

The Sound of Waves



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF YUKIO MISHIMA

Yukio Mishima, widely considered to be one of the most important and influential Japanese authors of the 20th century, was a prolific, nihilistic, and controversial artistic and political figure. Born in 1925 to an affluent and influential family descended from Tokugawa Ieyasu (the founder of the Tokugawa shogunate of Japan), Mishima lived a sheltered existence and was raised primarily by his grandmother. Mishima was intrigued by Kabuki drama and European literature from an early age, and while his teachers admired him, his militaristic father worried about his son's interest in "effeminate" things. Mishima was declared physically unfit for service in World War II, and after the Surrender of Japan in August of 1945, Mishima declared his intent to rebuild and preserve Japanese culture while resisting Westernization at any cost. After the war, Mishima continued writing while also dabbling in acting, modeling, and bodybuilding. Though he married a woman in 1958, Mishima frequented gay bars and conducted affairs with men. In 1967, Mishima helped to form a private militia dedicated to the protection of the Emperor of Japan, and, in 1970, Mishima and several members of his "Shield Society" attempted a military coup to restore power to the emperor. When the coup failed, Mishima committed *seppuku*, or ritual suicide by disembowelment and decapitation. Mishima is buried in Tokyo. In spite of his controversial life and politics, his body of work—consisting of 34 novels, roughly 50 plays, 25 books of stories, and 35 books of essays—lives on, regarded as some of the most formative Japanese literature of the modern era.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Sound of Waves is set in the early 1950s, in the period immediately following the end of World War II. Following Japan's surrender, the United States and the other Allied powers led a campaign to occupy and rehabilitate the Japanese state, leading to a period of rapid Westernization and sweeping political, economic, and social changes in the country. While the residents of the tiny fictional island of Uta-jima are largely isolated from goings-on on the larger islands of the Japanese archipelago, Mishima situates the story temporally by making reference to the ways in which those Uta-jima residents who do visit big cities like Tokyo and Osaka react with incredulity to the technological innovations and changing fashions in Japan's more populous areas. Mishima, a staunch nationalist who rejected Westernization, makes no secret of his romanticizing of life on an island where collective devotion to traditional

clothing, traditional seafaring work, and traditional social roles trump the encroaching forces of modernity.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Though Yukio Mishima composed and set *The Sound of Waves* in the years directly following World War II, many elements of the story are timeless: the romance (and the class differences) between Shinji and Hatsue, the narrative focus on the forces of nature, and the struggle between tradition and modernity echo throughout twentieth- and twenty-first century literature around the globe. Literary novels like Marilynne Robinson's [Housekeeping](#) echo Mishima's lush, descriptive language and centering of nature as a defining force of the human experience. Even contemporary, edgy romances such as Sally Rooney's popular *Normal People* focus on the ways in which wealth, class, and status threaten to derail profound romances. *The Sound of Waves* also reflects many of the themes that appear in Mishima's other novels. For instance, *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* also centers around sailors and seafaring people, while *Spring Snow* also tackles a relationship between two lovers from different class backgrounds. Critics have pointed to *The Sound of Waves* as one of Mishima's quietest and most optimistic novels—Mishima's works often tackle themes of violence and misogyny and feature pained characters with hidden or fractured identities.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Sound of Waves
- **When Written:** Early 1950s
- **Where Written:** Japan
- **When Published:** 1954
- **Literary Period:** Postwar Japanese literature
- **Genre:** Literary fiction; Romance; *Bildungsroman*
- **Setting:** The fictional island of Uta-jima in the Bay of Ise, Japan
- **Climax:** Shinji braves a typhoon in order to save his fellow crewmembers on the *Utajima-maru* freighter, thus proving his worth to the owner of the rig (and his future father-in-law) Terukichi Miyata
- **Antagonist:** Terukichi Miyata, Yasuo Kawamoto
- **Point of View:** Third-person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Classical Roots. Scholars have suggested that Mishima drew on classical mythology—most notably the pastoral tale of Daphnis and Chloe—in the writing of *The Sound of Waves*. In the

myth, set on the Greek isle of Lesbos, two orphans named Daphnis and Chloe fall in love but do not consummate their feelings out of a fear of doing something wrong. Many male suitors court Chloe and threaten to take her away from her true love Daphnis, but ultimately Daphnis and Chloe are reunited with their birth parents and allowed to marry at last.

The Real Uta-jima. The Japanese word for “island” is *jima*, while the Japanese word *uta* translates to “song.” Thus, the island of Uta-jima is “Song Island”—a reference to the omnipresent sound of waves in the background of island life. While the island of Mishima’s imagination does not exist, there is, as of 1995, an Uta-jima in Japan: famous Japanese singer Masashi Sada purchased a small island called Tera Shima, located in Omura Bay (near Nagasaki), for 20 million yen (or about \$280,000 USD) and renamed it Uta-jima, referencing not Mishima’s fictive island but his own relationship to songs and music.



PLOT SUMMARY

Yukio Mishima’s *The Sound of Waves* tells the story of Shinji Kubo, a poor but passionate young fisherman who lives on the remote island of Uta-jima in the Japanese archipelago. Shinji lives with his widowed mother and his younger brother, Hiroshi. He works hard each day aboard the *Taihei-maru* (a fishing boat belonging to the seasoned fisherman Jukichi Oyama) in order to provide for his family in the wake of his father’s death. When Shinji spots a beautiful woman he’s never seen before on the island, he becomes entranced by the young pearl-diver, whose name is Hatsue—but when he learns that she is the daughter of Terukichi Miyata, one of the wealthiest men on the island, Shinji fears he has no chance at winning her love. One night, after a meeting of the island’s Young Men’s Association led by the brash, cruel, promiscuous, and wealthy Yasuo Kawamoto, Shinji stops at Yashiro Shrine to pray for the health and happiness of his family—and for Hatsue to notice him.

One day, while gathering wood for his mother near an abandoned watchtower, Shinji runs into Hatsue, who has gotten lost on her way to the lighthouse. He shows her the way and begins to feel that she cares for him, too—yet when he hears a rumor that she is engaged to Yasuo, he becomes sad. After Shinji drops his pay envelope on the beach while helping some sailors pull in their boat, Hatsue finds it and returns it to Shinji’s home, then goes to meet him on the beach where he has gone to look for it. There, Hatsue tells Shinji that the rumor about her and Yasuo is nothing but a lie. They share a kiss and make a plan to rendezvous again soon—but when they meet the following night at the home of the lighthouse-keeper and his wife, to whom Shinji brings fish each evening, the lighthouse-keeper’s wife’s mention of her daughter Chiyoko’s crush on

Shinji offends Hatsue. Shinji assures Hatsue that the rumors about him and Chiyoko, too, are just that—rumors. However, Chiyoko does pine for Shinji, unbeknownst to him.

A heavy storm strikes the island, making fishing impossible. Shinji and Hatsue meet at the abandoned watchtower, but Shinji arrives early and falls asleep near a fire. When he awakens, he finds Hatsue drying herself near the flames—she is naked. Hatsue is startled when Shinji wakes up and demands he look away, but he refuses to do so. Hatsue tells Shinji that in order for her not to feel embarrassed, he must undress, too. He does so immediately. The two kiss and embrace, but Hatsue does not want to make love—she thinks doing so before marriage is wrong. Nevertheless, they declare their love for one another, then head home together down the mountain.

Unbeknownst to them, the jealous Chiyoko spies them from the lighthouse. She quickly tells Yasuo what she’s seen, and Yasuo begins spreading the rumor quickly throughout the village. While Shinji and his mother struggle to understand why their neighbors have begun to look at them strangely, Yasuo makes plans for revenge against Hatsue. He waits for her to come down to the village well to gather water late at night, then tries to assault and rape her. His attempt is thwarted by an angry swarm of **hornets**—yet he forces Hatsue to let him walk her home.

When Terukichi Miyata learns of the rumor about his daughter and Shinji, he becomes enraged and forbids Hatsue to leave the house. Hatsue begins writing letters to Shinji and leaving them in the water-jar at the front door. Shinji’s fellow fisherman Ryuji brings him the letters each day and delivers the notes Shinji writes back to her. Meanwhile, Chiyoko prepares to return to Tokyo where she attends university. As she bids farewell to Shinji, he pays her a nice compliment. She feels guilty for the wildfire of gossip she has started and decides to try to find a way to make up for her wickedness.

Shinji’s mother, fed up with the gossip, decides to confront Terukichi Miyata herself—but when she arrives at the house and asks to see him, Hatsue sheepishly relays that her father will not see Shinji’s mother. Hatsue and Shinji make a plan to meet in secret, but on the night of the meeting, Terukichi is waiting in the shadows for Hatsue. He drags her back to the house as Shinji looks on.

Pearl-diving season begins, and when a peddler brings some fine wares to the beach for the pearl-diving women to peruse, he offers to give away a fancy purse to the winner of a diving contest. Hatsue wins the contest and the bag, but she gives it to Shinji’s mother as an apology for her father’s rudeness.

One afternoon, Shinji receives a visit from the captain of one of Terukichi’s freighters, the *Utajima-maru*. The captain offers Shinji a job. Shinji is skeptical and insists he needs to get Jukichi’s permission, but the captain says he’s already visited Jukichi and secured it. Shinji takes the job. On the day of

departure, he learns that Yasuo, too, will be joining the crew of the freighter. At the docks, Hatsue gives Shinji's mother a package for Shinji—it contains a charm for good luck, a letter, and a picture of herself. As the freighter makes its way from port to port toward Okinawa, Shinji works hard at his post while Yasuo spends all his time bragging to the other seamen about how one day, he will marry Hatsue and own the freighter himself.

By the time the ship arrives in Okinawa, a dangerous typhoon is brewing. The freighter ties itself to a nearby bonito ship and the two boats make their way into harbor, tying themselves to a buoy. That night, while keeping watch through the storm, Shinji and Yasuo see one of the lines tethering the ships to the buoy snap. The captain says someone needs to volunteer to tie a lifeline to the buoy. Yasuo says nothing, but Shinji offers himself up. He dives into the sea fearlessly and works hard to swim out to the buoy, fasten the line, and return to the ship. In the morning, the storm clears.

Shinji's homecoming to Uta-jima is celebrated across the island—word of his heroic deed has made it home. Chiyoko, who refuses to come home for summer vacation, writes to her mother and confesses that it was she who started the rumor about Shinji and Hatsue, and that she will not return home until Shinji and Hatsue are engaged or wed. The lighthouse-keeper's wife gathers several village women—including Shinji's mother—and heads for Terukichi Miyata's house to confront him with the truth about the rumor. Terukichi says he has already chosen Shinji to be his daughter's husband—Shinji proved his worth on the freighter, passing the test Terukichi himself lined up for both Shinji and Yasuo.

Shinji and Hatsue celebrate their engagement by praying at Yashiro Shrine and bringing fish to the lighthouse-keeper and his wife. The lighthouse-keeper offers Shinji and Hatsue a tour of the lighthouse, then leaves them alone at the top of the tower to watch as the beacon's bright beams shine light into the dark ocean. Shinji and Hatsue vow to protect each other forever.

affection turns out to be Hatsue Miyata—she is the daughter of the powerful and imposing Terukichi Miyata, one of the wealthiest men on the island. Though Shinji is poor, he is devoted to Hatsue and sees her as his equal. After the two confess their love for one another one stormy day, the jealous daughter of the lighthouse-keeper and his wife, Chiyoko, sees Shinji—the object of her own affections—descending a slope with Hatsue on his arm. Chiyoko starts a rumor that Shinji and Hatsue have slept together—and overnight, Shinji finds his life completely changed. Suddenly, the humble and unassuming Shinji finds himself at the center of a swirling storm of scandal and gossip. Shinji tries to keep his head down and stay detached from the drama brewing on the island, but he cannot silence his love for Hatsue, and he remains dedicated to finding a way for them to be together. When Shinji receives a mysterious offer to work aboard one of Terukichi's freighters, he is confused but accepts the job with grace and gratitude. While sailing to Okinawa, Shinji braves a fearsome typhoon to rescue the ship from capsizing—and he thus proves that his connection to nature, his bravery, and his selfless nature make him the perfect match for Hatsue. The ways in which the quiet, thoughtful, generous Shinji values honesty, family, hard work, and the lessons nature has to teach him provide him with a strong moral compass that guides the novel's thematic interrogations of nature, love, class, and the destructive effects of gossip.

Hatsue Miyata – Hatsue Miyata is the beautiful, brave, sensitive daughter of Terukichi Miyata, one of the wealthiest men on the small island of Uta-jima. At the beginning of the novel, Terukichi calls Hatsue home years after adopting her out into a **pearl-diving** family on a neighboring island. Shortly after Hatsue returns home, she catches the eye of the young fisherman Shinji Kubo—and soon finds herself having feelings for the humble and thoughtful young man. When Shinji and Hatsue rendezvous at an abandoned watchtower one stormy day, they kiss, embrace, and exchange gifts and declarations of love—but when Chiyoko, the jealous daughter of the lighthouse-keeper and his wife, sees Shinji and Hatsue walking together, she starts a vicious rumor about them having slept together. Hatsue's rageful father forbids her from seeing Shinji, threatens to marry her off to the cruel Yasuo Kawamoto, and all but forces her to stay in the house day in and day out. She can only communicate with Shinji through letters, yet she never gives up on her hope that one day they will be able to be together. Hatsue is sensitive and emotional yet never self-absorbed or self-pitying. As a young but talented pearl diver, she is attuned to the rhythms of nature, she is fearless when it comes to dangerous pursuits, and she understands the value of hard work. Ultimately, after Terukichi Miyata devises a test through which Shinji can prove his worth, Terukichi allows Hatsue and Shinji to become engaged. Hatsue and Shinji are grateful to be together at last, and, toward the end of the novel, they announce their intent to be one another's light in the darkness and each other's shelter in the storm. Intuitive,



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Shinji Kubo – Shinji Kubo is the protagonist of the novel. A humble young fisherman's apprentice, he spends his days working hard on a fishing boat alongside his fellow apprentice Ryuji and his master Jukichi. Shinji is deeply connected to nature, intuition, and hard work. He draws strength and a sense of companionship from the sea, and he is deeply devoted to his family—he gives his widowed mother his every paycheck so that she can care for herself and Shinji's younger brother Hiroshi. When Shinji notices a beautiful new face on the island of Uta-jima, he falls head over heels for her. The object of his

graceful, and optimistic, the perceptive and thoughtful Hatsue is in many ways the novel's beating heart.

Yasuo Kawamoto – Yasuo Kawamoto is the brash, braggadocious, and entitled president of Uta-jima's Young Men's Association. A member of a relatively wealthy and powerful family on the island, Yasuo talks endlessly of his sexual exploits and banal accomplishments, yet he has never known a day of hard work in his life. He adorns himself in fine clothes and watches, yet he is completely disconnected from the natural life that surrounds the island. Yasuo is the perfect antagonist because he believes that his class and his wealth make him better—and more deserving—than those around him, even as he ignores the moral imperatives to be selfless and to learn from and work with nature. Instead, Yasuo is promiscuous, self-serving, and easily drawn into maelstroms of gossip and rumor. He leaves the island at every chance he gets, and while he claims to care for Hatsue, he only wants her because of her money and her social clout. When he attempts to rape Hatsue, believing a rumor about her having slept with Shinji, he is attempting to punish her and exert dominance over her—but a swarm of **hornets** begins stinging him, illustrating the fact that his failure to learn the lessons of nature and respect those he purports to care for have made him disconnected not just from the world around him but from himself. When Terukichi Miyata secretly conducts an experiment and sends both Shinji and Yasuo out on his lumber freighter, hoping to see which young man will be the best match for Hatsue, Yasuo cowers on deck in the midst of a deadly typhoon while Shinji risks life and limb for the good of the crew. Yasuo's inability to work with nature or to stand up for what is right ultimately condemns him—Terukichi chooses to adopt Shinji into his family and marry him to Hatsue, leaving Yasuo alone and isolated.

Shinji's Mother – Shinji's mother is a widowed woman raising her two young sons as best as she can. A seasoned **pearl-diver**, she is athletic, brave, and deeply devoted to her family's well-being. She has a very complicated inner life; though she is a devout woman who mourns her husband's passing by visiting his grave each month and paying respects at a prayer altar in her home, there is a part of her that longs for more children, adventure, and another chance at love. As a diving woman, she is one of the wisest and most experienced women on the island—yet because she is poor, she finds herself excluded from exerting any influence in her community. When her son Shinji becomes the subject of terrible rumors, Shinji's mother does everything she can to clear her son's name—yet she finds herself humiliated when she is unable to even obtain an audience with the wealthy Terukichi Miyata, the father of the girl Shinji is rumored to have deflowered. Shinji's mother enjoys work and finds herself bored and lonely during the winter and spring months when there is no pearl diving to be done. She draws strength from being around other women who share the

same struggles as her, who have the same connection to nature that she does, and who are focused, for the most part, on helping one another rather than tearing each other down with petty gossip. A thoughtful, giving, fiercely defensive individual, Shinji's mother wants her sons to live happy lives free of worry, strife, or pain.

