

# Fritz



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SATYAJIT RAY

Satyajit Ray was born on May 2, 1921, in Calcutta, the capital of British India (now Kolkata). His father died in 1923, and he was raised by his mother as an only child. Ray was fluent in both Bengali and English, having been educated in both languages, including at Presidency College in Calcutta where he earned a BA in economics. In 1940, Ray's mother convinced him to attend art school Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan, which was founded by Rabindranath Tagore. Through this experience, Ray gained an appreciation for Indian art and culture and read books that would influence him in his pursuit of filmmaking. He dropped out of art school in 1943 and returned to Calcutta, where he spent nearly a decade working in advertising. While in London for work in 1950, Ray saw the Italian neo-realist classic *The Bicycle Thief* (1948) by Vittorio de Sico and decided to devote himself to filmmaking. On his return to Calcutta, he worked as Jean Renoir's assistant on the filming of *The River* and, thanks to Renoir's encouragement, resolved to go ahead with his first film, *Pather Panchali* (1955). Though it had little financial support and took three years to complete, the film was a major critical and commercial success and even won a major award at the 1956 Cannes Film Festival. Ray would go on to create 36 films, including features, documentaries, and shorts, and become known as the greatest Indian filmmaker of all time. Among the many honors he received throughout his life are an Academy Honorary Award for lifetime achievement and the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award. Though he is most famous for his films, Ray was also a prolific fiction writer whose novels and short stories specifically targeted young readers. In 1961, Ray revived the children's literary magazine *Sandesh*, founded by his uncle in 1913. He would continue editing the publication until his death in 1992 at the age of 70.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Satyajit Ray lived and worked in India at a momentous period in its history, having borne witness to the country's hard-fought independence after nearly a century of British rule. While the story of "Fritz" does not explicitly delve into the ramifications of this colonial legacy, Ray does allude to India's pre-independence era, as he at one point describes the city of Bundi as resembling "old Rajputana," evoking a name for the region of Rajasthan that was allegedly coined by the British. Nevertheless, explorations of the ongoing effect of the kind of cross-cultural contact spurred by Britain's occupation of the Indian subcontinent course through much of Ray's work, both

literary and cinematic. The multi-faceted dynamic between "East" and "West" (here, India and Europe) is indeed present in "Fritz," illustrated most prominently by the story of the doll's origins and the assumption that due to his Swiss identity and cultural and religious heritage, Fritz should be buried rather than cremated after death (the latter of which is the common practice of Hindus in the region). By 1971, the year that "Fritz" was first published in Bengali, India was more than two decades out from independence, yet artistic and cultural production from the era remained centered around the effects that such consequential political and economic shifts were continuing to have on the region, especially the growing tension between tradition and modernity. Ray's corpus is no different, and the prolific author and filmmaker provided his audiences with empathetic and humanistic takes on a complex and diverse society in the midst of ongoing change.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Satyajit Ray's literary works are part of a vast corpus of twentieth-century Bengali literature, a subset of Indian literature written in the vernacular language Bengali. Poet, playwright, and author Rabindranath Tagore is one of the most well-known Bengali writers from the twentieth century. Tagore, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913, is best known for his poetry, and his poem "The Fort of Bundi" is referenced in the beginning of "Fritz." English translations of Tagore's poetry include *The Gardener* (1913), *Fruit-Gathering* (1916), *The Fugitive* (1921), and highly acclaimed *Gitanjali: Song Offerings* (1912). Bengali literature is especially well-known for short stories, of which Ray was a particularly prolific writer. Some of Ray's best-known short stories, which target young readers, include "Khagam," "Indigo," "The Pterodactyl's Egg," and "Patol Babu, Film Star," all of which can be read in *Satyajit Ray: The Collected Short Stories*. In Bengal, however, Ray's most popular works center around two fictional characters: Feluda, a detective and private investigator inspired by Sherlock Holmes, and Professor Shonku, a scientist and inventor. Their stories can also be read in translation, in anthologies such as *The Complete Adventures of Feluda*, vols. 1 and 2, and *The Diary of a Space Traveler and Other Stories* (2004, translated by Gopa Majumdar). Many of Ray's short stories, especially "Fritz," also evoke elements of the *fantastique*, a term that refers to a subgenre of (especially French) literature poised between fantasy and magical realism. More specifically, the *fantastique* is defined by the presence of supernatural or uncanny events and a hesitation on the part of both characters and readers to accept such events as real. The history of the genre extends as far back as medieval times, encompasses both literary and cinematic works, and often overlaps with "horror" or "gothic." A

few prominent examples of *fantastique* literature include the nineteenth-century works of German author E.T.A. Hoffmann, Guy de Maupassant's short story "The Horla" (1887), and the [Frankenstein](#) novels penned in the late 1950s and early 1960s by the late Jean-Claude Carrière.

## KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Fritz
- **When Published:** Bengali, 1971; English, 1993 in *The Penguin Book of Indian Ghost Stories*
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Short Story, Horror, *Fantastique*
- **Setting:** Bundi, Rajasthan, India
- **Climax:** Shankar and Jayanto convince the gardener to dig up the area where Fritz was buried and find a skeleton.
- **Antagonist:** Jayanto's perception of and relationship to the past
- **Point of View:** "Fritz" is recounted in the first person from the perspective of Jayanto's close friend, Shankar.

## EXTRA CREDIT

**Self-taught Artist.** With no formal training in filmmaking, Satyajit Ray has described himself as wholly self-taught. As an avid filmgoer, he claims that his primary education in cinema came from watching Hollywood films. Ray was especially a fan of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd.

**Like Father, Like Son.** Satyajit Ray is survived by his only son, Sandip, who has followed in his father's footsteps and maintained a prolific career as a filmmaker, writer, and editor. As of this writing in May 2023, Sandip is in the process of adapting one of his father's stories from the Professor Shonku detective series to film.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Shankar and Jayanto have recently arrived in Bundi and are having tea in the garden of the circuit house. The two have known each other since their school days and, in spite of the fact that they have embarked on different career paths, they remain close friends. They had been planning to take a trip together to Rajasthan for some time, and though there are other, more desirable destinations in the region, Jayanto insisted that they come to Bundi. Jayanto's desire to visit Bundi at first puzzles Shankar, but on the train up, Jayanto confesses that he had visited the town as a child and wishes to revisit it to see how it compares to his memories. Jayanto is an emotional person, and he has been quiet and pensive ever since they got to the circuit house. Shankar believes that the return of his childhood memories has caused him to feel depressed. During

their conversation, Jayanto tells Shankar how much grander the circuit house seemed to him as a kid. Now that he is an adult, the place has lost a lot of its charm, and Jayanto remarks on the fact that those inaccuracies would have remained with him had he never decided to return.

After tea, Shankar and Jayanto are strolling through the garden when, out of nowhere, Jayanto pauses and says the word "deodar." He begins searching for the tree and is delighted when he finds it where he expected it to be. When Shankar asks him why the tree matters to him so much, Jayanto cannot recall. Instead, he mentions "a European," and the two go on about their evening. Then, at dinner, Jayanto starts to remember more and more. He shows Shankar where his parents used to spend time and recalls the physical features of the old circuit house cook. Finally, he tells the story of **Fritz**, a lifelike doll that one of his uncles brought to him from Switzerland. Jayanto loved Fritz more than any of his other toys and would spend hours playing with the doll and talking to it. Shankar asks Jayanto what happened to Fritz, and Jayanto tells him that he had brought it with him to Bundi, where it was destroyed by a couple of stray dogs. Believing Fritz to be dead, Jayanto buried him directly into the ground at the foot of the deodar tree that he had seen earlier that day.

That night, Shankar is woken up by a strange sound and sees Jayanto sitting up on his bed looking terrified. Jayanto tells Shankar that he felt something walk across his chest. Shankar tries to search the room to find it, believing it to be some kind of small animal, but finds nothing. Then, Jayanto shows Shankar some brown circular marks on his quilt. Shankar tries to reassure Jayanto by telling him that it could have been a cat and, after more attempts to comfort his friend, falls back asleep. It is clear the next morning that Jayanto has barely slept, but the two have already made plans to rent a car and go and visit the Fort of Bundi, which they had seen from afar the previous day while sightseeing. While they are out, more of Jayanto's memories return, and his joy and enthusiasm suggest that he has forgotten all about his doll. This reassures Shankar until about an hour later, when he finds Jayanto alone on a terrace and staring off into the distance. Jayanto asks Shankar if they can leave, and it becomes clear in the car that his anxiety is mounting. Shankar pleads with him to tell him what is going on, no matter how unbelievable it might be, so Jayanto tells him he believes it was Fritz who had come into their room the night before.

Not wanting the memory of this doll to ruin his friend's vacation, Shankar convinces Jayanto to dig up Fritz's burial spot. Though Jayanto is hesitant at first, he eventually lets himself be persuaded. A little later, they spot the gardener, and Shankar approaches him and asks if he would do them the favor. Though there is at first no sign of the doll, the gardener keeps digging and eventually uncovers a pristine, twelve-inch-long, white human skeleton.



