind has been taken from her sails. She has publicly embarrassed herself with her photo stunt and Hortense finished her off by revealing the truth about the ghost writing scheme. Philippe has for the most part left her and taken Alexandre who is also disgusted by her behavior. She has lost everything she once had and held dear. She commiserates with Josephine but knows that it is all her fault. "I messed up, and I got caught. Life was easy and I shouldn't have tried for more. I would roll the dice, and the dice were always hot. Then they suddenly went cold," (418). The reader does not know the full outcome of Iris's demise, but Pancol paints enough of a picture to show that it will not be pretty.

Colorful, however would easily describe the manner in which Marcel dispatches Henriette. The Toothpick gets everything that is coming to her as far as Marcel is concerned. She has blatantly used him and been cold and unloving. Now that he has found someone to share mutual love and respect as well as a child, Marcel is done playing along. He is so filled with delight to deliver the news to Henriette that she is completely out of his life. He hits her with every blow imaginable, from talking about the separate banks accounts, to being written out of the company to no longer having



access to the chauffeur. And for an extra dig, he throws out the tidbit that the chauffeur cannot stand her. Although a long time coming, Marcel is finally free to love.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Shirley go over a bit of English history with Josephine on Christmas night on the island?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Josephine able to mourn Atoine's passing together with Mylene?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Hortense not seem to be concerned with happens to Iris when the truth about the novel is revealed?

Vocabulary

reprimand, chamberlain, baccalaureat, frenzy, baguette, ratatouille, brouhaha, malicious, zilch, exasperation



Characters

Josephine Cortes

Josephine is the novel's protagonist. She is an historian specializing in twelfth-century women at the National Center for Scientific Research in Paris, a part-time job that is paying the bills since her husband has been out of work for over a year. She is resolved to remain strong once she kicks her cheating husband out of the home, and is determined to raise her two daughters on her own, without assistance from her well-off mother. Despite her strong will, she lacks confidence in herself at times, feeling dowdy and fearful that she will spend her life alone. Since she speaks four languages, her brother-in-law, Philippe, provides her with additional work translating legal documents. She also is given a job translating a book from English for a publisher. Her work is thorough and she makes very good money working for him, enabling her to pay her bills and even take on loan payments which Antoine has failed to pay.

As she later agrees to ghost write a novel for her sister, Iris, Josephine finds new strength and confidence not only in her abilities to write and be successful, but as a woman who can be a self-sufficient and attractive woman. She begins to eat more healthy and take care with her physical appearance. She finds meaningful friendship with her neighbor, Shirley, and love with an attractive, caring and intelligent man with whom she shares common interests. She is a strong character, who travels through the course of the novel from being insecure and almost despairing of life to a strong, independent woman who knows what she wants from life and is confident in how to achieve her goals.

Antoine Cortes

Antoine is Josephine's husband who has been unemployed for over a year. He is well dressed and manicured and every day he works out to keep fit. He was once a well-paid salesman for an American gun company. He had a fancy office and enjoyed taking his European customers on hunting trips to Africa, Asia and South America. His sudden job loss due to a company buyout left him feeling depressed and uninspired to find other work; settling for anything just to pay the bills the bills is something he is not willing to do. Josephine's discovery of his affair with Mylene, a local manicurist, finally ends his marriage which has been stressed for several months. Antoine finally announces that he has moved to Kenya in Africa to raise crocodiles. He and Mylene manage the farm, although after several months, he still is not being paid by the company owner. Antoine continues to flounder, resorting to drinking, not standing up for himself and demanding payment. It takes Josephine's encouragement and suggestions for Antoine to pull himself together and force Mr. Wei to pay him.

The crocodile farm continues to encounter financial difficulties and Antoine also is unable to find a secure place in life. Mylene has adjusted well to life in Africa and



established a cosmetics sales business to the large Chinese population in their area. Her announcement to go into business with Mr. Wei has left Antoine out in the cold. He has not been included in the deal, and he realizes that despite their still being together as a couple, they are not true partners, and he is really all alone. He becomes despondent and meets end as he is literally devoured by the crocodiles he meant to exploit.

Iris

Iris is Josephine's older sister. She is married to Philippe Dupin, an international corporate business lawyer. Iris was on her way to becoming successful in the movie industry but suddenly gave it up to marry Philippe, a decision she sometimes regrets. As she hears rumors of her husband's philandering, perhaps with a young man, she wonders what her life may have been like had she stayed with her first true heart's desire, Gabor Minar, a fellow actor and now famous director. She is supportive of her sister's decision to kick Antoine out of the house, but has her own marital future to consider. She enjoys the luxurious lifestyle her marriage affords her, so she is willing to pretend and feign happiness.

In an attempt to impress both her husband and a mutual friend, Iris lies about working on a novel. The publisher friend is excited and keeps pressing her to see the book and even offers a deal. Under pressure, Iris convinces her sister to ghost write the novel for her. She offers Josephine all the financial profits from the book deal and she will be the face of the book and get all the glory. She also hopes that this will regain Philippe's interest in her, so that he does not leave her. Her plan backfires however, as Philippe discovers, unknown to her, that Josephine has actually written the book, and he is disgusted by the way in which she is using her sister, a ploy that she had also executed fifteen years earlier with other writers.

Romantically, Iris secretly longs for Gabor and is so overconfident in their previous love that she is sure that if he sees her again, they can pick up their romance and be together. Philippe's secretly orchestrated plan to place the two former lovers together culminates in Iris being crushed as she discovers that Gabor is happily married with three children. Iris is also revealed to have scammed everyone concerning her novel and is left humiliated and alone.

Philippe Dupin

Philippe is married to Iris and is a lawyer with a practice in international corporate law. He is at the top of his profession and is well-respected and very well-off. Initially he appears to be emotionally cold and always preoccupied with business. As the novel progresses, he becomes more interested in spending time with his son Alexandre and even less time with his wife. He softens toward Josephine as well. Once she begins to work for him, Philippe develops a deep respect for his hard-working and intelligent sister-in-law.