Terukichi Miyata – Terukichi Miyata, often called “Uncle Teru,” is the confident, imposing, self-made owner of two large lumber freighters. Though he is one of the wealthiest men on the island, Terukichi is only recently accustomed to having money and social clout, having built himself up from nothing into a magnate over the course of his career. Mishima describes the proud and prickly Miyata as “the personification of all of Uta-jima's toil and determination and ambition and strength.” He is not just a successful businessman, but also a skilled fisherman and navigator and a great predictor of the weather. Mishima implies that though Terukichi Miyata has learned the lessons of nature throughout his youth, he has lost sight of some of them in his old age, often acting as “a bronze statue erected to his own memory.” After the widowed Terukichi loses his only son, he calls his youngest daughter Hatsue home from a **pearl-diving** apprenticeship on a neighboring island and announces plans to adopt a young man into the family to marry her and carry on the family name. When Hatsue falls in love with Shinji Kubo, the two are seen together in public—and after rumors fly about their having slept together, the rageful Terukichi forbids his daughter from seeing Shinji and threatens to marry her off to the brash, cruel Yasuo Kawamoto. Though Terukichi is insulated and classist, toward the end of the novel, his daughter's sadness penetrates his armor and he devises a test to see whether Shinji or Yasuo is worthier of Hatsue's hand. Ultimately, after Shinji risks his own life while journeying to Okinawa with the crew of Terukichi's freighter the *Utajimamaru*, Terukichi decides that Shinji has the most “get-up-and-go” of anyone on the island. He agrees to let Shinji marry Hatsue, and he offers to take Shinji's mother and younger brother Hiroshi in, as well. Though salty, judgmental, and occasionally narrow-minded, Terukichi ultimately proves himself to be a wise, generous, level-headed man.

The Lighthouse-keeper – The lighthouse-keeper operates the lone lighthouse on the island of Uta-jima. A quiet and thoughtful man who is deeply dedicated to his wife and his daughter, Chiyoko, he has a curious and tender soul and he takes his work very seriously. The lighthouse-keeper finds great purpose in his job, and, toward the end of the novel, as he gives the young lovers Shinji and Hatsue a tour of the watchtower and the beacon, he helps them to see that just as the lighthouse provides a light in the darkness for the island itself, so too can love and devotion provide a warm and guiding light in the darkness of life.

The Lighthouse-keeper's Wife – The lighthouse-keeper's wife is a kind, warm, and chatty woman who is devoted to her family.

Though she is occasionally sucked in by gossip, rumor, and any whiff of a scandal, she ultimately has a strong moral compass and a deep sense of responsibility to her community. The lighthouse-keeper and his wife both adore Shinji, who brings them fish every evening after coming in from the ocean as an attempt to repay them for doing him a large favor related to helping him graduate from high school on time. When Shinji is in trouble because of a rumor about him and Hatsue, the daughter of the wealthy and powerful Terukichi Miyata, the lighthouse-keeper's wife learns that her daughter Chiyoko is responsible for the devastating rumor. The lighthouse-keeper's wife then takes it upon herself to confront the intimidating Terukichi and repair the damage her daughter has done—in the process, she winds up involving many of the village women in a dialogue about the control Terukichi wields over their entire community. The lighthouse-keeper's wife proves herself to be deeper and more thoughtful than she appears to be on the surface by resisting the undertow of gossip and rumor and pivoting to a focus on righting the wrongs in her community.

Chiyoko – Chiyoko is the insecure, anxious, jealous daughter of the lighthouse-keeper and his wife. Chiyoko attends university in Tokyo—she is one of the few people Shinji knows who has left Uta-jima. Chiyoko harbors intense feelings of love and desire for Shinji, but she is too shy to say anything. When she is home visiting the island for her spring vacation, she spies Shinji and Hatsue walking down the mountain together arm-in-arm. Hurt and upset, she starts a rumor that Shinji and Hatsue have had carnal relations, confiding in the brash and pompous Yasuo Kawamoto and setting in motion a wave of gossip that threatens to tear Shinji and Hatsue apart. When Chiyoko departs the island and has a positive interaction with Shinji, however, she realizes what a kind person he can be and how deserving of happiness he truly is. Chiyoko tells her parents that she will not return home to the island until the mess she has made has been righted and Shinji and Hatsue are allowed to be together. Though Chiyoko fears she is dull and ugly—and acts out because of her insecurities—she ultimately proves herself to be a thoughtful and selfless person who is able to set aside her own desires and dedicate herself to the needs of others.

Hiroshi Kubo – Hiroshi is Shinji's younger brother. He is excitable, impetuous, and occasionally a bit greedy. He enjoys stirring up trouble so that he can temporarily get Shinji in trouble and become his mother's favorite. Hiroshi is a restless spirit who finds his curiosity about the world expanded and deepened after a trip to the cities of Kyoto and Osaka with his classmates—yet in many ways, Hiroshi is deeply naïve. When rumors about Shinji and Hatsue sleeping together out of wedlock begin to spread and Hiroshi's friends tease him, Hiroshi is confused by what the rumors are exactly about. He wants to be part of the world and participate in life outside of Uta-jima—but even by the end of the novel, he has a lot of

growing up to do before he achieves the centered, calm selflessness that Mishima suggests marks someone's entrance into adulthood.

Jukichi Oyama – Jukichi Oyama is a master fisherman and the owner of the fishing rig called the *Taihei-maru*, or “calm circle.” Jukichi is an older man whose quiet disposition, sunburnt skin, and profound dedication to the sea speak to a life of hard work and focus. He mentors Shinji and his fellow apprentice fisherman Ryuji, often giving the young men advice about much more than life on the sea. Through Jukichi, Shinji comes to understand more about the values of patience and devotion. Jukichi's love of the sea and his willingness to learn from and work with the powerful, unpredictable forces of nature greatly influences the ways in which Shinji learns to move through the realms of life, love, and work.

Ryuji – Ryuji is the other apprentice fisherman who works on the *Taihei-maru*. Like Shinji, Ryuji is shy and deferential, devoted to learning the lessons of the sea from their master Jukichi. When push comes to shove, Ryuji is a deeply loyal friend and staunch defender of Shinji's who is willing to stand up for what's right. He defends Shinji against the rumors that begin to swirl about Shinji and Hatsue—and when the two young lovers are forbidden from seeing each other, Ryuji volunteers to act as a go-between by delivering the secret letters they write to one another.

The Captain – The captain, an employee of Terukichi Miyata, is the captain of the *Utajima-maru*, a large lumber freighter. A wise and observant man, the captain carefully observes both Shinji and Yasuo on their journey to Okinawa toward the end of the novel so that he can report back to Terukichi Miyata about which young man he thinks is most worthy of Hatsue.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Sochan – Sochan is one of Hiroshi's friends. While playing a game in some dark caves, Sochan suggests that the sea-god is sending waves to ruin their fun because Hiroshi's brother Shinji slept with Hatsue outside of wedlock, demonstrating his superstitious, gossipy, and confrontational nature.

Katchan – Katchan is one of Hiroshi's friends. He works to keep the peace between Hiroshi and Sochan.

The Peddler – The peddler is an old, wizened, sunburnt man who comes to Uta-jima each summer to sell his flashy fabrics and accessories to the **pearl-diving** women of the island.

The Priest – The priest is the spiritual leader of the Yashiro Shrine, a shrine housed on Uta-jima and dedicated to a sea-god.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes

occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



LESSONS FROM NATURE

Throughout Yukio Mishima's *The Sound of Waves*, the powerful forces of nature define life on the island of Uta-jima. As Mishima tells the story of a young couple battered by gossip, jealousy, and class divisions, he draws parallels between the lessons they have to learn and the lessons nature has to teach. Mishima suggests that nature is all-powerful and beyond human control—and as such should be respected. Ultimately, Mishima argues that humans can show their respect by trying to embody nature's resilience, strength, purity, and beauty in order to exist in harmony with the natural world rather than resist it.

Throughout the novel, Mishima demonstrates that humans must respect and embody nature's traits in order to live in harmony. This is first shown through the character arc of Hatsue, Shinji's love interest. Hatsue is the beautiful young daughter of the most powerful man on Uta-jima, Terukichi Miyata. She has spent several years learning the art of **pearl diving** on a neighboring island, and Hatsue's beauty, serenity, and facility with nature make her the object of several islanders' affections. The work of pearl-diving is difficult and dangerous; one must traverse painfully cold waters, the harsh landscape of the ocean floor, and the threat of fearsome sea creatures in order to reap the rewards of pearls. Hatsue's work as a pearl diver allows her to learn lessons about strength and bravery, while teaching her that the rarest treasures are often encased within tough, uncompelling exteriors. This knowledge helps her find a partner to share her life with, allowing her to see through Shinji's working-class exterior to understand the rare and precious strength of character within him.

Mishima also illustrates how nature punishes those who do not learn its values. Yasuo is a self-absorbed youth, the son of one of Uta-jima's leading families. Though Yasuo is a natural-born leader, he is brash, inflexible, and narcissistic—values that directly challenge the lessons of nature. After Hatsue returns to the village, Yasuo finds himself drawn to her—but he becomes incensed when rumors of Hatsue and Shinji's clandestine relationship spread quickly across the island. Yasuo decides to take matters into his own hands, and one night, while Hatsue gathers water from a well near her father's house, Yasuo attempts to rape her. His dastardly deed is foiled, however, when an aggravated cluster of **hornets** begins stinging him repeatedly all over his body, including his buttocks. Mishima uses this incident to show how nature quite literally takes revenge against those who make a mockery of its teachings. When Yasuo attempts to rape Hatsue, he tries to exert unnatural force over her. Nature immediately punishes him for this, showing that even though people may think they

are separate from or even above the natural order of things, they are not.

Lastly, Mishima uses Shinji's encounter with a tremendous force of nature—a typhoon—to illustrate that when people work with nature rather than against it, they can learn to embody nature's might. When Shinji is invited to join the crew of the *Utajima-maru*—a lumber freighter owned by Hatsue's father—as a deckhand, he takes the job excitedly. As the ship sails into port in Okinawa, however, the crew finds themselves confronted by an enormous typhoon that descends rapidly and unexpectedly. When one of the lines tethering the ship to a nearby buoy snaps and the captain asks for a volunteer to retie it, Shinji bravely offers himself up. He dives into the roiling typhoon waters and successfully reattaches the line, using all of the knowledge he has gained through his years of confronting the roaring sea to complete the task before him. The morning after his act of courage, Shinji wakes to find a “crystal-clear blue sky” shining above him and a calm sea “glitter[ing]” before him. Shinji is the protagonist of the novel, and his positive, flexible relationship to nature is a mark of his moral fortitude and deep inner strength. Shinji has always had a unique relationship to the natural world, and he harbors immense respect for the strength of nature. As Shinji replicates that strength within himself by using the lessons nature has taught him, he is able to save not just his own life but the lives of his fellow crewmembers.

Though Mishima paints nature as a dangerous force that occasionally exhibits violence, he ultimately suggests that humans must learn the lessons nature teaches. If people choose to learn from nature, they can accomplish incredible feats of strength and learn to treat one another with more flexibility, empathy, and care.



LOVE, SEX, AND DEVOTION

Yukio Mishima's *The Sound of Waves* is, at its core, a love story. When Shinji and Hatsue find themselves magnetically drawn to each other, they quickly begin traversing the waters of love and sex for the first time. As Shinji and Hatsue talk, flirt, and test the boundaries of propriety, they nonetheless maintain their inner purity of heart, spirit, and intention—their attraction is just as spiritual as it is physical. As Mishima charts Shinji and Hatsue's love story, he suggests that when it comes to romance, true devotion (rather than mere physical attraction or social climbing) will safeguard against jealousy, cruelty, and lies.

As Shinji and Hatsue grow closer, their choice to remain devoted, honest, and optimistic sustains their love in the face of gossip, jealousy, and sabotage. This is made clear in the scene in which Shinji falls asleep before a fire while waiting for Hatsue to meet him. When he awakens, Hatsue is standing in front of the fire half-naked, drying her clothes and body, as is the custom of pearl-divers after returning from the cold sea.

Hatsue's unabashed nakedness in front of Shinji—at least while he is sleeping—demonstrates the purity of spirit that defines the young lovers' relationship. And even though Hatsue is briefly ashamed to be naked in front of Shinji when he wakes up, she quickly suggests that he get naked too—not out of any particular sexual desire, but simply so they'll be in an equal position. As Shinji and Hatsue bare themselves to each other, they experience feelings of “unceasing [...] intoxication,” but also of “pure and holy happiness.” Rather than have sex, which Hatsue believes would be “bad” for them to do, Shinji offers Hatsue a beautiful pink shell that reminded him of her when he found it on the beach the previous day. This incident demonstrates the innocence and pure intentions that define Hatsue and Shinji's courtship. Though they desire each other physically, they also connect spiritually—and this, Mishima suggests, is what makes a relationship genuine and strong.

This pure and intense devotion helps Hatsue and Shinji to weather the gossip and jealousy that plagues their courtship. When Chiyoko, the daughter of the lighthouse-keeper, sees Hatsue and Shinji together, she spreads horrible rumors about them throughout town. These rumors threaten to derail Hatsue and Shinji's blossoming relationship, especially when Hatsue's father Terukichi forbids the young lovers from seeing each other. Hatsue must contend with public embarrassment, and Shinji must reject his fellow sailors' crude comments about his relationship. But in spite of all the gossip surrounding Hatsue and Shinji, the two of them remain devoted to each other; they figure out how to secretly correspond, and they never waver in their mutual respect and commitment. In the midst of the firestorm, Hatsue hopes that she and Shinji will be able to “go on truly, with strong hearts,” showing that while the town sometimes stoops to vicious and petty gossip, Shinji and Hatsue preserve their love by rising above this behavior.

Mishima also shows how Shinji's wholehearted devotion to Hatsue gives him strength that allows him to conquer not just emotional hardship, but physical danger as well. After Shinji takes a job on a lumber freighter owned by Hatsue's father, Hatsue gives Shinji a picture of her to take along on the long journey to Okinawa. Upon arriving on the faraway island, Shinji—drawing strength from the picture of Hatsue in his pocket—braves a typhoon to retie a snapped buoy line and secure the ship after no other crew member volunteers. When Terukichi, or “Uncle Teru” as he's known throughout the village, receives word of Shinji's brave actions, he decides to bless Shinji and Hatsue's union and adopt Shinji into his family so that Shinji and Hatsue can carry on the family name. Shinji's brave actions on the freighter are inspired by the purity and strength of his love for Hatsue, and this is both an example of his devotion to her inspiring strength, and the purity of his love overcoming gossip—after all, it's this act of courage that convinces Uncle Teru that Shinji's heart is pure, despite the gossip about him. Teru's decision to bless Shinji and Hatsue's

union solidifies Mishima's argument that the purest love and most intense devotion can withstand anything.



COMING OF AGE

Yukio Mishima's *The Sound of Waves* focuses primarily on Shinji Kubo's coming-of-age journey. Over the course of the novel, Shinji learns

important lessons about love, honor, class, family, and the value of hard work. As Shinji grows from a boy into a man by learning to gracefully accept whatever comes to him, Mishima suggests that in order to fully come of age, one must become flexible and selfless.

Shinji is, by nature, a giving person—but he must learn to be even more selfless as he matures. He initially demonstrates his selflessness (and thus his burgeoning manhood) by giving away all of the fish he catches and the money he earns; his catches go to the island's fishing cooperative, while his wages go to his widowed mother so that she can support Shinji and his brother Hiroshi. Shinji wears sweaters full of holes and rarely takes a day off. He lives a humble life—yet he never even considers keeping his pay for himself in order to better his own circumstances. Shinji's natural selflessness demonstrates that he's well on his way to coming of age. The arrival of Hatsue seems as if it will threaten Shinji's ability to focus on other's needs—yet Mishima goes on to show how, even when tempted by the possibility of furthering his personal satisfaction and his social status, Shinji continues to prioritize others above himself.

The next major moment in Shinji's coming-of-age journey is also marked by prioritizing others over himself. Shinji quickly falls in love with Hatsue, and amid vicious rumors that threaten Hatsue's integrity, Shinji selflessly decides to give Hatsue space so that her reputation might be spared—even if his own honor continues to get dragged through the mud. While remaining distant from Hatsue, Shinji briefly considers solutions to his loneliness. He wonders if he could convince Hatsue to elope—or whether the two of them might commit double suicide to end their shared pain. Ultimately, however, Shinji recognizes that these fleeting impulses are the thoughts of “selfish persons who [think] only of themselves.” He knows that he should not cause further damage to Hatsue's reputation—nor can he leave his mother alone to support herself and Hiroshi through the dangerous job of pearl-diving. Though Shinji is tempted by the desire for selfish satisfaction, he ultimately proves his maturity by setting aside his own desires and recommitting to helping the people who need him.

Shinji's climactic encounter with a powerful typhoon in the port of Okinawa is the final step in his coming-of-age journey. Shinji selflessly decides to risk his own life in order to tether the freighter he's crewing to a nearby buoy—prioritizing the safety of his fellow sailors over his own life. This brave and selfless act symbolizes Shinji's final transition into manhood. Though Shinji has faith in his abilities as a swimmer, he knows that it is risky to

venture into the heart of the storm. Nevertheless, he cheerfully volunteers himself, willing to face whatever “banquet of madness” awaits him in the ocean rather than cower on the deck any longer. He even leaves behind his raincoat that contains the picture of Hatsue he has long clung to for strength. As Shinji sheds all trappings of himself on behalf of others, Mishima implies that Shinji’s coming-of-age journey is at last complete. Whereas some coming-of-age novels characterize self-possession as the mark of maturity, Mishima argues that a person’s ability to prioritize others over themselves is what indicates that they’ve come of age.



CLASS, WEALTH, AND POWER

As fisherman Shinji Kubo sets his sights on Hatsue, the beautiful daughter of the wealthiest man on the island, he quickly finds himself caught up in a struggle centered around class, wealth, and power. Shinji, who gives every penny he makes to his mother so that she can support their family, must prove himself to Hatsue’s intimidating father, Terukichi Miyata, who owns two huge freighters. The difficult lives of Uta-jima’s working class—and particularly Shinji’s struggle to ingratiate himself with Hatsue’s family—show how inequality in wealth and power can destabilize and harm communities. With this, Mishima argues that a person’s worth can never be determined by their material possessions, socioeconomic class, or societal power—people can only be judged by their moral character.