## CHARACTERS

**Shankar** – Shankar is the story's narrator. He works as a teacher and is around 37 years old. Shankar has been planning a trip to Rajasthan with his childhood friend, Jayanto, for some time. Shankar agrees to visit Bundi with Jayanto but is puzzled by his friend's choice until Jayanto tells him he wants to see how modern Bundi compares to his childhood memories. A devoted friend, he spends a lot of time listening to Jayanto share memories from his childhood trips to Bundi, including the rather intriguing story of **Fritz**, a lifelike doll that Jayanto's uncle had gotten him from Switzerland. Shankar watches as his friend grows increasingly anxious throughout their trip and begins to worry that his memories are depressing him. One night, Jayanto wakes up terrified because he feels something walk across his chest. Shankar not only searches the room to find whatever it might have been, but he also tries to comfort his friend by telling him it was either a cat or a dream. The next day, while they are visiting the famous fort, Shankar sees that Jayanto is restless and agrees to go back to the circuit house with him even though he would rather stay at the fort. In the car, he asks Jayanto what is wrong, and Jayanto says he believes it was Fritz who had walked across his chest. Though Shankar finds this implausible, his concern for his friend motivates him to find a solution for his anxiety. He eventually convinces Jayanto to have the gardener dig up Fritz's burial spot, revealing a miniature human skeleton.

**Jayanto** – Jayanto is the story's protagonist. He works in the editorial department of a newspaper and is about 37 years old. Friends describe him as emotional. Jayanto has been planning a trip to Rajasthan with his childhood friend, Shankar, for some time. Though there are more popular destinations in the region, Jayanto convinces Shankar to go to Bundi. He admits on the train ride up that he had visited Bundi as a child and wants to see how it compares to his memories of it. After they arrive, Jayanto is anxious and withdrawn, and he tells Shankar that this trip is challenging his childhood perceptions of the place. Eventually, he tells Shankar the story of **Fritz**, a lifelike doll that one of his uncles had brought him from Switzerland. Jayanto had a lot of toys as a child but loved this doll the most. He would spend hours playing with it and talking to it and became so obsessed that his parents even warned him not to overdo it. When Shankar asks what happened to the doll, Jayanto tells him that he had brought it with him to Bundi and that it was destroyed by two stray dogs. That night, after telling the story, Jayanto is awakened by the sensation that something had walked across his chest. Though Shankar attempts to comfort him, he is barely able to sleep afterward. The next day he is obviously unwell, and he tells Shankar that he believes it was Fritz who had come in their room the night before. Jayanto concedes to Shankar's suggestion to dig up Fritz's burial spot, but when they do, instead of the doll they find a miniature

human skeleton.



## 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.



## THE ELUSIVE NATURE OF MEMORY

"Fritz" explores the elusive nature of memory. The two main characters, Shankar and Jayanto, are on a trip together in Bundi, Rajasthan. Out of many possible destinations in the region, they have chosen Bundi because Jayanto had visited it as a child and wants to see how it compares to his childhood memories. While they are there, Jayanto is able to recall more and more about his time there, and the act of remembering becomes the primary driver of the plot, propelling it toward its eerie conclusion.

This remembering process particularly comes into focus around **Fritz**, a one-foot-long, incredibly lifelike figure of an old man that one of Jayanto's uncles had bought him in a small village in Switzerland. As a child, Jayanto had brought Fritz to Bundi, where it was destroyed by two stray dogs. This memory deeply haunts Jayanto, disturbing him to the point that he imagines Fritz coming (back) to life and walking across his chest while he sleeps. In an attempt to assuage Jayanto's fears and anxiety, Shankar arranges to dig up Fritz from his old burial spot. However, instead of the doll's remnants, they see a bare, doll-sized, human skeleton.

As the story depicts it, then, memory is not simply the story one tells about the past, but rather serves as the past's entryway into the present. While back in Bundi as an adult, Jayanto's childhood memories of Fritz slowly trickle in. At first, this process is unconscious: strolling through the garden after tea, Jayanto suddenly recalls a deodar tree but is only able to connect its significance vaguely to "a European." The reader eventually learns that the European is, of course, Fritz, and the deodar tree marks the spot where Jayanto buried him after his untimely end. Indeed, the more Jayanto uncovers about his past, especially as it relates to Fritz, the more anxious and depressed he becomes. These altered mental and emotional states are linked to the disheartening realization that he had preserved a false image of his childhood in his mind. In the end, Fritz's true identity remains shrouded in mystery, and the reader is left with more questions than answers. In this way, the story suggests that human memory is not only unreliable, but it also has the capacity to fundamentally distort the truth about the past.