Throughout the novel, Philippe has secret meetings with an unknown man, who Iris initially suspects may be a lover. However, the man is an investigator and someone who handles special jobs for Philippe. His job has been to track down Gabor Minar and orchestrate a meeting between Gabor and Iris during a dinner party in New York. There, Philippe has the pleasure of watching Iris's dream of reuniting with Minar fall to pieces as she learns that he is happily married with three children.

Philippe eventually reveals to Josephine that he knows that she is the writer of *The Humble Queen* and tells her a story from Iris's past. Fifteen years earlier, when he first met and fell in love with her, Iris had gotten into trouble for stealing some other writer's work. He is disgusted that she had done the same thing with Josephine, but the two agree to keep it quiet and save Iris the embarrassment. Philippe plans to leave their marriage and is content with his strong bond with Alexandre.

Shirley

Shirley is Josephine's neighbor and best friend. She is originally from England, but came to France to escape a failed relationship with the man who is the father of her son, Gary. To earn a living for herself and Gary, Shirley gives voice lessons at the conservatory, tutors English and bakes cakes for a restaurant. She is a straight forward person who encourages Josephine to stand up for herself and make a way for herself and her children. She also helps Josephine with English words when she needs help with translations.

Shirley has a mysterious side to her and a background that is unknown to Josephine. It is likely that Shirley has something unpleasant in her background because following one visit home, she tells Josephine that she will not be returning home anymore. She has also learned to handle herself physically, which she demonstrates one afternoon when she and Josephine are attacked by three muggers. Shirley releases her fury on them, chasing them off and stripping one of the men down to his underwear before sending him on his way. Nevertheless, she has a caring nature. She is a loyal friend to Josephine and provides advice and encouragement to her as she writes her novel and gains stability in her new life as a single mother.

During a visit to England, she is spotted on television by Josephine and the kids as she is standing near Queen Elizabeth at the Royal Ball. She eventually admits to Jo that she is the illegitimate daughter of the Queen. She lives in hiding in order to protect the Queen's reputation, but is at times hired as her bodyguard in order to be able to visit and be in her presence without question. Shirley's involvement with a secret lover who knows her true identity threatens their safety and could undo the coverup, but Shirley eventually decides to stop running and allows Britain's secret service to deal with any threats from the man.



Marcel Grobz

Marcel is the owner of Casamia, a string of several homegoods stores. He started out poor, but with the assistance of his first employer began to buy out failing businesses and build them back up into successful ventures. He is a large, bald man, but very wealthy. In need of someone to bring polish and style to his showrooms, he hired Henriette Plissonnier. His deep attraction and physical desire for her turned into a marriage proposal and legally sharing half of his business with her. Henriette's coldness toward her husband however, has driven him into the arms of Josiane Lambert, a younger and plumper assistant who is always willing to pleasure him. Marcel is fully aware that Henriette married him for his money, but is legally stuck unless he is willing to forfeit half his financial holdings. He is a fair and kind man and treats his step-daughters and their children with kindness. In fact, he hires Hortense to do an internship in his company for the summer and is pleased that she is a hard worker.

Following a brief disruption in their affair due to the discovery of a side affair between Josiane and another worker, Bruno Chaval, Marcel makes up with Josiane, as the two declare their love for each other. Marcel asks Josiane to have a child with him, since his own wife has denied him that pleasure. Marcel is a shrewd business man and orchestrates a deal to vastly increase the size of his business holdings and to restructure the company so that Henriette is written out of the company. Free of Henriette's hold on his finances, Marcel is able to restart his life with Josiane and their newborn son.

Josiane Lambert

Josiane is an employee at Casamia who has worked her way into the bed and heart of Marcel Grobz. Unlike Marcel's wife, she is willing to satisfy him sexually as well as be a vital part of his staff. She is familiar with all the ins and outs of the company and wants the company to continue to succeed. She is however, also have a side fling with a younger, more chiseled worker at the company. She is miserable when Marcel discovers the betrayal and vows to find a way to get back in his good graces. With the help of another work friend, Josiane and Marcel reunite and decide to have a child together.

For a brief time Josiane leaves Marcel because she fears that he will never leave Henriette and leave her stranded to raise her son on her own. However, once she learns that Marcel has been waiting in order to restructure his company and be free of Henriette's financial hold, she returns to him. She bears him a son as the two plan to eventually marry.

Henriette Plissonnier

Henriette is Josephine and Iris's stylish and haughty mother. As a middle-aged widow she met Marcel and was hired as a designer for his company. She soon began to sleep



with him and eventually married him. His money enabled her to provide her girls with private school educations and a very comfortable life. She is head of the board of directors of Marcel's company and his sole beneficiary.

Henriette is stuck-up and looks down on others who she does not consider worthy of her time. She never really liked Antonio and never thought much of Josephine's academic pursuits. She thinks her daughter's job at the research center is boring and useless and openly mocks her for it. Near the novel's end, the author reveals that during their childhood, Henriette left a very young Josephine to drown in the ocean in order to save herself and Iris.

Henriette also suspects that Marcel is having an affair with someone and snoops around his office to look for evidence. She does not really care that he has a lover because she herself is not interested in him. But, she does want to take him for every penny she can and will use anything against him in order to get as much money for herself as possible.

Ultimately, through some clever maneuvering by Marcel, she is cut out of the company. Marcel provides her with a monthly stipend, but she is removed from his life for good.

Hortense

Hortense is the fourteen-year old daughter of Antoine and Josephine. She is smart and very outspoken. She is aware of everything that is going on around her, even of her father's affair well before her mother. She wants the easy life and knows who to manipulate in order to get what she wants. She works hard at pleasing her grandmother's husband, Marcel, in hopes of being able to take advantage of his money. She loudly expresses her disdain of poor people and declares that she will not be poor. Because of this attitude, she hates her mother and blames her for driving Antoine away. She complains about Josephine's dowdy appearance and boring job.

Over the next year, as Hortense begins to demand more independence, she clashes with Josephine. She dresses very provocatively and attracts the attention of men everywhere. She learns how to sweet-talk her mother and do things behind her back. She goes out with Bruno Chaval, a man twenty years her senior and gets a cell phone without Jo's knowledge. She is only interested in using Bruno for his money and connections to the fashion industry. Despite her forceful and overly direct way with people, she is a hard worker and has an natural sense of fashion, her primary vocational interest. She works for Marcel during a summer internship and studies hard in order to get good grades for entrance into fashion school.