Uta-jima’s community is divided along lines of class, wealth, and power. Most of the island’s inhabitants are low-paid fishermen or divers. Men work day in and day out hauling in fish for the good of the fishing cooperative, while many women hurt themselves or risk hypothermia as they **dive** for abalone (small shellfish that contain valuable pearls). Uta-jima’s working class rarely sees the rewards of their labors. The fisherman must give the majority of their hauls to the island’s cooperative, which sells fish on the mainland—though fishermen like Shinji sometimes keep one or two fish from their daily haul in order to feed their families. The women who work as pearl divers for many months out of the year never get to keep the lustrous pearls buried in the abalone that they bring up from the ocean’s rocky, jagged floor. The struggles of Uta-jima’s working people introduce the idea that class rarely indicates a person’s worth, work ethic, or honor. The island’s divers and fishermen support one another, take care of their neighbors, and dedicate themselves to hard work done with integrity. Though they own little and control even less, they form the moral center of the novel. By contrast, while the wealthy few on the island enjoy solitude, luxury, and power, they are cut off from their neighbors physically, emotionally, and ideologically.

When Shinji Kubo falls in love with Hatsue Miyata, the daughter of Terukichi Miyata—the wealthiest man on the island—he finds himself struggling to prove himself to be a

worthy match for Hatsue, since he is not of her social standing. Even though the two are wholly devoted to one another, the class barrier between them threatens to tear them apart. For example, when a terrible (and false) rumor spreads that Shinji took Hatsue’s virginity, Hatsue is forbidden from seeing Shinji at all. Though Shinji is indignant about the rumor—and embarrassed by how quickly it spreads across the island—he knows that he has no chance of explaining himself to Terukichi because of the class-related barriers between them. “It’s all because I’m poor,” Shinji confides in his friend and fellow fisherman Jukichi. Shinji doesn’t normally “let such querulous words pass his lips” or feel himself to be “weak enough to voice such a complaint”—but Shinji knows that if he were a rich man, his Hatsue’s father would not judge him so harshly, and this strikes him as deeply unfair.

This dynamic is also evident in the rivalry between Shinji and Yasuo, a wealthy young man who also wants to marry Hatsue. While Hatsue’s father would likely see Yasuo as the natural choice for his daughter (since Yasuo is of similar social standing), the young man has terrible character—he’s a selfish brute with no work ethic or empathy. Thus, Yasuo’s wealth actually imperils Hatsue by making him a frontrunner to marry her even though he would be a terrible partner. Thankfully, Terukichi surprises everyone on the island—including Shinji—by devising a test to help choose between Shinji and Yasuo; he hires both Shinji and Yasuo as crew members on one of the freighters he owns. When Shinji demonstrates his courage and selflessness by saving the crew from a typhoon, Terukichi realizes that “the only thing that really counts [in a person] is his get-up-and-go” and allows Shinji to marry his daughter. This shows that Terukichi at last understands that, in spite of their class difference, Shinji is a morally honorable person—and this makes him a good match for Hatsue. Though Terukichi spent a long time feeling that wealth and birthright were true indicators of a person’s merit, he now sees that integrity, bravery, and selflessness are the true markers of an individual’s worth.

Ultimately, Shinji proves himself to the fearsome Terukichi not by amassing wealth or power or finding a route to social mobility. Instead, Shinji shows his strong spirit and deep devotion to his work—and he is rewarded with Terukichi’s blessing to marry Hatsue. Through Shinji’s journey, Mishima argues that class, wealth, and power only distract from what truly matters: a person’s inner character.



GOSSIP AND RUMOR

Throughout *The Sound of Waves*, many of the major characters fall prey to gossip and rumor. The rumors that these characters overhear are intriguing and seductive—yet all too often, Mishima’s characters jump to conclusions about the tidbits they hear, hurting feelings, perpetuating lies, and causing damage to their

relationships in the process. Ultimately, Mishima suggests that gossip can erode not just relationships but entire communities and rumors should not be taken at face value.

Uta-jima is a small, insular island that is home to hardworking people who enjoy gossiping and spreading rumors about their neighbors. From the fishermen down by the docks to the lighthouse-keeper's wife, who pries into the emotional and romantic lives of the village girls, everyone on the island is a participant—willing or unwilling—in the island's economy of gossip. Mishima establishes this dynamic early on by creating two mirrored misunderstandings in the lives of Shinji and Hatsue, the devoted young lovers at the heart of the novel. First, Shinji overhears a rumor that Hatsue is engaged to Yasuo Kawamoto, the brash, haughty, and wealthy leader of the island's Young Men's Association. Shinji's feelings are deeply hurt—so much so that he doesn't even speak to Hatsue the next time he sees her. It is only after Shinji directly confronts Hatsue about the rumor and she laughs it off as patently false that Shinji is able to feel better and trust in Hatsue once again. Likewise, Hatsue soon overhears a rumor about Chiyoko being interested in Shinji. She mirrors Shinji's earlier behavior by refusing to speak to him at first, but when she confronts him about the rumor, she learns that it is false. Mishima uses these incidents, which take place early on in the novel, to demonstrate that rumors are often false. When taken at face value, they have the power to erode relationships, even between people who are in love.

Mishima also demonstrates how rumors have the power to destroy entire communities of people. When the lighthouse-keeper's jealous daughter Chiyoko starts a false rumor that Shinji and Hatsue have had sex before marriage, the reverberations can be felt throughout the entire island of Uta-jima. First, Hatsue's father, the wealthy and powerful Terukichi Miyata, forbids Hatsue from seeing Shinji and keeps her more or less confined to the house. Second, Shinji and Hatsue both suffer from ruined reputations. Third, the fallout of this rumor intensifies divisions on the island, such as when Shinji's mother tries to correct the record with Hatsue's father and he refuses to see her, which cements the bad feelings between them. Perhaps the most horrific example of the pernicious nature of gossip is when Yasuo hears the rumor that Hatsue is no longer a virgin and decides to rape her. While a swarm of **hornets** prevents Yasuo from inflicting any violence upon Hatsue, the incident is traumatic for her. Yasuo's behavior also illustrates how people seek to take advantage of the nasty rumors they hear throughout their communities, meting out what they believe to be "justice" to those who they feel are deserving of punishment. Through these incidents, Mishima illustrates how gossip and rumor can ruin a person's reputation and a community's cohesion, and can even put people in danger. Though Shinji and Hatsue are eventually able to prove their innocence and begin building a life together, it is a close

call—and they must suffer, together and separately, through harsh judgement and many fractures in their community as they weather the storm that descends upon them. Mishima uses Shinji and Hatsue's tale of perseverance in the face of defamation and denigration to demonstrate how painful, divisive, and dangerous gossip and rumor can be.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



PEARL DIVING

Throughout *The Sound of Waves*, the act of pearl diving symbolizes the beauty within struggle. Just as the women who live on the island of Uta-jima push their bodies to the limit in pursuit of the hard-shelled abalone shellfish that contain beautiful pearls, Mishima suggests that all people must push themselves to often-frightening depths of the soul in order to learn the lessons of nature, love others fully, and subvert the forces of jealousy, gossip, wealth, and class that threaten the fullness of human life. Pearl diving can be seen as a symbol of how difficult and bracing—yet profound and revealing—the work of coming of age, committing to love, and resisting the temptation to give into jealousy, fear, anger, and other base instincts can be. Throughout Shinji's coming-of-age journey, he finds himself challenged by the socioeconomic environment of his home island when he falls in love with the beautiful and wealthy Hatsue, who is herself a pearl diver, just like Shinji's own mother. The women's experiences with the jagged ocean floor and the bitterly cold water have taught them what it means to weather the bad in pursuit of the good—and as Shinji finds himself observing the start of pearl-diving season, he realizes that in order to fully grow up and earn Hatsue's love and devotion, he too must search for the small pearls of beauty, happiness, and fulfillment in the midst of tough experiences.



HORNETS

In *The Sound of Waves*, hornets symbolize the ways in which those who fail to learn the lessons of nature will always suffer. When the brash, narcissistic, and jealous Yasuo begins to fear that he will lose Hatsue, whose hand he hoped to win, to the poor fisherman Shinji, he decides to take matters into his own hands. Yasuo confronts Hatsue one night as she gathers water at the well near her father's house and attempts to rape her. As Yasuo tries to commit this rape, however, he finds that he cannot do it because he is being stung by many hornets on various vulnerable parts of his body. As the hornets appear to smite Yasuo, Mishima hammers home

the fact that Yasuo has failed to respect nature. The hornets do not show up again later in the novel, yet their brief and brutal appearance underscores nature's swift capacity for vengeance.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *The Sound of Waves* published in 1994.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ His dark eyes were exceedingly clear, but their clarity was not that of intellectuality—it was a gift that the sea bestows upon those who make their livelihood upon it; as a matter of fact, he had made notably bad grades in school. He was still wearing the same clothes he fished in each day—a pair of trousers inherited from his dead father and a cheap jumper.

Related Characters: Shinji Kubo

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 6


Explanation and Analysis

In the first chapter of *The Sound of Waves*, Yukio Mishima introduces the book's protagonist, Shinji Kubo. In this passage, as Mishima describes Shinji's appearance and disposition, he points to several of the novel's most important themes. First, he demonstrates the special relationship Shinji has to nature by pointing out the clarity that the sea itself has "bestow[ed]" upon Shinji, who has dedicated his life to the sea (and to learning the lessons that nature teaches those who are willing to learn). Next, Mishima points to Shinji's selfless, humble nature as well as his lower class status by describing the clothes he wears—they are garments with both practical and sentimental purposes. Shinji wears his dead father's clothes, demonstrating his close relationship to his family and his devotion to them—he makes his living so that they can survive in the absence of their patriarch. The clothes are humble, "cheap," and torn, illustrating Shinji's social standing and positioning him as a young man for whom hard work and fulfillment is more important than flashy things. Mishima creates this portrait of Shinji so that his readers will immediately recognize Shinji as the moral center of the novel, the prism through which large ideas about nature, love, wealth, and the self are distributed.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ Surrounded though he was by the vast ocean, Shinji did not especially burn with impossible dreams of great adventure across the seas. His fisherman's conception of the sea was close to that of the farmer for his land. The sea was the place where he earned his living, a rippling field where, instead of waving heads of rice or wheat, the white and formless harvest of waves was forever swaying above the unrelieved blueness of a sensitive and yielding soil.

Related Characters: Shinji Kubo

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mishima follows Shinji as he spends an ordinary day aboard the *Taihei-maru*, the fishing boat where he works as apprentice to the master fisherman Jukichi Oyama. As Shinji considers the ocean around him, Mishima further explores Shinji's relationship to nature. Shinji recognizes that the sea is a living, breathing thing—he knows that he and his fellow fishermen have a symbiotic relationship with the ocean, one in which they must respect the sea's ecosystem and be cautious on the waves in order to benefit from the fruits the sea yields. The sea allows Shinji and his fellow fishermen to sustain themselves—but Shinji doesn't see fishing as a means to a flashier or more prosperous life. Rather, Shinji believes it is his job to tend to and care for the ocean out of respect for the ways in which it, too, takes care of him. This passage is significant because it attempts to deepen readers' understandings of Shinji's thoughtful, humble soul—a soul that seeks to learn the many lessons nature has to teach.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ "God, let the seas be calm, the fish plentiful, and our village [...] prosperous. [...] Let me have much knowledge in the ways of the sea, in the ways of fish, in the ways of boats, in the ways of the weather . . . [...] Please protect my gentle mother and my brother, who is still a child. [...] Then there's a different sort of request I'd like to make. . . . Some day let even such a person as me be granted a good-natured, beautiful bride . . . say someone like Terukichi Miyata's returned daughter. . . ." [...]

Shinji looked up at the star-filled sky and breathed deeply. Then he thought:

"But mightn't the gods punish me for such a selfish prayer?"

Related Characters: Shinji Kubo (speaker), Terukichi Miyata, Hatsue Miyata

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

After spying a beautiful young girl who is new to the village, Shinji visits Yashiro Shrine, where he prays to the sea-god that protects the island of Uta-jima. As Shinji offers up a prayer to the god, he asks first for the health of the sea itself as well as his island, for his own edification, and for the protection of his family—all selfless things which are, of course, important to him, but which are really focused on the world and the people around him. Toward the end of his prayer, as Shinji—who has a serious crush on Hatsue, the daughter of the wealthy Terukichi Miyata—asks for something that will benefit him alone and sate one of his own desires, he feels guilty for being selfish. This passage is significant because it illustrates Shinji's profoundly selfless personality, his respect for nature, his devotion to his family, and his acceptance of his social standing in life. Shinji doesn't want to say or do anything that would ever make him appear selfish. He has been taught that respect for nature and for others are of the utmost importance—and even in private moments, he tries to make sure to live by that careful code of duty and deference.

Chapter 4 Quotes

💬 As they walked along, the girl asked him his name and now, for the first time, he introduced himself. But he went on hurriedly to ask that she not mention his name to anyone or say anything about having met him here: Shinji well knew how sharp the villagers' tongues could be. Hatsue promised not to tell. Thus their well-founded fear of the village's love of gossip changed what was but an innocent meeting into a thing of secrecy between the two of them.

Related Characters: Hatsue Miyata, Shinji Kubo

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Shinji has just found Hatsue Miyata—the girl on whom he has a serious crush—lost and alone atop the island's lone mountain. As Shinji walks Hatsue toward her destination, the two laugh, joke, and grow close—but once

they near the end of their walk, Shinji becomes concerned about what the “villagers' tongues” will say if anyone finds out about their rendezvous. This passage is significant for several reasons. It is one of the first instances in the novel that introduces the culture of gossip, rumor, and minor scandal that dominates the island of Uta-jima. Though the villagers are mostly humble and kind, people are starved for entertainment and excitement on such a small island—and Shinji knows that because he and Hatsue are strangers from vastly different classes, their association could start peoples' tongues wagging. Shinji is already very devoted to Hatsue, and here he shows that he wants to protect their relationship from outside speculation so that it can blossom. Though it might seem that Shinji is embarrassed or nervous to be seen with Hatsue, this passage actually indicates that he respects what is growing between them so much that he wants to give it space to bloom.

Chapter 5 Quotes

💬 Their dry, chapped lips touched. There was a slight taste of salt.

“It's like seaweed,” Shinji thought.

Related Characters: Shinji Kubo (speaker), Hatsue Miyata

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

In this short passage, Shinji and Hatsue share their first kiss down at the beach one moonlit night. This passage is significant because when Shinji kisses Hatsue for the first time, he finds himself reminded of the smells and tastes of nature. This aligns Hatsue herself with the forces of nature, suggesting that just as nature has many important lessons to teach those willing to learn from it, so too will Shinji's relationship with Hatsue teach them both a lot about themselves and the world around them. Mishima suggests that the love and devotion Shinji feels for Hatsue mirror the love and devotion he feels toward nature itself. By suggesting that Hatsue and Shinji's love is as pure, as rich, and as natural as the movements of the ocean, he hammers home the special and almost fated quality of their still-blossoming romance. If Shinji and Hatsue heed one another as seriously as they both heed the rhythms of nature, Mishima suggests here, their relationship will be blessed with the ability to withstand anything that comes their way.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☝ “What made you so mad?” Shinji asked, looking her full in the face.



“All that talk about you and Chiyoko-san.”

“Stupid!”

“Then there’s nothing to it?”

“There’s nothing to it.”

Related Characters: Hatsue Miyata, Shinji Kubo (speaker), Chiyoko

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Shinji and Hatsue discuss the second rumor-based misunderstanding of their relationship. Though Shinji and Hatsue are not officially together, their courtship has already weathered one misunderstanding: just a day earlier, Shinji was in a dark mood because he’d overheard a rumor about Hatsue being betrothed to the brash Yasuo Kawamoto. Hatsue laughed the rumor off as lies—but after meeting with Shinji at the home of the lighthouse-keeper and his wife and overhearing them tease Shinji about how excited their daughter Chiyoko is to see him when she returns from Tokyo, Hatsue became upset by the implications of Shinji being interested in another woman. Now, as Shinji and Hatsue clear the air for good and confirm that neither of them are interested in anyone else, they laugh off the strife, jealousy, and sadness that has plagued them both over the last several days. This passage is significant because it illustrates how destructive rumors and gossip can be, potentially eroding or even destroying relationships new and old. It also demonstrates Shinji and Hatsue’s true, pure devotion to one another: they want to always be honest with one another and serve as a reassuring presence in the other’s life, even in times of uncertainty.

☝ “I’ll do my best to help make life on our island the most peaceful there is anywhere . . . the happiest there is anywhere. . . . Because if we don’t do that, everybody will start forgetting the island and quit wanting to come back. No matter how much times change, very bad things—very bad ways—will always disappear before they get to our island. . . . The sea—it only brings the good and right things that the island needs . . . and keeps the good and right things we already have here. . . .”

Related Characters: Shinji Kubo (speaker), Hatsue Miyata

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis


In this passage, as Shinji walks Hatsue back to the village from the lighthouse, he tells her dreamily about his hopes and plans for the future. As Shinji describes the life he envisions for himself, he doesn’t mention money, fame, or glorification—all he wants, he says, is to contribute to the maintenance of the island’s delicate physical and emotional ecosystems and the preservation of its traditions. This passage is significant because it shows that Shinji knows that the true measure of a life’s worth is not how much money one makes or how flashy one’s life becomes: the true measure of a person’s goodness and a life well lived is what someone can do for their partner, their community, and their family. This passage demonstrates Shinji’s respect for nature, his selfless commitment to his family and his people, and his lack of interest in the falsely fulfilling trappings of class and wealth. Shinji wants to live a life in which learning from nature and using that knowledge to sustain his community are the most important things.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☝ When he could no longer bear the thought of waiting, Shinji flung on a rubber raincoat and went down to meet the sea. It seemed to him that only the sea would be kind enough to answer his wordless conversation.

Raging waves rose high above the breakwater, set up a tremendous roar, and then rushed on down.