## FRIENDSHIP

Shankar and Jayanto's relationship is central to the plot of "Fritz," which illustrates the critical role that friendship plays in working through difficult

memories and emotions. Shankar and Jayanto have known each other since childhood, and despite having pursued different career paths (one is a teacher, and the other works for a newspaper), the two remain close friends. The intimacy of their bond is illustrated throughout the story, mostly through Shankar's many acts of generosity and compassion (for example, coming to Bundi with Jayanto in the first place, listening to Jayanto's stories about his childhood, and patiently comforting Jayanto through his depression and anxiety). Though the plot arguably centers around Jayanto's process of unearthing childhood memories (specifically those pertaining to the loss of his favorite doll, Fritz), the story is told from Shankar's point of view. And the fact that Jayanto's memories are recounted from the perspective of a good friend, and not that of a detached observer, suggests that true friendship forms the necessary context within which Jayanto can confront his painful past: in the end, it is thanks to Shankar's dedication to his friend that they unearth the spot where Fritz had been buried. In this light, the fact that Fritz's identity remains mysterious at the end of the story matters less than Shankar's role in helping his friend face his fears.

Yet the fact that the two are friends and not merely strangers or acquaintances is more than a central thematic element of the story; it is also crucial for the formal and aesthetic development of the plot as it defines how the story is actually told. The nature of Shankar and Jayanto's friendship is part of the reason that Satyajit Ray is able to so effectively draw the reader into the storyline: by encouraging the reader to identify with Shankar's perspective—not only as a narrator but also as Jayanto's close friend—Ray ignites the reader's compassion for Jayanto. In this way, friendship becomes the filter through which the reader experiences Jayanto's story.



## THE SUPERNATURAL

Satyajit Ray's literary works often incorporate elements of the supernatural, and "Fritz" is no different. In the story, the supernatural centers

around Fritz, Jayanto's old doll, and Ray uses Fritz to interrogate the relationship between memory and reality. Jayanto loved Fritz and played with him all the time. He even brought it with him on a family trip to Bundi where, unfortunately, it was destroyed by a couple of stray dogs. Because Fritz was "a European," Jayanto believed a funeral to be the appropriate way to mark Fritz's untimely passing, so he buried the doll in the garden of the circuit house. Though the memory of Fritz's violent fate is at first difficult to recall, it soon becomes clear that it has deeply impacted Jayanto. Thirty-one years later, Jayanto is still so tormented by grief and guilt over

what happened to Fritz that he believes the doll came to life, entered his room, and walked across his chest in the night. Later the next day, to get Jayanto's mind off this doll, Shankar suggests that they dig up the place where Fritz was buried. Yet when they finally unearth his spot, what they find is a perfectly intact human skeleton, and this utterly terrifying conclusion incites more questions than it does answers about who Fritz actually was.

Thus the supernatural arises in moments of heightened fear and anxiety related to the untold story of Fritz's identity. And because the supernatural is always associated with such heightened emotional states, it not only contributes to the buildup of narrative tension and suspense, but it also illustrates how Jayanto's understanding of reality is impacted by these intense emotions. Through the mystery surrounding Fritz's true identity, then, Ray skillfully incorporates the supernatural to show how unresolved events from the past will quite literally haunt the present. In doing so, he suggests that at the core of Jayanto's fear and apprehension are childhood grief and guilt—feelings that can't be rationally understood or categorized.



## SYMBOLS

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



## FRITZ

The doll Fritz symbolizes Jayanto's painful and unresolved past. While revisiting Bundi as an adult,

Jayanto slowly unearths memories from his childhood visits there. Jayanto is at first unable to recall the details about Fritz's identity (he first recalls only the deodar tree and then relates it to something about "a European"). Eventually, however, he shares the story of Fritz's tragic final days in Bundi: he was plucked up by two stray dogs and ultimately destroyed in a game of tug-of-war. It soon becomes clear that this memory haunts Jayanto: later that night, Jayanto is awoken by a strange sensation on his chest and believes that Fritz visited him while he slept. Jayanto becomes increasingly anxious the following day, and a concerned Shankar hopes to rid him of his anxiety by digging up Fritz's old burial spot. Yet instead of the doll, they find a doll-sized human skeleton, a strange and unexpected turn of events that suggests there is more to Fritz's story than perhaps even Jayanto is aware of. The doll thus becomes a symbol for mysterious and unresolved aspects of Jayanto's childhood. Though one may attempt to bury it, just as Jayanto literally buries his doll, the past never really dies and will likely haunt those who refuse to confront it.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *The Collected Short Stories* published in 2015.