Despite her initial conflicts with her mother, she comes to respect her for all her hard work and intelligence. She is impressed that Josephine has been supporting the family on her own, especially once she learns that her father had never sent them any money or support. She is angry with Iris for owning all the rights to the book and spills the beans about the ghost writing scheme on national television so that Josephine will get



the credit and money she deserves. She learns to strike a balance between love and money; she no longer is willing to do anything in order to be rich, but learns to value hard work and respect for others.

Zoe

Zoe is Josephine and Antoine's ten-year old daughter. She is naturally sweet and still innocent. She has a friendship with Max Barthillet, a neighbor in their building, but Josephine is concerned about the influence the older boy is having on her young daughter. Zoe longs to be like Hortense and is eager to grow up. She is also very close to her cousin, Alexandre and the two play together and share secrets.

Mylene Corbier

Mylene is a manicurist who has an affair with Antoine. She has saved some money and she and Tonio use this money to head off to Kenya and start life on the crocodile farm. Mylene is content at first to experience the new life in Africa, but she soon longs for something to do with her time. During a brief trip to Paris, she purchases lots of cosmetics with which she starts a business upon her return to Kenya. The business takes off and she eventually partners with Mr. Wei and sets up a company in Africa and eventually China.

She was happy to go along to Africa with Antoine, but did not settle for sitting quietly by his side. She needed to work and she made something of herself, despite Antoine's own failure to succeed at his business scheme. She is saddened by Antoine's tragic death, but has built herself a new life is able to move on.

Luca Giambelli

Luca Giambelli, aka Duffle Coat Man, is an attractive man that Josephine first runs into at the library. He gradually gets to know Josephine and the two go out on a date. He is writing a paper for an academic publisher on the history of tears, but Josephine has seen photos of him in several magazines, and assumes that he is also a model. He becomes increasingly interested in Josephine and tries to make love with her one night after they have spent the day together at an academic conference. He is saddened that she refused him and then becomes angered when he discovers that she is the true author of Iris Dupin's novel. As he confronts Josephine with his discovery, she confesses her insecurity but also her desire for him. She asks him about his own recent rejection of her at a Paris fashion show, when she waved hello, and he outright ignored her. Luca then reveals that he has a twin brother who leads a very different lifestyle from his own and is someone he often has to bail out of trouble. Luca finally becomes Josephine's true love.



Bruno Chavel

Bruno is the young, well-toned, sometimes lover of Josiane. He works for Marcel at Casamia and tries to get promoted via Josiane's special connection with Marcel. He is smart and knows his way around the business. When his relationship with Josiane is discovered by Marcel, Josiane ends the affair. A few weeks later he announces that he has been hired by IKEA to manage their stores in France. He threatens to blow Casamia out of the water and ruin their business. But before his time is over at the company, he encounters Hortense who is working there on a summer internship. Hortense is eager to exploit the sexually-charged Chaval; as long as she dangles the promise of sex in front of him, he takes her everywhere and lets her spend his money. Eventually he gets dumped and he moves out of the story.

Gary

Gary is Shirley's son and the same age as Hortense. As a teenage boy, he is head over heels crazy for Hortense, but as he matures and comes into his own, he comes off as less desperate. The two become good friends and study together for their baccalaureate exams. Earlier speculation that Gary may be related to the British Royal Princes is confirmed at the end of the novel when Shirley confesses to Josephine that she is the illegitimate daughter of Queen Elizabeth. Gary lives quietly and happily in the shadows with full knowledge of his "royal" connection.

Max Barthillet

Max is the fourteen-year-old neighbor who attends school with Hortense and Zoe. He and Zoe tend to spend the most time together watching Disney movies. Josephine is a bit concerned about Max because he has shown Zoe a list that he and some friends have created naming girls with exploitable vaginas. Max appears tough and cool, but at times sad, because his father has recently left the family and his mother is sometimes not around. He eventually moves elsewhere with his father.

Christine Barthillet

Madame Barthillet is one of Josephine's neighbors in the apartment building. She and her son Max often appear downcast or troubled. She is also somewhat heavy, but begins to lose weight by going on the potato diet. Her husband leaves the family at one point and soon Christine and Max are evicted from their apartment. She is taken in by Josephine and proceeds to take advantage of her neighbor's generosity and hospitality. She is lazy and selfish, and not at all interested in looking for work or for supporting her son. Instead, she surfs internet dating sites looking for another man to hook up with so that she can live off of him and not have to find work. She hopes that Max's father will take him so that she does not need to care for him anymore.



Ginette

Ginette is Rene's wife and works at the office with Josiane and Marcel. She is a friend to Josiane and is excited that her friend is finally hoping to have a baby. Ginette is a good friend to Marcel as well and tells him that he needs to cut Henriette loose before Josiane will ever come back to him. She also is the one who breaks the good news to Marcel about Josiane's pregnancy.

Carmen

Carmen is Iris's housekeeper. She manages everything necessary for running the house and doing all the chores for the household, including cooking all the meals and drawing Iris a bath. When the family travels to their beach house, Carmen goes with them and serves them there.



Symbols and Symbolism

White camellia flowers

Camellia flowers are a symbol of adoration and affection between two people. As the novel begins, Antonio lovingly cares for these flowers on their balcony. He attends to them daily as part of his routine, caring more for the flowers than his family. For a year he has been unwilling to find work and responsibly provide for their needs. Sadly, they are the one thing he expresses concern over as he leaves. He pauses before he walks out the door, and asks what will happen to the plants. His concern should be for his wife and daughters, but it is not, causing Josephine even further pain.

As time goes on, Josephine cares for the plants on the balcony, which had always been solely Antonio's job. The author notes however that the camellia flowers were giving her trouble (65). The bond of affection that once existed between Antoine and Josephine and even flourished, was failing just as the flowers themselves were being to die off. As the novel concludes, the balcony flowers have been forgotten and have all died, just as Antoine himself has been devoured by the crocodiles. Josephine mourns his death, but emotionally she has moved on to love someone else.