Related Characters: Shinji Kubo

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 66-67

Explanation and Analysis

As Shinji prepares to rendezvous in secret with Hatsue on a dark and stormy day off from fishing, he finds himself full of so much pent-up excitement that he feels only the sea will be able to understand the roiling within him. This passage is significant because as Shinji encounters the “tremendous” ocean waves before him, he seems to be seeking to learn from the current state the sea is in about how to handle his own “raging,” “rushed” state of mind. This illustrates Shinji’s

deference to and respect for nature. He wants to learn the lessons of nature in order to confront all that is hard or uncertain in his own life. Though Shinji is embarking on new territory today as he explores his newfound love for and devotion to Hatsue, he reminds himself that he can always have the tough and often “wordless” emotional breakthroughs he needs to have when he stops, stands still, and observes nature.

☞ “What would make you quit being ashamed?”

To this the girl gave a truly naive answer, though a startling one: “If you took your clothes off too, then I wouldn't be ashamed.”

Related Characters: Hatsue Miyata, Shinji Kubo (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis


In this passage, Shinji and Hatsue rendezvous alone at the abandoned watchtower atop Uta-jima's lone mountain. Shinji has arrived first and fallen asleep by the fire he started to warm himself from the storm—when he awakes, he finds Hatsue standing before him, naked and drying herself off. Here, as Hatsue laments the shame she feels at Shinji observing her naked body, she suggests that if Shinji got naked, too, she'd feel less ashamed—or even not embarrassed at all. This passage is significant because it positions the root of Shinji and Hatsue's relationship as the values of equality, mutual investment, and a respect for things in their most natural, pure state. Shinji and Hatsue come from different worlds: Hatsue is the daughter of a wealthy man, while Shinji is a poor fisherman. Here, though, alone in the watchtower, they have the opportunity to bare themselves to one another completely and view each other, for the first time, as true equals.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☞ All the time the luminous watch of which Yasuo was so proud, strapped above the hand with which he was holding onto the branch of the beech tree, was giving off its phosphorescent glow, faintly but distinctly ticking away the seconds. This aroused a swarm of hornets in the nest fastened to this same branch and greatly excited their curiosity.

Related Characters: Hatsue Miyata, Yasuo Kawamoto

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 


Page Number: 89-90

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Yasuo Kawamoto, one of Hatsue's suitors, has heard the quickly-spreading but false rumor about Shinji and Hatsue sleeping together out of wedlock—and he has decided to take his revenge by raping Hatsue while she gathers water in the middle of the night. As Yasuo lies in wait for Hatsue, his flashy and “phosphorescent” watch—a physical representation of his wealth, self-centeredness, and pride—attracts the curiosity of a swarm of hornets, which, unbeknownst to Yasuo, will begin attacking him as he advances on the vulnerable Hatsue. This passage—and the scene after it, in which hornets sting Yasuo—reveal his disconnection from nature (and his pig-headed failure to learn its lessons while focusing instead on aesthetics and modernity). This passage also touches on the destructive forces of wealth, gossip, and impure or false “devotion.” Yasuo wants Hatsue not because he loves her, but because he believes that he is entitled to her as one of the island's wealthiest young men. Whereas Shinji, Hatsue's true love, doesn't need to wear a watch because he is deeply attuned to nature's rhythms, Yasuo is so disconnected from nature that he attempts to force an unnatural act on Hatsue—and, as this passage foreshadows, is punished for doing so.

☞ After a moment Yasuo glanced back and saw that Hatsue had come down from the grove without his knowing it and was following along about two yards behind him. She did not so much as smile. When she saw him stop walking, she stopped too, and when he started on down the steps again, she started too.

Related Characters: Hatsue Miyata, Yasuo Kawamoto

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

After Yasuo's unsuccessful attempt to rape Hatsue, Hatsue says she won't tell her father about what Yasuo has tried to do to her if he carries home the buckets of water she came down to the stream to fill. As Hatsue warily follows Yasuo back toward her home, Mishima highlights the ways in


which the forces of class, wealth, gossip, and rumor have effectively trapped Hatsue within a social and ideological prison. Hatsue must make nice with the man who just minutes ago attempted to violate her physically and emotionally, because she knows that if she were to rebuke Yasuo or make a scene, she'd be upsetting the social order of the island and inciting a firestorm of gossip. Hatsue longs to be with Shinji, who is pure and good and loving—but the barriers of class and social status stand between them, leaving Hatsue to struggle on her own against the cruel, thoughtless men that society deems acceptable for her to court. Mishima is clearly indicting the rigid and violent class system that defines so much of society, as well as the destructive ways in which the need to avoid gossip and rumor can impinge upon a person's life and safety.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☝☝ The mother took a very tolerant view of young people's amorous affairs. And even during the diving season, when everyone stood about the drying-fire gossiping, she held her tongue. But when it came to its being her own son's affair that was the subject of malicious gossip, then there was a motherly duty that she would have to perform.

Related Characters: Hiroshi Kubo, Shinji Kubo, Shinji's Mother

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Shinji's mother has just heard word from her youngest son, Hiroshi, about the unseemly gossip that is spreading throughout town concerning Shinji's relationship with Hatsue. As Shinji's mother considers what to do in this passage, she is torn between her desire to do the proper thing and "h[old] her tongue" so as not to draw any more attention to the situation and her need to fight for her child's reputation. Shinji's mother knows her eldest son to be respectful, thoughtful, humble, and true—and she believes it is her "motherly duty" to publicly defend the honest and decorous young man she knows Shinji to be. Shinji's mother knows from experience how destructive gossip and rumor can be, and she wants to save her son—whom she knows is truly devoted to Hatsue, not merely interested in her body or her money—from being

the victim of cruel and unnatural vitriol.

☝☝ It might be better to say that Terukichi was the personification of all Uta-jima's toil and determination and ambition and strength. [...] The uncanny accuracy of his weather predictions, his matchless experience in the matters of fishing and navigation, and the great pride he took in knowing all the history and traditions of the island were often offset by his uncompromising stubbornness, his ludicrous pretensions, and his pugnacity...

Related Characters: Shinji's Mother, Terukichi Miyata

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Yukio Mishima introduces the imposing Terukichi Miyata, a self-made man whose freighting company, which he built from the ground up in his youth, has made him one of the wealthiest men on the island. Mishima is careful to draw attention to the conflicting values and ideals that live within Miyata as a result of his many life experiences. Terukichi grew up with nothing, and he had to learn, this passage implies, the lessons of nature in order to become successful. Terukichi has made a name for himself as a great predictor of weather and a successful fisherman and navigator—but in his later years, Mishima suggests, Terukichi has perhaps lost sight of many of the lessons nature taught him in his youth and become focused on wealth, class, and self-absorption. Terukichi's "ludicrous pretensions" and self-obsession have overshadowed his connection to nature and his humility, and thus his relationship with his community has suffered. Now, he is only interested in what others say and think about him. In this way, Mishima suggests, Terukichi is extremely vulnerable to the forces of rumor and gossip, forces that will soon invade his life in unexpected ways.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☝☝ "It's all because I'm poor," Shinji said.

He was usually not one to let such querulous words pass his lips. And he felt tears of shame springing in his eyes, not because he was poor, but because he had been weak enough to give voice to such a complaint.

Related Characters: Shinji Kubo (speaker), Hatsue Miyata

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

When Terukichi Miyata overhears rumors about the affair between his daughter Hatsue and the lowly fisherman Shinji Kubo, he decides to keep Hatsue locked up at home. Her only way of communicating with Shinji is to leave letters in a jar at the front of the house each morning. As Shinji reads one of Hatsue's first letters and learns of her father's anger, he laments that all of this is happening because he is poor. This passage is significant because it marks the first time that Shinji has spoken of his socioeconomic position in life in denigrating terms or acted ashamed of his background. Shinji's love and devotion toward Hatsue are not enough, he knows now—he is not an ideal match for her, and so her father finds the idea that he would pursue her offensive and dangerous. Shinji immediately loathes himself for giving voice to such a self-centered thought. He feels that in lamenting his own poverty, he is lamenting the way of life that has sustained and nurtured him for so long—a life marked by a deep connection to nature, to family, and to truth. He worries that now this is no longer enough, since he has known Hatsue's love and feels incomplete without it. Shinji is in danger of losing sight of what's important, but he recognizes his own worst impulses and thus, Mishima suggests, he will be able to mitigate them as the novel progresses.

“I know exactly what you two are thinking. You're planning to give Yasuo a beating. But you listen to me—that won't do a bit of good. A fool's a fool, so just leave him alone. Guess it's hard for Shinji, but patience is the main thing. That's what it takes to catch a fish.”

Related Characters: Jukichi Oyama (speaker), Hatsue Miyata, Yasuo Kawamoto, Ryuji, Shinji Kubo

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Shinji and his fellow fisherman Ryuji have just finished disparaging the cruel Yasuo, who has been spreading the terrible gossip about Shinji and Hatsue and who, rumor has

it, is now the frontrunner to marry Hatsue after all. Suddenly their wise yet quiet master Jukichi, an experienced fisherman, interjects to calm the young men down. As Jukichi explains that “patience is [...] what it takes to catch a fish,” Mishima engages with several of the novel's major themes. First, Mishima shows that the wise Jukichi has learned to apply the lessons nature has taught him to real-life situations. Just as one must be patient while fishing, so too must one be patient when it comes to matters of love, devotion, and social tension. Jukichi has faith that things will work out all right for Shinji—as long as Shinji continues to heed the lessons of nature and exert calmness, care, and patience in all matters.

“That's really what he said. And that's enough for me. I mustn't expect more than that. That's really what he said to me. I must be satisfied with that and not expect him to love me too. He—he has someone else to love. . . . What a wicked thing it was I did to him! What terrible unhappiness my jealousy has caused him! And yet he repaid my wickedness by saying I'm pretty. I must make it up to him . . . somehow I must do whatever I can to return his kindness. . . .”

Related Characters: Chiyoko (speaker), Shinji Kubo

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the jealous, insecure, and lonely Chiyoko experiences a revelatory moment of clarity and remorse while riding the ferry from Uta-jima back to Tokyo, where she attends university. Chiyoko has long harbored feelings for Shinji—and recently, after she saw Shinji and Hatsue descending the mountain near her parents' lighthouse together, Chiyoko flew into a jealous rage and began spreading exaggerated rumors about Shinji and Hatsue having consummated their relationship out of wedlock. Just now, while bidding Shinji goodbye before her ferry journey, Shinji gave Chiyoko a kind and generous compliment. Chiyoko's realizations in this passage tie in with several of the novel's major themes. First, Chiyoko begins to understand that while she has believed herself to be “devoted” to Shinji, her devotion has been selfish and thoughtless. As she recognizes the truth and purity of Shinji's devotion to Hatsue when contrasting it against her own parasitic desire for Shinji, Chiyoko feels guilty for weaponizing the destructive forces of gossip and rumor against someone so pure and kind. Chiyoko's change of

heart in this passage will have ripple effects throughout her community as she seeks to adopt a more selfless state of mind and undo the damage she's wrought.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☝️ Shinji's mother hesitated a moment as she was about to enter the house. Just the fact that she had come calling at the Miyata house, where she was not on intimate terms, would be enough to set the villagers' tongues to wagging.

Related Characters: Terukichi Miyata, Shinji's Mother

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Shinji's mother is fed up with the gossip spreading about her son—and she decides it's time to take matters into her own hands by visiting the home of Terukichi Miyata and setting the record straight so that Shinji and Hatsue can see each other again. Even as she merely approaches the Miyata household, however, Shinji's mother is worried about inciting another cycle of gossip and rumor. Shinji's mother knows how gossip works on this small, isolated island—and she knows that the next firestorm could be worse than the first. This passage is significant because it shows that even as Shinji's mother undertakes an act of devotion and selflessness out of her love for her son, she feels constrained by the class tensions all around her and the destructive forces of gossip that threaten her own reputation. Mishima suggests, through this passage, that no one who lives in an environment so susceptible to rumor and gossip can ever be truly at peace.

☝️ Double suicide then? Even on this island there had been lovers who took that solution. But the boy's good sense repudiated the thought, and he told himself that those others had been selfish persons who thought only of themselves. Never once had he thought about such a thing as dying; and, above all, there was his family to support.

Related Characters: Shinji's Mother, Hatsue Miyata, Shinji Kubo

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

As Shinji prepares for a secret—and very risky—rendezvous with Hatsue, he goes down to the beach, as he did before their first meeting at the watchtower, to draw strength and calm from the sea. He considers what will happen when they meet up, and whether Hatsue will suggest they elope or even consider taking their own lives. As Shinji considers what he'd do if confronted with such a request, he realizes that as much as he loves Hatsue, he does not want to do anything that would take him away from his family and thus jeopardize their well-being. This passage illustrates several important thematic points. First, it once again hammers home just how much strength, knowledge, and clarity Shinji takes from the forces of nature. Second, it illustrates what while he loves Hatsue dearly, he knows that true devotion is not marked by selfishness or cowardice. Lastly, this quotation illustrates just how selfless Shinji truly is: he would do anything for his family, and the thought of disappointing or hurting them is almost more than he can bear.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☝️ Hatsue got to her feet in silence and went around the rock to receive her prize. And the prize she returned with was the brown, middle-aged handbag, which she pressed into the hands of Shinji's mother.

The mother's cheeks flushed red with delight.


"But...why?..."

"Because I've always wanted to apologize ever since my father spoke so rudely to Auntie that day." [...]

The mother's simple, straightforward heart had immediately understood the modesty and respect behind the girl's gesture. Hatsue smiled, and Shinji's mother told herself how wise her son had been in his choice of a bride.

Related Characters: Hatsue Miyata, Shinji's Mother (speaker), Shinji Kubo

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hatsue, who has just won a diving contest and won a beautiful, expensive handbag in the process, gives her winnings selflessly to Shinji's mother. This passage

is significant because it illustrates the connection between Hatsue and Shinji's mother. Both women, as pearl divers, daily brave the elements. The cold of the ocean water, the strength of its waves, and the danger of its jagged, rocky floor all pose existential threats to the women as they dive for abalone so that the valuable pearls inside can be harvested and sold. These women never see the fruits of their labor: they don't own fine things or wear pearls. Hatsue, as the daughter of a wealthy man, knows she doesn't need the prize of the handbag—and that to Shinji's mother, the material item itself as well as the gesture of giving it to her are deeply meaningful. This illustrates the benevolence within Hatsue, the generosity of spirit and capacity for forgiveness within Shinji's mother, and the mutual love and devotion that both women share for Shinji, for nature, and for the value of hard work.

good, selfless, and confident in his relationship to the powerful forces of nature. Yasuo, on the other hand, proves himself here to be cowardly, self-centered, and painfully disconnected from nature, lacking the relationship to nature that would be needed to undertake such a feat. This passage underscores that although Shinji is not rich or well-connected socially like Yasuo is, he has the values that truly matter in life.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☝☝ “Which one of you fellows is going to take this lifeline over there and tie it to that buoy?”

The roaring of the wind covered the youths' silence.

“Don't any of you have any guts?” the captain shouted again.

Yasuo's lips quivered. He pulled his neck down into his shoulders.

Then Shinji shouted out in a cheerful voice, and as he did so the white flash of his teeth shone through the blackness to prove that he was smiling.

“I'll do it,” he shouted clearly.

Related Characters: Shinji Kubo, The Captain (speaker), Yasuo Kawamoto

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 161



Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Shinji is working as a crew member on the *Utajima-maru*, a freighter owned by the powerful Terukichi Miyata. Unbeknownst to Shinji, Terukichi has recruited both Shinji and Yasuo for the purposes of determining which young man is braver, more honorable, and most deserving of Hatsue's hand in marriage. As the ship's captain calls upon his crew to volunteer to leap into a dangerous typhoon and secure a lifeline from the ship to a nearby buoy, Yasuo cowers in fear while Shinji bravely offers himself up. This passage is significant because it shows that Shinji—who bursts into a genuine smile as he offers his service—is truly

☝☝ The boy swam with all his might. And, inch by inch, step by step, the huge mass of the enemy fell back, opening the way for him. It was as though a drill were boring its way through the hardest of solid rock.

The first time his hand touched the buoy he lost his hold and was pulled away. But then by good luck a wave swept him forward again and, just as it seemed on the point of dashing his chest against the iron rim, lifted him up with a single sweep and deposited him on the buoy.

Related Characters: Shinji Kubo

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

Shinji leaps into the ocean in order to save the lives—and livelihoods—not just of his own crew, but also of the crew on the bonito ship to which the *Utajima-maru* has tied itself. This selfless act—and Shinji's willingness to work with the forces of the great typhoon swirling overhead—are significant for many reasons. First, in this passage, Mishima doesn't underplay the severity of the typhoon or the difficulty of Shinji's task—yet he shows that the selfless, intrepid Shinji is up for the challenge because he knows that nature will not forsake him as long as he heeds the lessons it's taught him all his life. As Shinji swims into the heart of the storm, the ocean waves seem to lift and cradle him toward the buoy. Though the forces of nature are powerful, unpredictable, and indeed dangerous, Mishima shows that Shinji has learned to put his trust in his own facility with the sea and in the sea's ultimately benevolent nature. This, combined with Shinji's goodness and selflessness, enables him to complete the rigorous task ahead of him and save the day for everyone.

Chapter 15 Quotes

☞ “When Shinji did that great thing at Okinawa—well, I changed my mind too and decided he was the one for my girl. The only thing that really counts . . .”

Here Terukichi raised his voice emphatically.

“The only thing that really counts in a man is his get-up-and-go. If he’s got get-up-and-go he’s a real man, and those are the kind of men we need here on Uta-jima.”

Related Characters: Terukichi Miyata (speaker), The Lighthouse-keeper’s Wife, Shinji Kubo

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the lighthouse-keeper’s wife, having learned that her jealous daughter Chiyoko was responsible for spreading the false and destructive rumor about Shinji and Hatsue’s promiscuity, travels with a group of village women to the home of Terukichi Miyata in order to confront the man and plead Shinji’s case. When the women arrive, however, they are shocked to learn from Terukichi that he has already forgiven Shinji and chosen to adopt him into his family and marry him to Hatsue. This passage is significant because it represents Terukichi’s redemption. Having seen how Shinji conducted himself on the freighter in Okinawa, he has recognized the young man’s selfless spirit, pure love for Hatsue, and his profound devotion to nature. In seeing these qualities in Shinji, Terukichi recalled when he himself, as a young man, espoused these values. Terukichi knows that Shinji has the “get-up-and-go” that he himself has lost sight of in his old age after living a pampered life insulated from poverty and strife. The cruel rumors about Shinji no longer matter—Shinji himself has proven to Terukichi that they could not possibly have ever been true, and Terukichi’s remorse at almost having destroyed the reputation of one of the best young men on Uta-jima is palpable here.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☞ Nature too again smiled on them. When they reached the top they turned around and looked out over the Gulf of Ise. The night sky was filled with stars and, as for clouds, there was only a low bank stretching across the horizon in the direction of the Chita Peninsula, through which soundless lightning ran from time to time. Nor was the sound of the waves strong, but coming regularly and peacefully, as though the sea were breathing in healthy slumber.

Related Characters: Hatsue Miyata, Shinji Kubo

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

Here, as Shinji and Hatsue at last celebrate their long-awaited engagement, they roam the island they both call home and pay tribute at Yashiro Shrine, giving thanks for all the ways in which their island has blessed them. As Shinji and Hatsue commune with nature together and listen to the peaceful, lulling sound of waves, they find themselves reassured and comforted by nature’s signals. The stormy seas and heavy rains that marked the early days of their relationship have abated, signaling that nature is no longer feeding them warning signs or tests—there is smooth sailing ahead, it seems, for this happy couple who have stayed devoted and true in the midst of hardship, strife, and scandal. Hatsue and Shinji’s relationship, Mishima suggests, is so special because it is rooted not only in mutual devotion and selflessness, but in a profound respect for nature, for community, and for the world around them.

☞ Out in front of them stretched the unfathomable darkness, where the beam from the lighthouse was making its vast, regular sweeps. [...] Shinji [...] was lost in thought. He was thinking that in spite of all they’d been through, here they were in the end, free within the moral code to which they had been born, never once having been estranged from the providence of the gods . . . that, in short, it was this little island, enfolded in darkness, that had protected their happiness and brought their love to this fulfillment. . . .

Related Characters: Hatsue Miyata, Shinji Kubo

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 182



Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Shinji and Hatsue visit the top of Uta-jima’s lighthouse and examine the shining, swirling beacon at the highest point of the watchtower. As Shinji and Hatsue watch the beacon’s beams illuminate the darkness of the ocean all around them, Mishima artfully externalizes the illuminating, protective quality of the love between Hatsue and Shinji. The “darkness” that has surrounded Shinji and Hatsue on all sides since the start of the relationship has been dense and

hard to navigate: from class differences to the painful forces of gossip and rumor, it has often felt as if the “island” of Shinji and Hatsue’s relationship was under constant assault. Now, however, Shinji and Hatsue see that remaining true to themselves and to one another has shone a light that has guided them through. They have not sacrificed their values or compromised themselves, and they have instead let the guiding light of their beliefs, their attachments, and their strengths part the stormy seas around them.

●● Hatsue touched the picture lightly with her own hand and then returned it. Her eyes were full of pride. She was thinking it was her picture that had protected Shinji. But at this moment Shinji lifted his eyebrows. He knew it had been his own strength that had tided him through that perilous night.

Related Characters: Shinji Kubo, Hatsue Miyata

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 183

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hatsue and Shinji share a tender moment alone at the top of Uta-jima’s lighthouse. Hatsue and Shinji produce the small gifts they gave one another earlier in the year and clung to as talismans of sorts when they were apart during Shinji’s long journey to Okinawa and back. This passage—which constitutes the novel’s final lines—is especially significant because it engages and considers anew two of the novel’s most important themes: the lessons of nature, and love and devotion. Though Hatsue, who gave Shinji a picture of herself in order to remind him throughout his journey of their love and devotion, believes it is the picture that somehow kept Shinji safe during his perilous encounter with the typhoon, Shinji knows what actually happened on the freighter. When it was time for him to forge ahead into the storm, he shed his raincoat—which had Hatsue’s picture in its pocket—and dove into the sea. Shinji knows that without Hatsue’s love, he perhaps wouldn’t have been quite as brave—but that ultimately it is his own connection to nature and the hard work he has done learning the lessons of the sea that led him through the “perilous night” in Okinawa. This passage illustrates that ultimately one’s own salvation must come from within—and that an authentic relationship with nature and with oneself is of utmost importance.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

The small island of Uta-jima—or Song Island—is inhabited by only about 1,400 people, and the coastline is only about three miles long—yet it is home to great beauty. Yashiro Shrine, a shrine dedicated to the god of the sea, allows the seafaring residents of Uta-jima to pray to the sea-god and ask for protection from the wild waves as they set off on or return from fishing and diving journeys. The island is also home to a lighthouse that shines beacons into the sea, guiding sailors home through the “unceasing roar” of the Irako Channel. The lighthouse watchman keeps a careful record of all the vessels and shipping freighters that come to the island seeking port or picking up goods, and he communicates with cargo owners in the ports where the freighters are ultimately bound.

One night, past sunset, Shinji Kubo—a young fisherman of 18—hurries up the path toward the lighthouse carrying a large fish. He has sunburnt skin and chapped lips from spending his days on the sea. As Shinji climbs the treacherous path to the lighthouse, his feet, familiar with the rocky terrain, guide him carefully.

Earlier that evening, after wrapping up a day of fishing on the *Taihei-maru*, Shinji helped his fellow fisherman transfer their catch to the boat belonging to the island’s fishing Co-operative. He took one halibut for himself and set out for the lighthouse. While walking along the beach, he noticed a girl he’d never seen before resting against a stack of heavy wooden frames used to help guide fishing-boats to shore. From the girl’s sweaty forehead and heavy breath, Shinji realized she must have just finished stacking the frames. Shinji admired the strange girl’s beauty, and as he passed her, he stopped before her and looked her full in the face. The girl refused to look back at Shinji.

Now, as Shinji approaches the lighthouse, he is full of shame over having stared so rudely at the girl. On many nights, he brings fish to the lighthouse, because he is indebted to the lighthouse-keeper and his wife. They helped pull some strings so that Shinji could graduate from school on time and begin working as a fisherman in order to provide for his brother, Hiroshi, and his widowed mother. As Shinji arrives at the lighthouse, the older couple rejoices at Shinji’s arrival—and the beautiful halibut he has brought—and invites him in for a cup of cocoa.

The opening lines of the book introduce the island of Uta-jima and explain the significance of nature—specifically the sea—to the people who live on the island. It is clear that the residents of Uta-jima respect nature deeply and seek to learn from it. Their lives are built on the ecosystem of the sea, and they feel both fear and reverence toward the ocean’s mighty power. The people of Uta-jima are accordingly resilient, intuitive, and fluid, just like the ocean itself.



This passage introduces Shinji, the novel’s protagonist. Shinji is a young but responsible man who clearly has a profound connection to nature as evidenced by his weather-worn appearance and his intrinsic knowledge of the terrain of his home island.



As Shinji lays eyes on a beautiful woman, he’s intrigued by her because of her obviously hardworking nature and the air of mystery about her—it’s not just her looks alone. This portends that Shinji is not simply attracted to superficial aspects of a person; instead, he devotes himself to people for deeper, more authentic reasons.



Though the lighthouse-keeper and his wife did Shinji and his family a favor quite a while ago, Shinji continues to pay them his respects and thanks. This demonstrates Shinji’s selfless character, his work ethic, and his desire to repay those who have helped him. His embarrassment over having stared at the beautiful girl shows that he’s empathetic towards the experiences of others.



CHAPTER 2

The next morning, Shinji boards the fishing boat on which he works and reminisces about the night before as the sailors head for fertile fishing grounds on the open ocean. Last night, when Shinji returned home, his twelve-year-old brother Hiroshi and his widowed mother, who has worked as a **pearl diver** since her husband was killed in the final year of World War II, were waiting up for him with dinner. After the meal, Shinji and Hiroshi went to the bathhouse. There, Shinji hoped to overhear some talk of the strange girl he'd seen earlier on the beach, but only two other men were there and neither of them mentioned her. After returning home, Shinji went to bed—but he sat awake for hours, unable to sleep.

This morning, as the *Taihei-maru* reaches the deep waters where its octopus-catching pots have been sunk, Shinji feels that same sense of unrest. As he attends to the work of raising the heavy octopus pots, the master fisherman and owner of the rig, Jukichi Oyama, looks on. Shinji struggles against the frigid waves to pull up over 20 octopus pots—all of them are empty. His fellow fisherman, Ryuji, works to empty the pots of water before sending them back to the depths. At last, Ryuji pulls up a pot containing a large octopus.

Over the course of the morning, the fishermen pull in five octopuses, four flatheads, and three soles. At lunchtime, Jukichi slices up one of the fish for the three of them to eat and asks what the other men think about Terukichi Miyata—whom he calls “old Uncle Teru”—bringing his youngest daughter, Hatsue, back to the island. Years ago, Teru had adopted her out to a family of **pearl divers** on a neighboring island. Now, the lonely widower Teru is planning on adopting a husband into the family for Hatsue to carry on the Miyata name—Teru’s only son recently died. Jukichi suggests Shinji or Ryuji should marry Hatsue. Both young men blush and laugh.

As Shinji thinks more about the prospect of courting Hatsue, however, he begins to feel down on himself for “his own poor condition in life”—Terukichi Miyata is the wealthy owner of two large freighters, but Shinji is just a lowly fisherman who earns his humble living on the sea. As the fishing boat returns to shore at the end of the day, Shinji spies a large freighter sailing by. He suddenly feels the weight of the unknown world around him and he becomes filled with a strange, undefinable emotion.

This passage introduces readers to a glimpse of what Shinji’s home life is like. He is at the beginning of a coming-of-age journey—a journey that will test his loyalty to his family and his sense of selflessness. Shinji is, at this point, intrigued by the strange girl he saw and desperate to seek out more information about her. Mishima suggests that Shinji might be tempted to put his own desires above his family’s needs—but as the novel progresses, he’ll show how Shinji ultimately prizes his duty to his mother and brother above his own wants.



*Shinji’s work is difficult, and it requires him to wrestle against the forces of nature. Shinji and his fellow fishermen, however, clearly respect the unpredictable ocean. The ship’s name, *Taihei-maru*, translates literally to “calm circle,” indicating the crew’s fear of and respect for nature as well as their desire to be protected while vulnerable to the ocean’s might.*



The strange new girl Shinji spied the day before, it turns out, is the daughter of the wealthiest man on the island. Shinji feels intimidated as he realizes that profound barriers in terms of wealth and class divide him from the young woman who has so entranced him. This passage also demonstrates how the wheels of gossip and rumor begin to turn in small communities.



Shinji’s complicated, indescribable emotions in this scene reflect the existential struggle that his feelings for Hatsue have set in motion. Shinji lives a life that has seemed full, happy, and enough: now, however, he finds himself worrying about his class status, his ability to provide, and his relationship to his work (and thus to nature itself). Shinji will have to face all of these complicated things and the attendant emotions they inspire as he embarks on his coming-of-age journey.



CHAPTER 3

That night, Shinji attends a meeting at the Young Men's Association. In ancient times, the Association was a dormitory where young unmarried men could live after leaving home. While some still sleep and live there, the Association is now mostly a meeting-place where young men can gather to drink, debate, and brag about their fishing exploits. Inside the drab hut which houses the association, Shinji sits and listens to the other young men talk and joke. When one of them mentions the name Hatsue, Shinji cannot help but blush and startle.

The president of the Young Men's association, Yasuo Kawamoto, enters the hut by opening the door with a loud bang. The brash, self-important Yasuo kicks off the meeting of the Association, discussing matters they must attend to in the coming weeks and reviewing the Association's monthly bulletin, *The Orphan Island*. The meeting grows rowdy as the young men playfully insult each other, argue, gossip, and debate. When the meeting is over, Yasuo leaves in a hurry without lingering to talk or joke any longer. Shinji asks what Yasuo's hurry was, and another young man tells him Yasuo is on his way to a party given by Terukichi Miyata to celebrate Hatsue's homecoming.

Upset, Shinji leaves the meeting alone and walks through the village past the Miyata house, which is lit up by oil lamps. Shinji heads for the Yashiro Shrine, where he places coins into the offertory chest, clasps his hands, and prays. Shinji asks for the sea-god of the shrine to make sure the seas stay calm, the fish plentiful, and the village prosperous. He asks the god to give him "knowledge in the ways of the sea [and] the weather." He asks for the protection of his mother and his brother. Lastly, he asks to become a person worthy of a beautiful bride—someone like Hatsue. As a wind rises, Shinji wonders if the sea-god has accepted his prayer—or whether he will be punished for asking something so selfish.

CHAPTER 4

Several days later, the wind is so strong and the waves so rough that not a single fishing-boat is out on the ocean. Shinji's mother has asked him to bring down a store of firewood she gathered and left on a nearby mountain so that it doesn't get too wet. Shinji brings a wooden frame to carry the wood with him up the mountain and past the lighthouse. At the top of the mountain—the highest point on the island—Shinji can hear nothing but the roar of the sea. He inspects an old abandoned building near the mountaintop—once a wartime watchtower, the building now houses the extra wood that the village women gather. Shinji finds his mother's pile, attaches the bundle to his frame, and prepares to go—but then he hears a strange sound on an upper floor of the tower.

Mishima continues to flesh out the social networks on the island of Uta-jima. There is a clear sense of community and cooperation—yet as this chapter progresses, Mishima will demonstrate how no institution on Uta-jima is fully insulated from the tensions of class, wealth, and social power.



This passage demonstrates that even though Shinji participates in the Young Men's association and has an active social life, he still feels unworthy when compared with his wealthier compatriots on the island. Shinji is contemptuous of Yasuo's brash attitude—yet when it comes down to it, Yasuo is by nature of his higher birth given access to spaces and relationships that Shinji fears he himself will never get the chance to experience.



Though Shinji believes his prayer in this passage to be a selfish one, he takes great care to pray for the prosperity of his village, the safety of his family, and the continuation of his positive relationship with nature before actually asking for anything for himself. This demonstrates that, even as Shinji feels tempted by the "selfish" desire for romantic love, he is, at heart, a deeply selfless and giving person.



Even on one of his rare days off, Shinji doesn't focus on taking time for himself—instead, he gets right to work helping his mother. This demonstrates his selfless nature. As Shinji climbs the mountain and looks around, he finds himself mesmerized by the power of nature and his island's past. Shinji is very clearly a young man with reverence for the lessons of history and nature alike.



Shinji heads upstairs to the roof, where he finds Hatsue alone and sobbing in the wind. Shinji asks Hatsue why she is crying. She tells him that she lost her way while headed to the lighthouse, where she is due to attend etiquette classes given by the lighthouse-keeper's wife. Shinji tells Hatsue that he will lead her down the mountain to the lighthouse. Hatsue smiles and asks about the building, so Shinji tells her about the building's history and points out some local landmarks nearby.

Hatsue suggests they head out. Shinji notices a black smudge on her sweater. As he stares at it, Hatsue follows Shinji's gaze and begins wiping the smudge out. As she brushes the dirt away, Shinji is mesmerized by the movement of her breasts beneath her sweater, yet his thoughts about Hatsue's beauty are tender rather than lewd.

On the way back down the mountain, Hatsue at last asks Shinji's name. The two introduce themselves to one another, though Shinji already knows who Hatsue is. Shinji points out the lighthouse to Hatsue when they reach it—but knowing how much the villagers love to gossip, he asks her not to tell anyone that they met alone on the mountaintop. Hatsue promises. Shinji feels that their meeting is suddenly charged with secrecy and intrigue.

CHAPTER 5

In the days that follow his meeting with Hatsue, Shinji transforms from a peaceful, contented young man into a brooding, sad one. He feels certain that he will never be able to win Hatsue's affections—as a poor fisherman, he feels both socially and ideologically cut off from the rich, beautiful, worldly young woman. Living on a remote island without access to novels or movies, Shinji is unschooled in the ways of love and uncertain of how to get more alone time with Hatsue.

On the monthly commemoration of the day of Shinji's father's death, Shinji, Hiroshi, and their mother head to the graveyard to visit Shinji's father's grave in the early morning hours. There, they light incense and lay down flowers together. Shinji and his brother bow to their father's headstone as their mother weeps behind them. Shinji's father was killed toward the end of the war after a plane dropped a bomb on his fishing boat. Shinji reminisces aloud about fishing with his father, but the young Hiroshi is distracted by thoughts of an upcoming school trip. Shinji, who was too poor to go on the trip himself when he was in school, has taken money from his own wages to fund Hiroshi's spot on the trip.

As Shinji and Hatsue talk for the first time, Shinji remains spellbound by her beauty but confident enough to help teach her about the island which is both familiar and foreign to her. Shinji genuinely likes Hatsue and wants to help her feel better—again, this is evidence of Shinji's selfless, reverent nature.



Shinji is, without a doubt, physically attracted to Hatsue. As this passage demonstrates, however, even as Shinji ogles Hatsue's body, he does so with tenderness and reverence for her beauty, grace, and charm. Shinji's devotion to Hatsue is pure and authentic—he doesn't want her for her body or her money, but for who she is.



This passage foreshadows the drama and gossip that will swirl around Hatsue and Shinji as they grow closer to one another. Shinji knows that on the small island of Uta-jima, there exists a profound thirst for excitement and gossip—he wants to protect his pure connection to Hatsue from those destructive forces, but he will soon find that he may not be able to do so.



This passage demonstrates how class and wealth dictate many aspects of life—even on a small island like Uta-jima, where it would seem that class stratifications might be more easily transcended due to the tight-knit nature of the community.



This passage demonstrates how devoted Shinji is to his family, to tradition, and to putting others' needs before his own. Shinji is dealing with his own inner emotional turmoil, yet he puts that all aside to focus on mourning his father, supporting his mother, and ensuring that his brother has a better youth than he himself was able to have. Shinji derives his worth not from hoarding material goods or spending his own money, but from sharing his meager resources with those who need them more.