"The Knight, the Lady and the Priest"

The book on medieval lore represents the world of academia in which Josephine lives and works, but also is a foreshadow of the novel she will write. The characters in the title are all common to any work of the time period, but each type plays a significant role in her novel. Her heroine, Florine, is a lady of position who marries several knights throughout her lifetime as well as one very cruel priest.

Red paper triangle over the toaster

Mylene is wearing a red blouse the day Antonio picks the girls up for summer vacation with him. When she sees the colorful shirt draped out the window of the car, from the window where she should be sitting, she realizes that Antonio has moved on. Here again is a sharp highlight using color. Red is the symbol of passionate love and this is what Josephine believes her husband now has with Mylene. She puts the red triangle above the toaster to remind her daily that her marriage is over, it is literally "toast" and she should move on emotionally.

Crocodiles

The crocodiles represent the various difficulties or dangers in life that suddenly creep up and threaten to devour an unsuspecting victim. For Iris, the crocodile is two-fold. She suddenly becomes aware that her husband no longer loves her or her scheming,



people-using ways and that her hopes of once again being with her former lover are misplaced.

Both Iris and her mother Henriette are in some ways representations of mean crocodiles. Thick-skinned women, they prowled around looking for those they could devour and use to their benefit. However, they are both outsmarted and beaten back into submission. As the rhyme warned, they are "crunched".

Antoine's crocodiles are both real and figurative. He is financially and emotionally destroyed by his lack of business sense and inability to make a success of the crocodile farm. As his world crumbles around him, he becomes despondent and is taunted by the crocodiles, resulting in his being crunched in the jaws of the hungry beasts he sought to exploit.

Josephine however is able to successfully battle her crocodiles. She faces much hardship in raising her two daughters on her own, paying for her husband's foolish business loan, and dealing with the emotional baggage of her mother's abandonment. She fights her crocodiles bravely, and defeats them soundly.

Yellow eyes

The yellow eyes of the crocodiles represent the desire for money, or gold, that several of the characters pursue. At night time, hunters shine lights on the water to look for crocodiles to kill for their valuable skin and meat. The lights reflect off the crocodiles' retinas and show pairs of bright yellow lights, revealing their whereabouts. For the hunters, the yellow eyes are literally their gateway to wealth. Likewise, in the novel, the author uses them to represent the pursuit of money. As Iris talks about the impending success of the novel Josephine has written, she says, "Isn't it terrific, sis? Iris asked, a yellow gleam in her eyes. We're going to be rich and famous!" (198).

Unfortunately for Antoine, the yellow eyes of the crocodiles serve to merely mock him. The croc farm does not become the huge success he had hoped and he becomes increasingly despondent. As he stares out at their yellow eyes one night, more and more of them gather and watch him. One croc in particular seems to taunt him. Antoine realizes his failure and the yellow eyes speak to him of his cowardice and lack of honesty with Josephine concerning the business loan (193). It is only as daylight approaches and the yellow eyes are extinguished that he is emboldened to stand up to Mr. Wei and work for his success.

Women's hair

Hair is a symbol of attractiveness and femininity. It has the power to attract men and to turn them cold if it is lost. When looking to get out of marital engagement, Florine shaves off her hair, assuming that her family will no longer be able to offer her hand in marriage since her beautiful golden locks are gone. Several marriages down the line, the scary priest, Guibert also shaves her head in order to keep her in a humble state



and not concerned with vanities such as appearance. Likewise, Shirley cuts her hair in order to hide her true identity and appear more like a bodyguard than a princess.

But hair is also used to manipulate men and cause interest. Hortense has beautiful long hair and she knows how to use it to her advantage. At work, her hair is kept tied up, but after hours she undoes it and lets it fall loose. When she leaves Chaval panting for her in his car, she walks away and then tosses her hair back and forth around her shoulders to further drive him crazy and longing for her, (312). Similarly, Iris uses her long black hair to draw attention to herself, especially when she allows it to be cut off on national television.

Josephine

Josephine is a symbol for anyone who is seeking to reinvent them self by taking the hard knocks in life and learning from them, working through difficulties and moving forward to better things. Although Josephine is in no way a religious person herself, she somewhat mirrors the Biblical character of Joseph. Joseph was looked down on by his brothers because of his superior education and understanding of life. In their jealousy, they sold him into slavery in Egypt and reported him as dead to their father. But Joseph had faith in his God and determined to make the best of his situation, which resulted in his rise to power as second in command in all of Egypt. He ultimately gained great wealth and saved his family from starvation along with all of Egypt.

Similarly, Josephine has had many knocks in life. She never felt the affection or approval of her mother and in the course of the novel discovers that her mother abandoned her in strong ocean currents in order to save herself and Iris. She discovers that her husband has been having an affair and she must solely find a way to support her children. But she has an inner strength that she calls upon to pull herself together and move forward. At various points in the novel, she talks first to the stars and then speaks more specifically to her father, who has passed away. By the story's conclusion she is deliberately speaking to God, who she believes has always been with her and gives her strength. She achieves financial independence and emotional security as she writes the novel, supports her children, discovers her passion for writing and most importantly finds true love.

Iris

Iris is a symbol for anyone who exists to be merely a decoration in life. Named for the intense blue color of her eyes that seemed like beautiful Irises, this beautiful French woman does not have much more depth or significance than the superficial life she lives. Iris is always immaculately dressed, her nails are perfectly manicured and she lives a life of luxury. She does not work and has no real goals or purpose in life. Even as she fantasizes about what life would be like if she had stayed with her former lover, Gabor Minar, the dream is not so much about the creative life and theatrical process, but about a life of glamour in the spotlight. At one point she even realizes that her life



with Philippe has little meaning. She used to try to participate in conversations about the corporate business world whenever they went to dinner with his business associates, but then she realized that she was "there just for decoration, because she was attractive and charming, because she was Philippe's wife," (87-88). She gets used to this and accepts it for a time. But the one evening with Serrurier, the publisher, moves Iris to present herself as something more exciting. She talks about writing a book, and is hooked by the publisher's excitement and attention to her. She is going to attempt to be something more than simple decoration.

Unfortunately, however, Iris is still all just show. She is unable to write the book herself, so she is actually living a lie. On the outside, as far as the general public is concerned, she is a glamorous, amazing author, but in truth, she is merely the face and the publicity stunt. She may have upped her game, but she is still a pretty facade and not real substance.