On the way down to the beach to start preparing for a day on the *Taihei-maru*, Shinji hears someone on the docks gossiping: it's rumored that Yasuo Kawamoto and Hatsue are going to be married. Distressed by the news, Shinji spends the day on the boat throwing himself into his work even more strenuously than usual. After returning to the harbor and selling their catch, Shinji and Ryuji head to the office of the Co-operative, where they collect their pay for the last ten days' work. Shinji removes his pay from an envelope bearing his name, counts it, puts it back into the envelope, and tucks it into his sweater.

Shinji walks home along the beach and comes across a group of sailors struggling to get their boat ashore. He hurries to join a group of women helping to push the boat onto land. As he gets closer, he sees that Hatsue is among the women pushing. The strong Shinji grabs a rope and pulls while the women push and soon the boat is safely ashore. Shinji turns and walks away without looking back at Hatsue.

At home, Shinji reaches into his sweater to pull out his envelope—he always gives his pay directly to his mother for household expenses. He is shocked to find that the envelope is missing. Knowing he must have dropped it on the beach, Shinji wordlessly turns around and runs out of the house. A few minutes later, a young girl comes to the door and asks for Shinji. Shinji's mother tells her that Shinji went out again. The girl—Hatsue—hands Shinji's mother Shinji's pay envelope with his name on it. Shinji's mother urges Hatsue to run and find Shinji so that he can stop searching and worrying.

On the dark beach, Hatsue finds Shinji bent over, combing through the sand. She approaches him and tells him that she found the envelope and brought it to his mother after asking for directions to his house from some other villagers. Shinji smiles, deeply relieved, but then he remembers the rumor he heard. He asks Hatsue if she and Yasuo are really going to be married. Hatsue begins laughing—she says the rumor is a lie. Hatsue continues laughing until she begins clutching at her chest, complaining that she's laughed herself sore. Shinji tenderly touches the spot on her chest. Hatsue tells him he's making her feel better. Beneath the moonlight, Shinji and Hatsue share a kiss. Shinji thinks that Hatsue's mouth tastes like salt and seaweed.

As the two break apart, Shinji tells Hatsue that he plans to bring some fish to the lighthouse-keeper's place tomorrow when he is done fishing. Hatsue says she, too, will be at the lighthouse tomorrow. The two part ways wordlessly.

Shinji is particularly distressed by the news about Yasuo and Hatsue because he feels it confirms what he already knows on some level: that even true love is not a strong enough force to interrupt the supremacy of wealth and class as markers of what makes a good spouse. Shinji truly loves Hatsue—but he fears Yasuo has won her simply because he is rich.



Shinji is too sad about the rumors he's heard concerning Hatsue's engagement to even try to talk, connect, or flirt with her. He feels he's missed his chance forever, and he doesn't want to increase his own pain by engaging with her on any level.



Once again, Shinji and Hatsue are brought together by chance circumstances. Shinji's envelope falling out of his sweater could be seen as the forces of nature at work on human experiences—the wind or the sea knocked the envelope loose, perhaps to bring Shinji and Hatsue together and to teach Shinji a lesson about the values of patience and calm.



This passage shows Hatsue and Shinji overcoming the tensions between them and connecting even more deeply than before. It also illustrates the power of gossip on the island, foreshadowing that the same malignant rumors will plague Shinji and Hatsue's courtship, too. When Shinji kisses Hatsue and finds that she tastes like the sea, Mishima draws a direct connection between Hatsue and the forces of nature. By aligning Hatsue with the sea, he suggests that she, like nature, is pure and patient.



Hatsue and Shinji are devoted to one another and plan to continue seeing one another—even knowing how unforgiving the rumor mill on Uta-jima can be.



CHAPTER 6

After fishing the next day, Shinji stops at the Yashiro Shrine on his way to the lighthouse to give thanks to the sea-god for blessing him. After praying at the shrine, Shinji looks out on the ocean. He feels a deep connection to the “opulence of nature” all around him as he breathes deeply and listens to the waves. He slowly makes his way toward the lighthouse, excited yet nervous about meeting Hatsue there.

The lighthouse-keeper and his wife have taken Hatsue into their hearts as if she were their own child. They do have a daughter of their own, Chiyoko, who attends university in Tokyo and visits the island only rarely. In her absence, the lighthouse-keeper and his wife have opened their home to local girls for etiquette lessons. The well-read, chatty wife and the stern lighthouse-keeper often argue—but they respect one another deeply and remain devoted to each other.

Hatsue arrives at the lighthouse with a gift of sea cucumbers, even though no etiquette lesson is scheduled for the day. She visits with the lighthouse-keeper’s wife, who, much to Hatsue’s embarrassment, asks Hatsue about her romantic life. To change the subject, Hatsue volunteers to help make supper. While Hatsue helps prepare the meal, Shinji knocks at the door with two fish for the lighthouse-keeper and his wife. As Shinji enters, the lighthouse-keeper’s wife tells Shinji that Chiyoko has written a letter asking about him—the lighthouse-keeper’s wife suggests Chiyoko has feelings for Shinji. Shinji, embarrassed, leaves the house quickly. Hatsue becomes quiet.

Shinji decides to wait for Hatsue along the path down to the village from the lighthouse. He stares into the sea as he considers scaring her when she walks past. When he hears her footsteps approach, however, he decides to announce himself by whistling. Hatsue walks right past him. Shinji calls out for her, but she doesn’t turn around. Hatsue walks into a small forest, using a flashlight to light her way. Shinji follows her. Hatsue trips and falls, and Shinji helps her up. Shinji asks if Hatsue was upset with him before. She says that the rumors about him and Chiyoko upset her, but Shinji insists that he has no feelings for Chiyoko. Hatsue is relieved.

This passage demonstrates Shinji’s deeply selfless, spiritual nature. He has a clear reverence for the forces of nature and other powers, seen and unseen, that govern the world.



By providing some background on the lighthouse-keeper and his wife, Mishima illustrates how another couple on the island remain devoted to one another in spite of differences between them. This portends that there is plenty of hope for Hatsue and Shinji, even though many things seem to stand in the way of their being together.



In this passage, the meddling and gossipy lighthouse-keeper’s wife manages to alienate Shinji and Hatsue from one another at the moment both of them had been anticipating all day—their meeting at the lighthouse. This passage reinforces just how painful and destructive gossip and rumor can be when one takes them as true at face value.



In this passage, Mishima shows how devoted Shinji is to Hatsue. He has no interest in any other girls, and he is desperate to let Hatsue know just how much she means to him. Just as Shinji was comforted by Hatsue’s ridicule of the rumors about Yasuo, so too is Hatsue now comforted by Shinji’s insistence that there is no truth to any rumors about him and Chiyoko.



As Shinji walks Hatsue back to the village, he tells her about his dreams of working hard, saving money, and buying a lumber freighter that he and Hiroshi can use to get into the shipping business and take care of their mother financially. No matter how successful he gets in life, he says, he hopes to come back to Uta-jima at the end of his life to help preserve its beauty and its community. Hatsue listens intently to Shinji's dreams for the future. They do not hold hands or touch as they walk—it seems to both of them that what happened yesterday between them on the beach was some “undreamed of event, brought about by some force outside themselves.” As they approach the village, they take different paths home.

Even though Shinji and Hatsue are deeply—and even cosmically—connected, Mishima illustrates how different their paths are by showing them walking home through the village different ways. No matter how much they care for each other, Shinji and Hatsue will at some point have to reckon with the differences in class, wealth, and status that divide them.



CHAPTER 7

It is time for Shinji's brother Hiroshi to embark on his school trip, during which he will tour the Kyoto-Osaka area with his classmates and spend five whole nights away from home—his first ever trip off of the island. This annual trip is the way most young people on Uta-jima come to learn about the outside world for the first time, spotting streetcars, skyscrapers, and cinemas at long last. Hiroshi's mother buys talismans at the Yashiro Shrine and packs Hiroshi's bag full of snacks and candies. She brings him to the docks to board the ferryboat that will take him to the mainland, where she joins the other mothers in tearfully waving goodbye to the departing schoolchildren. Hiroshi and Shinji's mother returns home, where she sits alone on the floor and cries, dreading the day when both her sons leave her for good to “take to the sea.”

Mishima uses this passage to illustrate the intensely insular nature of life on Uta-jima. The villagers there have little contact with the mainland—their lives are mostly concerned with community, survival, and living alongside nature. This creates a sense of fortitude and communality—but as Shinji and Hiroshi's mother's loneliness at the end of the scene indicates, it also means that people have little else to turn to when individuals within their community leave or move on.



After the ferryboat docks on the mainland, its crew prepares for the return journey. Chiyoko, the daughter of the lighthouse-keeper and his wife, is getting ready to board the ferry and return to the island—she is a brooding, “unsociable” girl, and she is dreading having to reunite with the gossipy islanders. Chiyoko fears that she is plain and ugly—and that everyone is always saying so behind her back.

Chiyoko has been forged into a person on the island of Uta-jima—and even after her adventures on the mainland, she is unable to escape the gossip and unkind rumors that defined her life there.



On the ferry, Chiyoko runs into Yasuo, who is returning to the island from the mainland after attending to some business for his father and the Co-operative. He teases her for coming home to the island for “another drink of mother's milk.” Chiyoko is angry at Yasuo for teasing her—she wishes, for once, that a man would look at her with love rather than contempt. Chiyoko wishes Shinji, not Yasuo, was with her on the journey. Meanwhile, Yasuo wishes he could brag to Chiyoko about sleeping with a prostitute the night before—but he knows that doing so would be uncouth.

Chiyoko is deeply insecure and clearly in love with Shinji, who, little does she know, is involved with someone else. As Mishima offers insights into what both Chiyoko and Yasuo are thinking, he contrasts Chiyoko's self-loathing and yearning against Yasuo's sleazy, braggadocious nature.



On the journey back, Chiyoko asks Yasuo what news there is on the island. He tells her about Hatsue's return—and her beauty. Yasuo boasts that he will likely be picked out of all the young village men to marry Hatsue and be adopted into her family. Chiyoko does not respond to the news—instead, she stands up from her seat, goes to the railing, and waits for Uta-jima to appear on the horizon.

Chiyoko is clearly upset by the news of Hatsue's return, even though Yasuo claims it is he himself—not Shinji—who will win her heart. Chiyoko, having been raised in an environment so influenced by gossip and rumor, is unable to see Hatsue's presence as anything but a threat to her own happiness.



CHAPTER 8

Two days after Hiroshi's departure, the island of Uta-jima is struck by a roaring storm. Shinji awakes knowing that there will be no fishing today. The house is shaking and rattling with the wind's fury, and the rain is coming down so hard that Shinji knows he won't be able to accomplish any other tasks outside. Normally, Shinji hates an idle day off—but today, he is excited, and he quickly leaps from bed and puts on a black sweater full of holes. Later today, he is going to meet up with Hatsue in secret.

Shinji respects nature's warnings enough to heed them most of the time—but today, he is determined to defy even the worst weather in order to be reunited with Hatsue. Mishima introduces an intriguing contradiction here: though Shinji is defying the warnings of nature, he is doing so in the name of his pure and steadfast devotion to Hatsue.



Shinji puts on a raincoat and goes down to the beach—he is so full of pent-up excitement that he feels that only the sea can “answer [the] wordless conversation” happening inside of him. As Shinji stands in front of the roaring sea and feels salt spray on his face, he is reminded of the taste of Hatsue's lips. A wave washes a beautiful pink shell up near Shinji's feet. He picks it up and decides to give it to Hatsue as a present.

Shinji may be turning against nature's warnings and heading out into the storm, but as he communes with the waves in this passage, it is clear that he derives strength, companionship, and even a sense of guidance from nature itself. Nature seems to be encouraging Shinji to follow his heart by presenting him with the beautiful pink shell for Hatsue.



Shinji returns home for lunch, then goes back out into the storm. After he goes, his mother is left to finish up the dishes. In the quiet house battered by rain, she considers her desire for a daughter whom she might understand—and who might help her with the housework. She knows she is young and healthy enough still that she could bear more children—but the thought of betraying her husband's memory shames her. She goes over to his memorial tablet to say a prayer.

Shinji's mother remains devoted to her husband, even though he is no longer alive. This illustrates Mishima's belief in the power of devotion no matter the circumstances. It's clear that Shinji has learned from his mother what it means to be truly devoted to someone. This passage also suggests that Shinji's mother might like it if he married; she would probably like having a daughter-in-law.



Shinji walks through the storm up the mountain and toward the abandoned observation tower where he and Hatsue met before, when she was lost on her way to the lighthouse. At the highest point on the island, Shinji marvels at the storm's “supreme dominion” over the island. On the ground floor of the tower, Shinji finds shelter from the storm. He takes off his raincoat and his trousers and reaches into his pocket for some matches. He lights a fire using some pine needles and driftwood, then lays his damp clothes near the flames to dry and sits down to wait for Hatsue. While Shinji waits, he grows so warm and comfortable that he falls asleep.

Shinji continues to demonstrate an awestruck respect for nature, even as he makes his way through the harrowing storm. As a result, perhaps, of his reverence for nature—and his ability to learn how to live with rather than in opposition to the forces of nature—he is rewarded by arriving safe and sound at the observation tower, where he can relax and dry himself by a fire he himself made.



When Shinji opens his eyes, he is surprised to find that the figure of a naked girl is standing on the other side of the fire, drying herself and her clothes. Shinji wonders if he is dreaming—but then he recognizes the girl as Hatsue. He decides to pretend to be asleep so that he can watch her a while longer through half-closed eyes. Diving women such as Hatsue, Shinji knows, are accustomed to drying themselves by a large communal fire—albeit with other women—as soon as they emerge from the sea. Shinji knows that the thought of undressing before a man never entered Hatsue’s head—she came in, saw the fire, and began to dry herself in the way she has always been taught to.

Shinji blinks. Hatsue notices the movement. She screams out for him to shut his eyes, and, though he has been admiring Hatsue’s body, he does so. He realizes, however, that there’s no fault in what he or Hatsue has done—she is simply drying herself, and he woke up in the middle of that process. Shinji opens his eyes again and faces Hatsue directly. Shinji tries to approach Hatsue, but she scoots away from him. She tells him she’s embarrassed, and he asks what would ease her embarrassment. Hatsue says that if Shinji disrobed, too, she would feel less alone and ashamed. Shinji immediately begins to take his clothes off. The two stand before each other, naked except for their underwear. Hatsue remarks that Shinji hasn’t taken his off. He says that if she will, he will too. Hatsue smiles and removes her underwear. Shinji does so, too.

As the storm intensifies, Shinji and Hatsue leap toward one another and embrace. They sink to the floor by the fire and begin to kiss, but Hatsue insists that she will not sleep with Shinji before she’s married—it’s “bad” for a girl to do such a thing. Hatsue tells Shinji she wants to marry him—they should wait, she says, until after they are legally bound. Shinji and Hatsue continue holding one another quietly by the fire for some time, listening to the sounds of the storm. Shinji feels “pure and holy happiness” with Hatsue in his arms. After a while, he goes over to the pile of his clothes and retrieves the seashell for Hatsue. She accepts it happily and kisses him deeply.

When it is time for Shinji and Hatsue to head home, they walk the easiest path down the mountain—the path takes them directly past the lighthouse, where the lonely Chiyoko, who is sitting in the living room gazing out the window at the storm, catches sight of Hatsue and Shinji, snuggled together, walking by. Chiyoko is reminded of a rumor she heard at school about a classmate who was seduced by the man she was in love with. Chiyoko turns away from the window and returns to studying. Neither her mother nor her father has seen what she has seen.

Shinji is as awestruck by Hatsue’s beauty as he is by the forces of nature. Shinji and Hatsue are both young and desirous of one another, yet as Shinji observes Hatsue’s body in this passage, he is impressed by her self-confidence and intuition, not overtly lustful. This illustrates that Shinji is devoted to Hatsue on a level that transcends the physical.



In this passage, Hatsue urges Shinji to get naked not necessarily because she wants to see his body, but because she wants him to prove his devotion to her and his willingness to do what she asks of him in order to establish them as equals in their relationship. Shinji leaps at the opportunity to prove the depths of his devotion—he is entirely committed to giving Hatsue the things she needs to feel happy, safe, and comfortable. Their commitment to one another’s joy and well-being is palpable.



This passage further illustrates that the connection between Shinji and Hatsue is on a level much deeper than the physical. They truly care for and respect one another. They seek to apply the lessons they’ve learned from nature about generosity, restraint, and interconnectedness to build a real relationship rather than deriving instant gratification.



Chiyoko is the only one who sees Shinji and Hatsue descend from the lighthouse together—but she is jealous, lonely, and easily influenced by the forces of gossip, rumor, and scandal. Chiyoko’s chance observation in this passage will set in motion the events that will test Shinji and Hatsue for the rest of the novel.



CHAPTER 9

A postcard from Hiroshi arrives. He describes seeing his first-ever movie in a cinema—he and his friends didn't know that the seats flipped down. Hiroshi says he hopes that one day he can take his mother to a movie, too. Shinji's mother, crying, orders Shinji to kneel with her before their home's prayer altar and pray for Hiroshi.

That night, after visiting the bathhouse with his mother, Shinji spies someone standing on the street looking up at the eaves of one of the nearby houses. Shinji recognizes the figure as Yasuo. Yasuo turns around and spots Shinji. Shinji smiles and waves, but Yasuo only stares back at Shinji.

The day before—unbeknownst to Shinji—Chiyoko went to see Yasuo. She told Yasuo that she had seen Shinji and Hatsue coming down the mountain, clinging to one another and in various states of undress. Now, Yasuo stands looking up at the water-drawing roster pinned to one of the buildings near the bathhouse—the roster lists whose turn it is to draw water from the small spring in town. He sees that Hatsue's turn to draw water is tonight at two in the morning. He is determined to have his way with Hatsue.