Potatoes

Potatoes represent both health and poverty in various places in the novel. When Josephine asks Christine Barthillet how she is losing weight, she attributes the potato diet as the secret of her success. The popular diet has participants eating nothing but potatoes for a set time period in order to reset the body's metabolism while providing a full load of nutrients. Christine claimed to be eating one potato every night in the evening before bed to burn calories. It is later discovered that her marriage is falling apart and that her husband has left her, so it may be possible that she is eating potatoes because she cannot afford much else. Similarly, Josephine's family meals consist largely of potatoes and ham every evening. She does not have much money to spend on variety and more expensive foods. Potatoes are universally known as the "poor man's food." As Josephine makes more money, the dinner items change. They indulge in sweets, sausages, quiche and fresh produce.

Wisteria vine

The wisteria vines inside Casamia's courtyard represent a sense of longevity as the hearty plants spread and grow for as much as 100 years. The vines decorate the beautiful old building and give the place a sense of grandeur which is one of the reasons Marcel loves them. Marcel has a huge empire and great wealth, but the one thing that he is missing is an heir - someone to carry on his work and legacy. After Josiane leaves him, he sits under the wisteria and longs for her return, because none of his wealth matters if he does not have her and a child to share it with. Just as the wisteria lives on, he longs for a child to carry on his name.



Settings

Courbevoie, France

Courbevoie is a suburb of Paris and is where Josephine and Antoine Cortes and their daughters live in an apartment building. Although very modern and nice, the area is not as expensive or "high-brow" as the main city of Paris. Iris looks down on the area and comments to a friend about visiting her sister there, "Yes, in Courbevoie! Can you believe it? I had to take a compass and bring my passport! Ha. ha!" (224). Even young Hortense has picked up on the lower social status that her address carries stating that the cute Prada jacket she had her eyes on would "stick out in Courbevoie, but it would be perfect when we're living in Paris" (305). However, the place is fine for Josephine who is happy to live near her good friend, Shirley and in a simple apartment.

Croco Park, Kenya

Antoine and Mylene move to Croco Park in Kenya to begin a life together and hopefully make it rich raising crocodiles. Since every part of a crocodile can be harvested and used, they are theoretically great money makers. The surrounding area has lagoons, a beach and coral reefs to enjoy. The croc farm itself contains many fenced in waterways where the crocs are herded and raised. They are fed chickens which are also raised in large buildings on the property. Antoine and Mylene live in a separate house with a pool and beautiful porches, reserved for the park manager. Croco Park is owned by Mr. Wei, a Chinese man who brings in many Chinese workers to handle feeding and taking care of the animals themselves. It sadly becomes the scene of Antoine's death.

Casamia Complex

Marcel Grobzs owns a large two-story building with a private courtyard, workshop and old stable on the outer edges of Paris which he made into the base of operations for his home goods stores, Casamia. It is here that he has his office and works along side his mistress, Josiane. Many of the novel's characters pass through this building as part of the story. Bruno Chaval works here as a salesman and accountant and also has a short fling with Josiane. He also chases after young Hortense while she completes a summer internship for Marcel. As Marcel pursues a future with Josiane and their baby, he purchases an apartment in the building next door to his complex, so that they can live close to work and Marcel can always be near his family.

England

The mysterious Shirley and her son Gary return to England every summer for a visit with relatives, so that Gary will grow up knowing about his heritage and his family roots, even though he is being raised in France. Shirley is very secretive about her



background, Gary's father or any details about her past life in England. Josephine learns that Shirley and Gary have a special connection to the English Royal Family, having seen Shirley at a royal ball standing next to Queen Elizabeth and photographs of Gary playing with the young Princes William and Harry.

The beach house in Deauville, France

Iris and Philippe own a beach house in Deauville, located on the north western coast of France. They often spend much of the summer in the home and frequently invite Josephine's children to spend time with them there. It is an upscale resort town known for its casino, horse races, quaint boutiques and boardwalk. Josephine and the girls go with Iris and Philippe after the book is written to relax and wait for the publisher's response to the manuscript.

New York Film Festival

Iris and Philippe go to America to attend the New York Film Festival on Philippe's suggestion. Iris's former love, film director Gabor Minar, would be the guest of honor. Iris sees it as an opportunity to finally see and be reunited with the man she still loves after fifteen years. She is unaware that Philippe has arranged the entire meeting in order to crush Iris and her dreams.

Mustique Island

Mustique Island is a private island in the Caribbean where Shirley owns a home. It is a place to retreat and hide and becomes her permanent residence once she decides to leave France. Josephine and the girls join her there for Christmas vacation and other holidays. One of the island's famous residents is Mick Jagger.



Themes and Motifs

Money and Love

The primary theme of *The Yellow Eyes of Crocodiles* focuses on the pursuit of money as it leads to ultimate loneliness and destruction as compared to the satisfaction found in pursuing love. Within the great cast of characters, everyone of course pursues money in some way. For some, money is paramount. Henriette and Iris marry primarily for money and arrange their lives in such a way as to maintain their lifestyle, almost at all costs. Their marriages are loveless and meaningless. They have no work to do and no purpose to give their life meaning. Iris attempts to become more than a mere decoration, but she does not do the hard work of becoming a writer for herself. She sits back and pays her sister to do it for her and as a result, the product is meaningless to her. When it all falls apart in the end, she is left with nothing.

Similarly, Antoine enjoys comfort. He liked his adventurous and cushy job and he is not ready to settle for just anything. He thinks he deserves better than just any job and better than his frumpy wife. The comfort he finds in the arms of a younger woman and the scheme to get rich raising crocodiles merely sends him down a path of destruction. He dishonestly puts Josephine on the hook for his business loan and soon the business begins to fail. As he becomes more and more lost, he despairs of his life and heads off into the crocodile infested waters to end it all, leaving behind two women who once loved him.

For his part, Marcel knows that he is being used, but he no longer cares; he has found love elsewhere. He is shrewd enough to balance it all and is able to keep his money and his true love. Of all the relationships in the novel, there are only two that end successfully, Marcel and Josiane being one. Marcel has been kind and generous to Henriette's family, despite her tyrannical ways. Perhaps Marcel's happy ending is the writer's way of rewarding him for his good nature and kindness.

Finally, both Josephine and Luca are not pursuing money as anything more than a means to survival. They are both hard working and relatively modestly paid. Josephine is willing to ghost write the book for Iris only because she needs the money in order to support her daughters and pay back Antoine's loan. In the midst of the work, she finds out who she really is and discovers her passion for writing, a happiness that has great value to her. She also finds a truly meaningful relationship with Luca, someone who respects her as she is and loves her completely. As the novel concludes, Josephine discovers that she has become like her heroine, Florine. Although she did not pursue it, wealth found her, as did true love.



Poise

The novel looks at self-confidence and illustrates that for some confidence is just an outward mask while even the most timid people can grow to exhibit great poise. Iris and Josephine exemplify the opposites, as the author develops them throughout the story.

Iris has always been the glamorous one, succeeding in the theater, attracting men with her piercing blue eyes and striking black hair and having the resources of a wealthy step-father at her disposal. She marries a wealthy lawyer and is well known in high society circles. She exudes grace and poise, perfectly poised in every situation. Even when her friend Berengere informs her of the rumors concerning Philippe and a possible affair, she holds her head high and keeps her composure. She calmly exits the restaurant, and walks to her car. "She sat tall and straight, the way she'd been taught, pride making her rigid," (35). She swallows the tears that begin to form and heads home. As she contemplates her situation, she realizes that she is not willing to confront Philippe or leave him because she would have to give up her comfortable lifestyle. She is not confident in her ability to be on her own or to attract another man because she is forty-four years old and believes that no one else would want her. So instead, she decides to carry on and live in an empty marriage. As the author writes, "she would have to practice pretending," (47).

Josephine on the other hand feels like she is falling apart. As the novel begins she wants to fall down and die after a simple cut with a kitchen knife. But even though she is initially lacking in confidence, she becomes a strong and independent woman throughout the course of the novel. She works hard, tackles each new problem and grows stronger. She learns that life isn't about avoiding mistakes, but about working through them, step by step. As her confidence in her abilities grows she works on her outward appearance as well, so that she manifests physically her inner changes. She gets highlights in her hair, makes healthy eating choices, presents a paper at a large conference and takes a firmer charge of her teenage daughter.

Another interesting aspect to Josephine's initial lack of confidence is that in reality she has always been strong. When she uncovers a memory from her childhood which she had buried deep in her subconscious, she realizes that one summer while swimming, she was cruelly abandoned by her mother in strong ocean currents and left to fend for herself. Her mother's choice to push her off and swim Iris safely to shore, left her potentially to drown in the ocean's undercurrent. But, Josephine had a strength within that enabled her to physically swim herself to the breakers, where the wave deposited her roughly back on the shore. The specific memory had been suppressed but the feeling of not being loved remained with Josephine. Her whole life, she always felt undervalued by Henriette, most likely because of that incident. However, her father maintained a loving and encouraging bond with his younger daughter. He told her how special and important she was and encouraged her to be herself. In his quiet, unassuming way, he provided a support and strength for Josephine that she relied on even into her adult life. Now, having written a successful novel, Josephine realizes her ability, value and strength, despite all the hardship and heartache that has come her



way in life. As she thinks to herself following her bathroom epiphany, "...there would be more waves, some that would carry her off, some that would bring her back. That's life..." (355).

Physical Appearance

A secondary theme throughout the novel is that people often put an unfair emphasis on physical appearance and body weight, negatively affecting individuals' self-worth. Josephine is the main character who suffers from lack of confidence because she is worried that she is unattractive and overweight. Her husband looks at her and notices her weight gain since their early years of marriage and Hortense outright blames her for driving her father away because of her dowdy appearance. "Open your eyes, Mom! Look at how you dress. What your hair looks like! You've let yourself go. It's no surprise he went looking elsewhere!" (25). Not only has her husband left her for another woman, but now her daughter is disgusted by her appearance as well. She is almost paralyzed by her fears and not knowing how to improve herself. She shares her frustration with her close friend, Shirley, "I feel ugly. I keep telling myself no man will ever fall in love with me again. I'm fat. I don't know how to dress or fix my hair. And I'm just going to get older," (31).

As the novel progresses, Josephine works on her weight, making more healthy choices about the food she eats and getting her hair highlighted. She observes that Christine Barthillet is losing weight, supposedly because she is on a special potato diet and wonders if she should consider it as well. Even young Zoe is aware of physical appearance and concerned about her own. One afternoon she walks home with Madame Barthillet and notices that she has lost a lot of weight. She exclaims to Josephine, "She's so skinny! Mom, if I ever get fat, will you put me on that diet of hers?" (185).

Josephine also worries about her appearance as part of her relationship with Luca. He is very handsome and as she believes, a model. When the two begin to become intimate one evening, she stops him because of her insecurity about her appearance. Later, she confesses to him, "I turned you down for just one reason...because you're so handsome, and I'm so plain," (374). Luca reassures her of his attraction to her and Josephine is able to relax. She does admit, "I've been taking care of myself. I'm improving," (375).

While the author points out the negative affect others attitudes have toward someone who struggles with weight or appearance, the ultimate goal it seems is to improve oneself and get thinner. By the novel's conclusion, Josephine has become a successful author, and improved herself not only concerning her vocation but also her physical appearance. When Jo and Philippe meet near the end, he notices the change in her. "...she had a tan, had lost weight, and looked younger...She no longer slouched along staring at the ground, as if apologizing for existing," (394). While Josephine's change is partially because of her literary success and financial independence, it is also somewhat connected to the improvement in her physical condition as well.



Parents and Children

An important theme in the novel is that parents frequently damage their children emotionally, but that honesty can strengthen their character. Stable homes and happy marriages are hard to come by in the novel. Just about everyone is having an affair or being cheated on. The affects of these failing relationships are weathered by more than the couples, as a handful of pre-teen and teenage children experience the rifts between their parents. Although the parents try to protect their children and continue to shower them with love, problems and anxieties do arise. For example, when Philippe begins to sleep in his study and not with Iris, Alexandre becomes worried and scared at night. He even asks Zoe what this may mean. She says that they will probably get divorced, just like her parents. Philippe chose the separate himself from Iris each night, but his action also negatively affects his son, a move that he is not aware of until Josephine helps him to see it.