After spotting Shinji—and purposefully ignoring him—Yasuo hurries home, where he obsesses about how Shinji managed to bed Hatsue. His animosity toward Shinji keeps him awake until it is time to sneak out of the house and head for the spring through the dark streets of town. At the stream, Yasuo waits near a tree until Hatsue comes down to the cistern carrying two water buckets. Yasuo watches as she draws water into her buckets, imagining what he is about to do to her. Yasuo is unaware that just above him, in the tree's branches, a swarm of **hornets** are growing excited by the ticking of the gaudy watch Yasuo always wears. A hornet flies at Yasuo and stings him on the wrist. Yasuo shouts, alerting Hatsue to his presence.

This passage shows that even though Hiroshi is off on his own having new experiences, he still feels a great deal of responsibility to his family. After all, he's not just thinking about his own experience at the cinema—he's thinking about his desire to share it with his mom. He is growing up to be a selfless young man, just like Shinji.



This puzzling interaction between Shinji and Yasuo portends Shinji's upcoming difficulties with the other villagers as a result of the cruel rumors beginning to spread about him and Hatsue.



Yasuo believes that Shinji has slept with Hatsue, whom Yasuo wants for himself. Yasuo is furious and determined to get vengeance by staking his own claim upon Hatsue. This illustrates Yasuo's selfishness and cruelty, as well as his privileged and misguided belief that he has a greater right to Hatsue because of his social and financial position.



In this passage, as Yasuo makes horrible designs on Hatsue, a swarm of hornets begin to slowly attack him. This is evidence of Mishima's theme that those who fail to learn the lessons of nature and who act cruelly or individualistically will always meet the fates they deserve. Yasuo ignored the hornets, focusing only on his dastardly thoughts about Hatsue—now, he faces retribution.



Hatsue greets Yasuo defensively but politely. Yasuo says he has been waiting to give her a fright. Hatsue laughs. Yasuo takes advantage of Hatsue's naivete, rushes toward her, and grabs her by the wrist. He wonders, in the back of his mind, how Shinji managed to seduce Hatsue. Yasuo tells Hatsue that unless she wants everyone in the village to know about what she and Shinji did up on the mountain the other day, she will comply with whatever he tells her to do. Hatsue struggles and tries to escape, screaming as loudly as she can, but Yasuo will not let her go. Hatsue knows that if she is able to get away now, she can tell her father what happened—but if Yasuo succeeds in raping her, she will be far too ashamed to tell her father anything.

Yasuo wrestles Hatsue to the ground. Hatsue spits in Yasuo's face—but this only arouses him more. As he leans down to kiss Hatsue, another **hornet** stings him on the back of his neck. He stands up to try to catch the hornet, and Hatsue begins to run away. Yasuo chases after her and catches her again. As he forces her down to the ground again, however, another hornet stings him on the buttocks. This time, when Yasuo leaps up, Hatsue runs away into some trees, takes hold of a large rock, and waits quietly.

Yasuo drives the hornet away and begins calling out for Hatsue. He promises he won't do anything bad to her. As he approaches the stand of trees, Hatsue lifts the rock above her head. Yasuo asks Hatsue to drop the rock—and not to tell her father about what has happened. Hatsue agrees to keep her mouth shut as long as Yasuo draws fresh water for her and carries it all the way home. Yasuo does as Hatsue asks. When he's finished, Hatsue follows him back to her house.

CHAPTER 10

Hiroshi returns home to the island full of stories about his trip to the city—but as he tries to share his experiences with his family, he finds he has a hard time describing the wonders of the “real” world. As excited as he is, Hiroshi is grateful to be home. Over the next several days, as summer vacation winds down, Hiroshi spends a lot of time reenacting Western movie plots with his friends on the southern tip of the island, near the entrance to a large, dark cave. The boys explore the cave, full of wonder and excitement, and incorporate the strange echoing of the waves coming in from the sea into their games.

Here, Yasuo attempts to threaten and blackmail Hatsue, knowing all too well that as a woman, she is expected to prize her honor and her reputation above her own bodily well-being. Hatsue herself wrestles with the pain of knowing that if Yasuo does succeed in raping her, she will be seen as responsible for his violent, disgusting actions.



Yasuo continues to ignore the hornets' warnings, and so they continue to sting him. Yasuo does not heed the lessons of nature as he is too focused on his own cruel, self-serving plans—thus he suffers at nature's hands.



Though Yasuo has calmed down for now, Hatsue knows that if she offends or upsets him, she will quickly find herself in danger. She is, unfortunately, forced to essentially allow Yasuo to blackmail her with the gossip he has about her and Shinji.



This passage shows how, even for the island's young people, nature defines their daily lives. Nature is a force that the island's children understand and respect intuitively as they work to incorporate nature's unpredictability into their lives at every turn.



To placate the wrath of the sea-god that they believe is sending the waves, they offer up small bits of crackers and buns their mothers have packed them for the day. When the waves keep coming into the cave, stronger than ever, one of Hiroshi's friends, Sochan, suggests the sea-god has sent the waves because of an immorality in their midst—he says that the god is angry about what Shinji did to Hatsue by sleeping with her. Hiroshi hits Sochan and the two begin fighting until their friend Katchan breaks them up. The two boys apologize and resume their game—but even after they leave the cave for the afternoon, the words still weigh on Hiroshi.

That night, when Hiroshi gets home, he asks his mother what his friend Sochan meant about Shinji and Hatsue sleeping together. Shinji is not yet home from work. Hiroshi's mother urges him not to ever repeat such a thing again—and especially not in front of Shinji. Later that night, after Hiroshi is asleep, Shinji's mother approaches Shinji and asks him if he knows what people are saying about him and Hatsue. Normally she ignores village gossip—but now that her own son is implicated, she knows she must shield him from the malicious forces of lies and hearsay. Shinji says he hasn't heard anything about the rumors, and that he didn't sleep with Hatsue.

The next evening, when Shinji's mother goes to a meeting of the island women's club, everyone stops talking as soon as she walks into the room—they have all been talking about her. The evening after that, Shinji arrives at a meeting of the Young Men's Association, and the same thing happens to him. Several days later, Ryuji tells Shinji that Yasuo is spreading horrible rumors about Shinji. Ryuji tells Shinji that he has his back no matter what.

One night, at the public bathhouse, the wealthy and powerful self-made man Terukichi Miyata struts into the crowded baths and undresses, revealing his aged but shapely form. As he dips into the bath, he overhears a nearby pair of young fisherman—who have not noticed his arrival—talking about how Hatsue is a "cracked pitcher" due to Shinji's dastardly machinations. Terukichi gets out of the bath, dumps ice-cold water over the fishermen's heads, then knocks their skulls together before leaving the bath house without a word.

This passage illustrates the widely-held belief on Uta-jima that nature punishes those who defy its lessons. Hiroshi doesn't know exactly what it is Sochan is talking about—but he knows that the rumors about his brother make him feel sad and defenseless. Hiroshi is worried about what will happen to Shinji given the malicious gossip swirling throughout town.



This passage illustrates just how seriously Shinji's mother takes the threat of gossip and rumor. She knows the power such forces have to erode individuals, families, and communities, and she is determined to protect her children from the destructive nature of lies and slander.



Shinji and his mother experience a great deal of judgement and shunning as they try to move through public spheres. Mishima illustrates how the gossip about Shinji is eroding his and his mother's ability to participate in their community.



As Hatsue's powerful, wealthy, and imposing father finds that even he and his family are not immune from gossip and rumor, he reacts with anger and violence. Mishima suggests that Terukichi will not stand for the spread of rumors about his daughter—and that he may treat Hatsue violently as a result of the gossip.



CHAPTER 11

The next day, on the *Taihei-maru*, Jukichi reaches into his pocket and pulls out a piece of paper. He tells Shinji that earlier, when he passed the Miyata household, Hatsue came outside and gave him the note—it is for Shinji. Shinji takes the note and opens it carefully. In the letter, Hatsue writes about how the night before, Terukichi overheard the gossip about her and Shinji and has forbidden her not just from seeing Shinji, but from leaving the house almost entirely. Hatsue begs Shinji to think of a way for them to meet. In the meantime, she says, she will leave a letter under the water jar at the front of the house each day—Shinji should leave his replies there as well. She concludes her letter by begging Shinji to join her in “go[ing] on truly, with strong hearts!”

Shinji is relieved to know that Hatsue still cares so deeply for him. He grows lost in thoughts of love as Ryuji and Jukichi read the letter aloud colorfully. Jukichi urges Shinji to tell him what really transpired between him and Hatsue. Shinji tells the story of his and Hatsue’s courtship, and insists that while they did embrace while naked, they remained pure and did not consummate their love—despite what the rumors state. Jukichi insists that everything will work out all right for Shinji and Hatsue. As gentle waves rock the boat, they calm Shinji nearly as much as Jukichi’s kind words.

Ryuji volunteers to pick up Hatsue’s letters each morning, and soon, the letters are the principal topic of conversation between the three fishermen while they’re out on the water. Ryuji and Jukichi become just as emotionally invested in Hatsue’s letters as Shinji himself—especially in one letter in particular that describes Yasuo’s assault. Hatsue writes that though she told her father about what Yasuo did to her, Terukichi is still on good terms with Yasuo’s family. As Shinji reads the letter aloud, he laments that he is in the position he’s in because he’s poor. He immediately regrets making a statement that’s so weak and self-pitying.

The wise old Jukichi, sensing Shinji and Ryuji’s anger, warns them not to pick a fight with a fool like Yasuo. When it comes to love, what’s needed, as in fishing, is patience.

Shinji devours Hatsue’s letter, greatly relieved by her declarations of love and devotion and her desire to continue seeking out ways to be together in spite of the cruel gossip and the painful class divisions that threaten to pull them apart. Mishima illustrates the sanctity of Shinji and Hatsue’s relationship by portraying their intense, committed devotion to one another on an emotional level, not just a physical one.



As Shinji finds comfort and solidarity in the support his friends give to him, he finds himself comparing the ways in which their words and actions soothe him to the ways in which nature soothes him. This represents yet another example of Mishima drawing connections—sometimes large and sometimes small—between the lessons of nature and the responsibilities of humanity.



In this passage, the young and naïve Shinji and Ryuji at last begin to understand that alliances based on class and wealth are more important to many people than integrity. Shinji is angry that, because he is of a different class than Yasuo and the Miyatas, he is subject to harsher judgement—but as a person on his way toward selflessness and openness, he knows that to languish in these feelings of futility and anger is counterproductive.



Jukichi, an old fisherman, has learned the lessons of nature and is able to apply them to his life—and the lives of others—with skill and grace.



The news that Terukichi has forbidden Hatsue to see Shinji reaches the lighthouse that evening. Chiyoko, overhearing the gossip, is immediately overcome with guilt. She is relieved that Shinji doesn't seem to know that she is the source of all of this turmoil—but she still can't meet his eyes when he comes by to bring her parents their fish. She is due to return to Tokyo soon, and she is determined to confess the truth to Shinji and beg his forgiveness before she goes.

On the morning of her departure, Chiyoko goes down to the beach early in the morning to say goodbye to Shinji. She catches him before he boards the *Taihei-maru* and bids him farewell—but she cannot bring herself to tell him the truth. As Shinji turns away from her and back toward the boat, Chiyoko realizes that what she truly wants is Shinji's attention. Chiyoko asks Shinji if he thinks she's ugly. Shinji kindly replies that Chiyoko is pretty. He boards the boat. Chiyoko remains on shore, feeling happy.

Later that afternoon, as she heads back to Tokyo by ferry, Chiyoko is overwhelmed by tenderness for Shinji. She accepts at last that he loves another, and she decides she must find a way to make up for the wickedness she has brought into his life.

CHAPTER 12

Spring is nearing its end already, yet Shinji still has not found a way to meet with Hatsue. Sometimes, Shinji wanders the neighborhood around her house at night, and sometimes he is able to glimpse her through an open window—but the two of them only look at one another and never dare to speak. Shinji feels guilty about these outings, as he promised Jukichi he would not become morose or lovelorn but would instead practice patience and faith.

One night, Shinji takes comfort in visiting the shrine at the ancient burial mound of Prince Deki, a prince who drifted to the island of Uta-jima from a faraway land and married an islander woman, whom he called *heya*, or “room.” No accounts exist of his life, and many villagers now wonder if he was some sort of heavenly being, or whether his life was just so happy and calm as to be exceptional. The next morning, Ryuji delivers Hatsue's daily letter to Shinji, and Shinji is excited to find that within it she talks about having had a dream in which a god told her that Shinji was a reincarnation of Prince Deki. In the dream, Hatsue and Shinji were happily married and had a child. Shinji feels his visit to the shrine and Hatsue's dream are too uncanny to be a coincidence.

Chiyoko knows the magnitude of the chain reaction she has set in motion by vindictively spreading rumors about Shinji. She knows the power that gossip has on the island—and while she may have wanted to weaponize that against Shinji at one point, now, she just wants to clear the air.



Even though Chiyoko doesn't do what she set out to do in this passage, she still is able to identify one of her impulses and, in a way, exorcise it. Chiyoko has already begun her coming-of-age journey—even if she doesn't know it yet, and even if she's still tempted by selfish insecurities.



This passage is a major turning point for Chiyoko. She has at last grown up and matured because she has decided to opt for selflessness and generosity rather than narcissism and pettiness.



Shinji is doing his best to resist the temptation to give into the narcissism of his own emotions. He knows that if he gets too wrapped up in self-pity or sadness, he will shirk his responsibilities to his work and his family—and he is determined to avoid that happening, even as he longs to honor his devotion to Hatsue.



This coincidence between Hatsue's dream and Shinji's visit to the shrine suggests that there is hope, after all, for the young lovers. The legend of Prince Deki is interesting—Deki was not necessarily endowed with any special gifts or wealth, but simply lived a life so full of happiness that he has been held up as a beacon of hope for centuries. This suggests that devotion to loved ones and a willingness to trust in where the forces of nature lead are keys to a happy life.



As the weather turns warm, Shinji's mother longs to get back to **pearl diving**. She is bored of doing housework and she is anxious all the time because of the gossip about Shinji. One sunny day, she decides to take matters into her own hands. She goes down to the beach to "take counsel with the sea" about what she should do. When she spots a butterfly flying near the surface of the water, defying the violent waves as it climbs higher and higher into the sky, the mother feels she has received a sign. Newly encouraged, she leaves the beach.

Shinji's mother approaches the surprisingly modest home of Terukichi Miyata. She is nervous—she knows that simply being seen approaching the house is enough to set off a whole new wave of rumors—but as she walks up to the entrance, she stands up tall and proud in spite of her plain appearance. Inside the house, Shinji's mother announces her presence. Hatsue excitedly flies into the room to greet her. Shinji's mother asks Hatsue if Hatsue will fetch her father—Shinji's mother wants to speak to him and plead her son's case. Hatsue looks uneasy, but she nonetheless hurries off to find him.

A moment later, Hatsue returns and sheepishly announces that her father will not see Shinji's mother. Shinji's mother, enraged, shouts that she will never again cross the threshold of the Miyata household.

In the aftermath of the incident, Shinji's mother is embarrassed. She doesn't tell Shinji what transpired right away—but when she finally confesses the truth, she learns that Shinji already knew all about the encounter from one of Hatsue's letters. Shinji, too, feels angry and humiliated that Terukichi turned his mother away. He begins to feel guilty about telling his mother so much about his love for Hatsue and for burdening her with his problems.

One day, Ryuji brings Shinji a letter from Hatsue that tells of her father's impending visit from some prefectural officials. Hatsue knows that whenever her father has guests over, he drinks a lot and falls asleep early—she tells Shinji to wait for her at eleven at the Yashiro Shrine. The following night, Shinji excitedly sets out at nine, deciding to go to the beach for a while before heading to the shrine. In front of the ocean, he contemplates whether he and Hatsue will decide tonight to elope or perhaps commit double suicide so that they can be together. Ultimately, Shinji decides that either option would be selfish—he has to stay on the island and support his family.

Shinji's mother, like her son, has an intense and reciprocal relationship to nature. As a pearl diver, she engages in a physically demanding and dangerous occupation—she must trust in nature at all times while being sure to watch for its signs and learn the lessons it has to teach.



Shinji's mother makes a selfless move in this passage as she puts her own reputation on the line in hopes of finding a way to salvage her son's. It is humiliating for her to visit the house of one of the village's wealthiest men and essentially beg for an audience—but she feels her humiliation is tolerable, while her son's is not.



Terukichi Miyata offends Shinji's mother by refusing to meet with her. She has nothing but contempt for a wealthy man who isolates himself from those he's wronged without a second thought.



Shinji and his mother are both deeply selfless people who want to do as much for the other person as they possibly can. Shinji doesn't want to burden his mother with his problems, yet she wants to be the one to help take his burdens away from him.



Shinji is so devoted to Hatsue that he feels, from time to time, that he'd truly do anything for her—sometimes he believes he would leave his family or his life behind if need be. When Shinji actually stops to consider the ramifications of such decisions, however, he finds that at a certain point devotion becomes a selfish thing. Shinji's priority is his journey toward selflessness and the preservation of his family's happiness—though of course his intense feelings for Hatsue, pure and committed as they are, are important to him as well.



Shinji doesn't have a watch, but he is so attuned to the rhythms of nature that he instinctively knows that eleven o'clock is approaching. He heads over to the shrine and waits. Soon, he hears footsteps coming toward the shrine. He resists the urge to run down the steps to meet Hatsue. Just then, he hears a rageful voice call Hatsue's name. Shinji sees Terukichi come out of the shadows—he has been hiding and waiting for Hatsue. He grabs her by the wrist and drags her home. Shinji stands motionless near the shrine, terrified and bereft.

Shinji and Hatsue's long-awaited meeting goes terribly, terribly wrong. It seems that Terukichi knew what Hatsue would do—and planned to catch her in the act all along. This incident threatens to tear Shinji and Hatsue even farther apart by setting off yet another wave of gossip, lies, and misunderstandings.