Similarly, Zoe is worried about what their family will look like. She does not know a whole lot about sex, but she asks her father if he sleeps naked with Mylene. What she really is concerned about is whether she will have competition for her father's affection in the form of a sibling. Antoine has replaced his wife with another woman and Zoe does not want to be replaced with another daughter.

Another subtly shown consequence of divorce is the affect that an absent father has on the raising of a son. Max Barthillet is sometimes shown as sitting on the steps looking sad and is even one time locked outside his apartment with no parents in sight. The lack of guidance in his life leaves him rough around the edges, talking big and looking for sexual conquests as a way to feel important. But the author portrays him as well, as a young man who would still like to maintain a bit of innocence and his childhood as he prefers to spend time with young Zoe watching videos rather than the physically maturing and attractive Hortense.

Finally, in contrast to the other teens, Gary appears to be a level headed and mature young man. Shirley has been very honest with him about his background, his father, and why they live in hiding. She has trained him to be watchful and how to take care of himself. He knows that his mother loves him and wanted him and will protect him at all costs. His life has not always been easy, but his mother's honesty has helped him to mature and become a responsible young man who can handle himself in many situations.

Personal Growth and Stagnation

Through the course of life's interaction with hardships and pleasures, individuals choose to either adapt and grow personally or rigidly remain a fixed personality. As in any novel, authors find it necessary to allow their characters to learn from their flaws and mistakes and become better people. However, not every character adapts or changes for the better. As the novel's heroine, Josephine clearly is aware of her shortcomings and works hard to better herself, for her own good as well as that of her children. Similarly,



Hortense sees the changes taking place in her mother and finds new respect for her and matures herself as a result. She moves from being a teenager who hates her mother and everything she stands for to sticking up for her on national television.

Unfortunately however, Iris and Henriette do not learn from their mistakes and uppity ways. Both woman have been so reliant on their money and social standing that they have lost touch with a basic sense of humanity. Iris is so hooked on the need for fame, that she continues to use others to get what she wants. Because book sales are down, she pulls a publicity stunt by anonymously sending pictures of Gary and her to the papers claiming that they are of her young lover. She also tries to coerce Josephine into writing another book for her. Rather than try to do anything for herself, she continues to attempt to get others to provide for her. Similarly, Henriette continues with her manipulative and selfish ways. Thinking that her nest-egg is secure since she has "evidence" against Marcel and his mistress, she is shocked when she learns that she has been completely cut off. She is unable to understand that she lost control. As the author writes, "Like all small-minded and malicious people, Henriette was constitutionally unable to abandon her preconceived ideas, or to hold herself responsible for her own unhappiness. She preferred to blame other people" (415).

Styles

Point of View

The *Yellow Eyes of Crocodiles* is told from the omniscient, third person point of view. The novel is very character-centric so it is necessary for readers to know the characters very well. Throughout the story, characters' values are extremely important, so this point of view allows the author to communicate what each individual is thinking and feeling as they react to situations and make decisions. The emotions and mental states of the characters are key to understanding the changes that take place within each person and third person, omniscient makes this possible.

Language and Meaning

The language is fairly simple and straightforward in the novel. Much of the writing is in the form of dialogue. It is important to note that the novel was originally written in French and translated into English. While the places, fashions and geographic references are all the same, some cultural references or colloquialisms may lose something in the translation.

The writing is fairly straightforward, but there are some phrases that use similes as effective literary devices. For example, the author uses a simile when Chaval refers to Marcel's shrewd business deal. "It was like a mouse swallowing an elephant," (348). In another instance, Henriette is upset and walking fast with "her knees clicking like knitting needles," (416). These phrases add color to the text but there are only a few of them scattered throughout the text.

Early on, Pancol does use a children's tongue twister to establish a bond between the sisters and also provide a hint of what is to come in the novel. Cric and Croc, cute names for Iris and Josephine perhaps, clobber the big Cruc before it crunches them. The phrases shows up a few times, always repeated by Iris. For Josephine that prediction is true, but unfortunately Iris gets crunched.

Structure

The book is divided into five sections, each containing several chapters. Within each chapter the story lines of characters are unraveled bit by bit. The cast of characters is fairly large, so time is spent within each section, moving the characters along their arc. The author needs to come back to each character regularly so that readers do not forget what is happening with any one individual. Within each chapter, the author visits several of the characters in a variety of scenes and settings moving the plot forward in slow increments.



As a character-centric work, there is a mix of dialogue and explanations of the character's internal thoughts and feelings. There is a great deal of dialogue and interaction between characters as well. Thoughts are accentuated in the text in italics to make them clearly stand out to the reader.



Quotes

Iris didn't work. 'There are women who suffer the embarrassment of leisure and those who master it,' she said. 'Doing nothing is an art.'

-- Iris (chapter 1)

Importance: Iris has chosen to marry a wealthy man and live a life of leisure. She is the mistress of her home, has only one child to worry about and spends her time in luxurious comfort, which she is completely happy to do. She is not bored by not having any serious vocation or work to complete. While other woman may become bored, she is perfectly content.

Open your eyes, Mom! Look at how you dress. What your hair looks like! You've let yourself go. It's no surprise he went looking elsewhere! You need to leave the Middle Ages and come live in this century.

-- Hortense (chapter 1)

Importance: Hortense is expressing her disdain for how her mother presents herself. She has been aware that her father was having an affair and feels that it is her mother's fault for not keeping herself looking good enough to keep him interested. She sees her mother as boring and too absorbed in history to be an active part of life in the present day. Hortense is very much like her father and here expresses verbally what Antonio has thought, but never said to his wife.

That glimpse of red blouse means it's over, she told herself....She drew a red triangle on a piece of paper and hung it up over the toaster, where she would see it every morning.

-- Josephine (chapter 4)

Importance: Josephine catches a glimpse of Mylene's red blouse hanging out of the car window when Antonio comes to pick the girls up for summer vacation. The flash of red struck her and she realized that Antonio had moved on to another woman, who was sitting in her seat in the car. It is a dose of reality for Josephine. She places the red triangle over the toaster so that she will see it every morning and be reminded of her new situation in life. There is a real person who has taken her place.

...don't forget: Cric and Croc clobbered the big Cruc as it crept up to crunch them.

-- Iris (chapter 5)

Importance: This is the second time that Iris quotes their favorite childhood tongue twister to her sister. On the surface, it is a fun way to lighten the mood and make her sister laugh or to reassure her that everything will be alright. It also serves as a foreshadowing of what is to come in the novel. Both Iris and Josephine have fears and difficulties to face and they will beat them down rather than allow the "crocodile" destroy them.



Send me someone to love, who will love me. I don't care if he's tall or short, rich or poor, young or old. But I can't live without love.

-- Josephine (chapter 6)

Importance: Josephine has just learned that Antoine made her a co-signer on his loan for the crocodile farm and that he has not made any payments for three months. All the money she has just earned for translating a book went toward paying his loan. She is overwhelmed and retreats to her balcony where she likes to go to hide and lose herself in the stars. As she prays to the stars for help, she does not ask to be given wealth or to be miraculously saved from her situation, but rather she asks them to send her love. She states that she does not want to be poor or tired anymore, but what she really wants is to not be alone in life. She ultimately desires love more than great financial success, which ultimately becomes the pursuit of her heroine in the novel she writes.

Stendhal supposedly wrote *The Charterhouse of Parma* in three weeks. Georges Simenon could bang out a book in ten days. But how long had they carried those books around inside as they got up in the morning, sipped their coffee, read the mail, watched the morning light on the breakfast table?

-- Josephine (chapter 10)

Importance: Josephine is beginning to write the novel and is struggling with not only how to begin but determining how all the pieces will fit together. Her thoughts not only reveal how well read she is, but also what she knows about writing. Stendhal was a 19th-century French writer whose work was admired by several later well-known writers. Georges Simenon was a Belgian writer who was extremely prolific, penning nearly 500 novels during his lifetime. Here, Jo is wondering what it will take for her to be able to write just this one novel and if she can finish it in just a few short months.

If we lose you, our family will fall apart. Because you bring it joy, good humor, and a big heart. In each family, there are some people who don't seem important, but without them, there would be no life, no love. You and I, we're that type.

-- Josephine's father (chapter 10)

Importance: Josephine is on her balcony remembering a time when she was little and watching the stars with her father. He was showing her the big dipper and pointed to the star at the very end of the handle. It does not seem like an important star, but he comments that it is needed to add balance to the whole constellation. He tells Jo that she is an important part of their family because she brings something to it that no one else does. This memory is a comfort to Jo now as an adult who is feeling guilty for agreeing to Iris's scheme.

I've learned that happiness doesn't mean living a safe life without screw-ups or mistakes, without taking risks. Happiness means accepting effort and doubt, and keeping on moving forward, overcoming obstacles.

-- Josephine (chapter 13)

Importance: Josephine is talking to Shirley about how writing the novel has affected her



life and how she is changing bit by bit for the better. In some ways she is like her character, Florine. She is becoming stronger and learning to stand on her own and work through struggles. She is not pursuing wealth, even though she achieves it by writing the book. Instead, she longs for real love and a sense of freedom in being comfortable with herself.

The book had become her friend. The characters spoke to her, and she listened, traveling with them along their path. How could she let them go?"
-- Josephine (chapter 14)

Importance: In this statement, the author is giving the reader insight to the private life of a writer as they struggle to release their work into the world. Josephine is thinking about finishing the manuscript and needing to turn it in to Iris. She has lived with these characters for the last several months in her own private world, and she feels intimately acquainted with them.

Just 'cause she's farting through silk, doesn't mean she can shit on people who don't have money.
-- Max Barthillet (chapter 14)

Importance: At an afternoon museum outing with Alexandre, Zoe and Max, Iris insults Max's intelligence, saying that he must not have a very big vocabulary because he isn't being talkative. She blames it on not having a good education. When Alexandre later mockingly questions Max if his mom hurt his feelings, Max responds with this crass and cutting comment. He is saying that Iris's money does not make her any better than anyone else and does not give her the right to tear people down and be rude to them.

That's how you know when love is gone: it doesn't hurt anymore. You take a long, hard look at the person you once loved, and you realize she's simply the way she is, and that you can't change her. You're the one who has changed. And it's over.
-- Philippe (chapter 15)

Importance: Philippe has been looking through a binder in which Iris has put all the newspaper and magazine article clippings talking about the success of the novel. He knows the truth, that the true author is Josephine, and he is disgusted by the way Iris is behaving. He sees her as a monster who uses and manipulates people to get what she wants. But the realization that he no longer loves her does not hurt him the way he thought it might, because he understands that he has changed and emotionally moved past caring about her.

We only recognize happiness by the sound it makes when it leaves,' Who said that, Jo?
-- Antoine (chapter 19)

Importance: Antoine is talking to Josephine on the phone checking in with her. He has been missing his former life with her and the girls and frustrated by the continuing failure of the crocodile farm. In the course of their conversation he learns that she is in love with another man and tells her that he is not surprised since she is such a wonderful



person. When Josephine responds that he never told her that when they were together, Antoine expresses his true feelings. He did not realize that he had been happy with her until now that it was too late and everything was lost.

My daughter, who has no use for love, tenderness, or generosity -- my daughter, who faces life with a knife between her teeth -- just gave me a gift no one has ever given me before: she looked at me and said, "Go ahead, take your name back! You can do it!" Maybe she does love me, in her own way. Who knows?
-- Josephine (chapter 22)

Importance: Hortense has just revealed on a national television show that Josephine is the true writer of *The Humble Queen* and not Iris. Josephine will now be able to write under her own name and levy off of the success of her former work. She will be able to get the royalties and rights to all the future printings of the first novel. She is stunned by her daughter's actions and willingness to stand up for her. She and Hortense have always clashed and Hortense has made it clear to her that she hated the whole history/academic world in which Josephine lived and worked. She is moved that her daughter would stand up for her in this bold manner and realizes that perhaps their bond as mother and daughter is stronger than she had thought.