CHAPTER 13

As diving season arrives, the young women who work as **pearl divers** feel a “heart-strangling” excitement. The pearl-divers of Uta-jima are skillful and competitive—and the dangerous work of pearl diving is no laughing matter. The water is cold and choking, the salt sometimes penetrates the divers' goggles, and the divers often suffer wounds on their feet when kicking off against the sea floor.

In describing the dangerous and often painful work of pearl diving, Mishima illustrates the raw power of nature—and the profound, valuable lessons it has to teach to those who are brave enough to learn from it.



June and July are the busiest months for **pearl diving**. One sunny midsummer afternoon at the craggy Garden Beach—the most fruitful spot for diving—the women rest around the drying-fire, laughing as they compare their bare breasts and argue over whose are the most shapely. Shinji's mother is quietly proud of her own breasts, which are the most youthful-looking among the women of her age—but she must admit that Hatsue's breasts are the most beautiful. What's more is that upon seeing Hatsue's breasts for the first time, she realizes why the rumors about Hatsue and Shinji have begun to die out—Hatsue's breasts are unmistakably the just-bloomed breasts of a virgin. Shinji's mother looks on fondly as Hatsue laughs and jests with the other women.

This passage demonstrates how the passage of time affects the women of Uta-jima. They embrace the cycle of life as it changes their bodies and teaches them new lessons. The older, mellower, more seasoned divers, like Shinji's mother, are wistful about the past—yet admiring of the potential, grace, and beauty that the young women of the island possess.



At lunchtime, the women shriek and squeal with excitement as an old peddler who makes his way to the island to sell his wares each summer arrives on the beach. He opens up his bundle on a rock, revealing swaths of cotton, housedresses, underwear, sashes, coin purses, handbags, ribbons, and jewelry. The women quickly begin buying up the goods, much to the delight of the scrawny old peddler. When he pulls out three beautiful and expensive plastic handbags, he announces that he will give one away free to the woman who brings up the biggest catch within the next hour.

The arrival of the peddler turns the dangerous work of pearl-diving into an exciting and rewarding game. The pearl-divers are competitive to begin with, but the peddler's challenge to them brings out the fun and exhilaration of the craft, things that all too often fade into the background as the women confront the power of nature.



Shinji's mother and Hatsue immediately enter the contest along with six other women. They take a boat out to a fertile cove nearby and begin diving. An hour later, when they return, they are exhausted, cold, and disheveled. The peddler counts their catches and announces that Hatsue has come in first place, while Shinji's mother has taken second. Hatsue walks forward to receive her prize—but then immediately gives the beautiful handbag to Shinji's mother. She says she wants to apologize for the way her father spoke to Shinji's mother the day she came to call. Everyone praises Hatsue. Shinji's mother thinks about what a good choice her son has made.

This passage demonstrates Hatsue's profound selflessness. As Mishima posits throughout the novel, demonstrations of generosity and selfless acts are the mark of someone's entrance into adulthood. Shinji's mother is not just grateful, but also proud as she realizes that Hatsue has at last come into her own as a woman. Hatsue is good, selfless, and generous—she is all the things Shinji has always seen in her.



CHAPTER 14

The rainy season brings Shinji nothing but boredom. Hatsue's letters have stopped since the incident at the Yashiro Shrine. Shinji is surprised, then, when the captain of one of Terukichi's coasting freighters, the *Utajima-maru*, comes to his house and asks Shinji to join the crew as an apprentice seaman. Shinji says he must discuss matters with Jukichi, but the captain insists Jukichi has already given his permission. Shinji is confused—he knows that Terukichi owns the freighter, and he has no idea why a man who hates him so would want to give him a job. The captain, however, insists that Uncle Teru knows Shinji to be a good, hardworking sailor. Shinji at last agrees. The next day, he learns that Yasuo, too will join the crew—he is anxious and pained, but his excitement drowns out his negative feelings.

Shinji is skeptical when an opportunity that seems too good to be true comes along. The captain seems to be recruiting Shinji on Terukichi's behalf—but Shinji has no idea why the man would want to recruit him for one of his freighters when he hates Shinji so much as to bar him from seeing Hatsue. Nevertheless, Shinji is restless and eager to see new things given how things have been going on the island.



On the day of departure, Shinji and Yasuo board the ferry to the mainland. At the docks, Shinji sees Hatsue whisper something to his mother, then hand her a small package. Shinji's mother approaches him to say farewell and wish him luck. She hands him the package. As the ship pulls out into the ocean, Shinji's wistfulness is replaced by a sense of freedom. Down in the cabins, he quietly opens the package, which contains a charm from Yashiro Shrine, a picture of Hatsue, and a letter. Hatsue writes that her heart belongs to Shinji and that she will pray for him every day until his safe return. She says she believes her father has some special reason for putting Shinji and Yasuo on the same freighter—she begs Shinji to stay strong and keep fighting for their future. The letter encourages Shinji, as does the beautiful photograph.

As Shinji embarks on the journey—his first time away from the island in all his life—he is intimidated and excited all at once. The package from Hatsue helps to give him strength and confidence as he sails bravely into a new situation. Hatsue's suggestion to Shinji—to remain strong and to refuse to give up hope that their love will prevail—tips Shinji off to the idea that he may be being watched closely throughout the journey.



In the city of Toba, Shinji, Yasuo, and the captain board the massive *Utajima-maru*. The captain shows Shinji and Yasuo to their tiny, humble bunks and leaves them to settle in. Yasuo, who has not spoken to Shinji once, at last speaks up and suggests the two of them should put the things that happened on the island behind them and become friends. Shinji nods and smiles in agreement. That night, Shinji and Yasuo receive their assignments—the ship is to set sail at nine in the morning, and Shinji’s task is to take the anchor-light off the mast at the crack of dawn. After a sleepless night, Shinji wakes up very early to complete his task on time.

The *Utajima-maru* begins its journey to Okinawa, one of the southernmost islands in the archipelago. The six-week-long voyage takes the sailors through towns large and small, and at each new harbor, Shinji feels excitement. Over the course of the long journey, he bonds with his fellow seamen during long discussions about matters small and large. Yasuo dominates these conversations, while Shinji mostly sits silently in the corner, observing others.

Life aboard the ship is busy, but Shinji does his best to keep up with his duties. Yasuo, on the other hand, is profoundly lazy. He often brags to the other crewmembers that after this journey, Terukichi will make him his son—and then Yasuo himself will be the owner of the freighter. One day, while Yasuo is bragging about being adopted into the Miyata family, Shinji asks if Yasuo has a picture of Hatsue. Yasuo says he does, but Shinji can tell he is lying. Yasuo asks if Shinji has a picture of Hatsue—Shinji says he doesn’t have one. It is the first lie he has ever told.

Bad weather keeps the crew held up at the last port before Okinawa for several days. When it’s time for them to set sail, they receive news that a large typhoon is headed for Okinawa. When they reach the harbor, the atmospheric pressure is dangerously low. The *Utajima-maru* and a nearby bonito ship tie themselves together with ropes and make their way into the shelter of the harbor, then tie their bows to a large buoy and prepare to ride out the storm. Many of the crewmembers fall asleep for the night afraid that the buoy will not hold.

This passage demonstrates that while Shinji and Yasuo may be willing to put aside their differences and issues for the time being, the two men remain profoundly different in terms of priorities and morals. Shinji is still the hardworking, humble young man he’s always been. He is not brash and loud like Yasuo, and he is determined to make an impression and fulfill his duties quietly and thoughtfully.



While Shinji fades into the background of the journey, keeping his head down and learning about his fellow crew members by observing them, the brash Yasuo fails to learn anything about anyone and instead focuses on glorifying himself.



As Shinji and Yasuo clash on board the ship, Shinji finds himself disgusted by Yasuo’s privileged entitlement. Shinji knows that Hatsue loves him alone—and even though Yasuo’s elevated social status might threaten Shinji’s ability to wed Hatsue, the pompous young man will never be able to threaten the sanctity of their love.



Mishima uses this passage to demonstrate the might of nature—and to set up a test for Shinji as the freighter reaches its destination. Nature is about to seriously threaten the lives of the ship’s crewmembers—but luckily, Shinji is a careful student of nature, and he is ready for any challenge.



Just before midnight, Shinji and Yasuo wake up for their shift to watch the ropes and buoy lines in case they snap. Up on deck, the fierce winds and rains batter their bodies. Shinji watches nervously as the sea tosses the buoy in and out of the water. He stares at the taut lines nervously, praying they hold. Suddenly, Yasuo cries out—one of the cables is about to break. As it snaps, it flashes like a whip up onto the deck. Yasuo runs off to tell the captain, who comes back to the deck and suggests someone swim out to the buoy and tie a lifeline to it. He asks who will volunteer. Shinji is the only one who speaks up and offers to tie the line.

Shinji grabs the line, stands still, and listens. He can tell the typhoon is right above them. It feels somehow “natural” to him that he should be the one to swim into the storm. Shinji removes his raincoat as the other crew members tie the end of the line to the boat. At last, it is time for Shinji to tie the other end around his own waist and swim for the buoy. As he leaps into the sea, he realizes that Hatsue’s picture is in his raincoat.

Shinji swims through the roiling waves, exhausted as the buoy seems to only be growing farther away. Nonetheless, Shinji swims onward. At last he reaches the buoy. A wave lifts him and deposits him on its flat surface. Shinji catches his breath for a moment, then begins untying the line from his waist. Shinji wrestles with the wind, the sea, and the weight of the rope as he ties the lifeline to the buoy. At last the line is secure. Shinji raises his arm in excitement and sees the crew wave back. Forgetting his exhaustion, he dives back into the sea. As he arrives back at the ship, the crew hoists him aboard and helps him straight to bed. In the morning, Shinji wakes to find a glittering sea and a clear blue sky shining seemingly just for him.

CHAPTER 15

The *Utajima-maru* returns to the mainland several days behind schedule, toward the end of August. From there, Shinji takes the ferry back to Uta-jima, where Shinji immediately visits the Yashiro Shrine to give thanks for his safe return. At Jukichi’s there is a large party celebrating Shinji’s success on the journey. Two days later, while out on Jukichi’s fishing boat, Jukichi says he heard of Shinji’s great deed in Okinawa. Shinji insists he simply did his job. Jukichi asks if Shinji has heard anything from Uncle Teru. Shinji says he hasn’t, and Jukichi is silent.

At dusk, as Shinji returns to shore, he spies one of Terukichi’s big freighters out on the ocean. He marvels at how, just a few months ago, he knew nothing of life on the freighter—now, however, he can feel in his bones the memory of touching the unknown. He holds his hand up and waves to the freighter.

In this passage, things grow dire. Yasuo acts cowardly, refusing to even look at the captain as the captain asks for a volunteer to help save both their own ship and the bonito ship. When Yasuo is silent, Shinji speaks up and proves himself to be the bravest member of the crew by far. Shinji’s selflessness in volunteering to risk his life for the good of his crew—plus a crew he doesn’t even know—signals that he has truly come into his own.



Even though Shinji has a momentary hesitation, fearing either that if he is wounded or killed in the storm, he might not make it back to Hatsue (or simply that his photo of her will be discovered, leading to a new cycle of gossip and rumor), he decides to work with nature rather than against it to accomplish the task ahead.



In this passage, as Shinji fights against the powerful storm to do what is right for his ship and his crew, it is clear that Shinji works with nature at every turn rather than against it. Because he has spent his life studying the lessons nature has to teach, he is able to commune with nature even in the deadliest of circumstances. After the storm breaks and the sun at last shines through, Mishima illustrates the incredible feats one can accomplish—and the gifts they can receive—when one respects nature properly.



Jukichi seems to know something that Shinji doesn’t. It’s clear that news of Shinji’s brave exploits has already made its way back to the island—and there is the sense that Shinji is going to be further recognized or even rewarded for his heroic actions.



Shinji has had new experiences that have changed him profoundly and allowed him to see the world in a different way. He has learned nature’s lessons and grown stronger for it.



The lighthouse-keeper and his wife, meanwhile, grow fretful when Chiyoko refuses to return to the island for the end of summer vacation. They write her many letters begging her to come home. At last she replies, writing down the truth of the rumor she began about Shinji and Hatsue earlier in the year. She says she is tormented by guilt and refuses to return to the island until Shinji and Hatsue are together. She asks for her mother to act as a go-between and persuade Terukichi to let Shinji marry his love. The lighthouse-keeper's wife immediately puts the letter down, changes into her best clothes, and heads down to the village toward the Miyata house.

On the way to Terukichi's, the lighthouse-keeper's wife spies Shinji's mother doing laundry in the stream with some other diving women. Realizing how strange it is to greet them and then head onward to arrange Shinji's mother's son's own marriage, she stops and quietly asks Shinji's mother if there is any news where Shinji and Hatsue are concerned. Shinji's mother says that while Shinji and Hatsue are in love, Hatsue's father stands between them. The lighthouse-keeper's wife divulges the truth of Chiyoko's letter—and her own intentions—to Shinji's mother. Shinji's mother expresses her gratitude for the lighthouse-keeper's wife's generosity.

At the Miyata home, the lighthouse-keeper's wife enters and finds Terukichi already descending the stairs. He greets her happily and asks what she has to say. He is shocked, however, when five other women, including Shinji's mother, enter the sitting-room. The lighthouse-keeper's wife says she wants to talk to Terukichi about Hatsue and Shinji. Terukichi cuts her off—he says he has already chosen Shinji to be Hatsue's husband. He believes they are too young to be married—when Shinji comes of age, the two can have a proper wedding. He even volunteers to take in Hiroshi and Shinji's mother.

Terukichi continues explaining himself to the shocked women. He admits that after he stopped Shinji and Hatsue from seeing each other, Hatsue became so depressed that he engineered a test to see if Shinji was truly the man his daughter believed him to be, or if Yasuo would be the better match. He recruited both young men to work on the freighter—and when the captain reported Shinji's great deeds in Okinawa, Terukichi realized that Shinji was indeed “the one” for Hatsue. “The only thing that really counts in a man,” Terukichi observes, “is his get-up-and-go.”

This passage makes it clear that Chiyoko feels genuine and deep regret for her actions earlier on in the year. She knows the magnitude of what she has set in motion—and while she is too ashamed and fearful to confront it head-on, she is determined to somehow find a way to right the wrongs she's done.



The lighthouse-keeper's wife wants to visit Terukichi in order to repair her own family—but here, she selflessly stops to consider that her actions may have wide-ranging ramifications. She has learned from Chiyoko's mistakes. Age and wisdom have brought her the foresight to see that the cycle of gossip, subterfuge, and lies must stop somewhere—and she wants it to stop with her.



The village women bind together to confront Terukichi and demand he change his point of view on Shinji—but little do they know that Terukichi has been up to his own sleuthing in order to determine Shinji's character and worth. Terukichi proves himself to ultimately be a generous, selfless man as he offers to take care of not only Shinji, but also his entire family, so that Shinji's mother doesn't have to work so hard and worry about her sons' well-being.



Terukichi reveals his master plan in this passage. He knew that whether or not the rumors were true, he had to find a way to test Shinji's character. Seeing the lessons Shinji has learned from nature put into action has confirmed to Terukichi that Shinji is brave, devoted, selfless, and willing to test the limits of what he's capable of rather than hide from responsibility.



CHAPTER 16

Shinji can now visit the Miyata house openly. He arrives one night after fishing to collect Hatsue—they are going to visit the Yashiro Shrine and then the lighthouse to announce their engagement and give thanks to the lighthouse-keeper's wife. At the shrine, as Shinji and Hatsue stoop to pray, he realizes that he has been given everything he's prayed to the sea-god for. He gives thanks for a long time, then offers a fresh red snapper to the shrine's priest. The priest congratulates Hatsue and Shinji and offers to officiate their wedding.

At the lighthouse, Shinji calls out to announce their presence. The lighthouse-keeper's wife opens the door and excitedly invites Shinji and Hatsue in. She happily tells them that Chiyoko is returning home tomorrow at long last. Shinji, who knows nothing of all the emotions his journey has aroused in Chiyoko, thinks nothing of the comment. After staying for dinner, Shinji and Hatsue agree to let the lighthouse-keeper give them a tour of the lighthouse and see its bright beacon.

At the top, the lighthouse-keeper leaves Shinji and Hatsue alone so that they can enjoy the beauty of the rotating beacon. Though darkness stretches ahead of them in all directions, the beam wafts its light around everywhere. Shinji holds Hatsue and thinks deeply about how his little island, "enfolded in darkness" as it is, has protected his and Hatsue's love. Hatsue reaches into her sleeve and pulls out the pink shell Shinji gave her. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out the picture Hatsue gave him. Hatsue becomes emotional, believing her picture protected Shinji from the typhoon. Shinji, however, knows that his own strength is what guided him through the perilous night.

Shinji and Hatsue know that they are not alone in the journey of their love. They believe that nature, the gods, the community, and the island itself have all played a part in nurturing them and helping to guide them toward one another. Shinji and Hatsue selflessly give thanks in this passage, demonstrating that they have come into their own as mature partners and lovers.



Shinji and Hatsue's courtship has been defined by the debilitating forces of gossip and rumor—but even now, they are not aware of the root of all that strife. Chiyoko was the instigator of their misery—yet she did what she needed to do to repair the things she'd broken.



In the novel's final lines, Mishima uses the metaphor of the lighthouse's beacon shining through the darkness to suggest that Shinji and Hatsue will continue to light one another's way through even the darkest times in life. Shinji's love for Hatsue gives him strength and confidence—yet Mishima ultimately argues that it is the lessons Shinji has learned from nature that have given him the deep inner strength to forge onward with or without Hatsue at his side. Hatsue, too, has grown stronger because of what the sea has taught her. Though the ocean is dark, cold, and unknowable—just like life—devoted love and inner strength can give a person the power to go on.





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