## Fritz Quotes

☞ He had always wanted to return after growing up, just to see how much the modern Bundi compared to the image he had in his mind.

**Related Characters:** Shankar (speaker), Jayanto

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 189

**Explanation and Analysis**

This passage is found near the beginning of the story. Shankar and Jayanto arrived in Bundi earlier that morning and are having tea in the circuit house. The two are childhood friends and had been planning a trip to Rajasthan, the region where Bundi is located, for quite a while. According to Shankar, though there are more historically significant destinations in the region, they decided to go to Bundi because Jayanto had insisted on it. Even though Shankar goes along with Jayanto's idea, he is initially confused by it. Then, on the train up, Jayanto explains himself, and this line sums up his reason: having visited Bundi as a child, Jayanto wishes to return in order to see how it compares to his memories of it.

Importantly, this quote clues the reader into one of the story's central themes: memory. More specifically, it shows how memory serves to mediate the relationship between past and present. Here, Jayanto's memories govern his connection to Bundi, and as is revealed throughout the story, his relationship to memory will have a profound impact on his attitude and behaviors. It is interesting to note that, despite the fact that memory is Jayanto's dominant motivation, his memories are often sporadic and, at times, even inaccessible to him. Nevertheless, memory is important in terms of both the story's thematic and plot development. As this quote illustrates, the act of remembering is what sets the plot in motion.

☞ "You know, Shankar, it is really quite strange. The first time I came here I used to sit cross-legged on these chairs. It seemed as though I was sitting on a throne. Now the chairs seem both small in size and very ordinary. The drawing-room here used to seem absolutely enormous. If I hadn't returned, those memories would have remained stuck in my mind."

**Related Characters:** Jayanto (speaker), Shankar

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 190

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, Shankar and Jayanto are having tea on their first day in Bundi. Jayanto's demeanor has changed since their arrival, and he appears very quiet and preoccupied. Shankar believes that the return of Jayanto's childhood memories is causing him to feel depressed. Jayanto is more sensitive than most, after all, and perhaps he is feeling nostalgic. However, as this quote illustrates, it is more than nostalgia that has altered Jayanto's mood. Rather, he faces the fallibility of his own memory: in real time, he must confront the fact that his childhood memories and present-day experience of Bundi do not match up. He must now contend with the possibility that, in his own mind, he had preserved a false image of his childhood.

Most readers can identify with the experience of visiting a place one knew as a child and then noticing a disconnect between the memory of that place and present-day reality. Such experiences end up demonstrating how unreliable human memory can be. And, as a result, they call into question one's experience of reality and the meaning one has made of their life story. It is arguable that this is what Jayanto is going through during his trip to Bundi, and this realization is stirring up feelings of fear and apprehension.

☞ "But why did you suddenly think of a tree?"  
[...] "I can't remember that now. Something had brought me near the tree. I had done something here. A European..."  
"European?"  
"No, I can't recall anything at all. Memory is a strange business..."

**Related Characters:** Shankar, Jayanto (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 191



### Explanation and Analysis


This passage illustrates the elusive nature of memory. In particular, it shows how peculiar and often unpredictable memory can be. Here, Shankar and Jayanto are in the midst of a stroll through the circuit house garden when, all of a sudden, Jayanto stops and thinks of a deodar tree. This memory causes him to walk to the far end of the space where, to his delight, he finds the tree exactly where he remembered it would be. However, even though this excites him, he has no idea why the tree has come to mind; all Jayanto can recall is something about “a European.”

What is interesting to note here is how memory is presented as a powerful, almost supernatural, force: it arises spontaneously from deep within Jayanto’s unconscious mind and pulls him to locate a specific object in a specific place. Jayanto is aware of the peculiarity of his situation—calling memory a “strange business,” he seems to understand that his behaviors are somehow beyond his control, that he is at the mercy of his unpredictable and mysterious subconscious. In this light, the passage also adds an additional layer of meaning to Jayanto’s original intent to come to Bundi, suggesting that perhaps another unconscious memory lies at the root of his decision to return. Either way, by introducing the relationship between the deodar tree and an anonymous European, this quote also introduces an important element of mystery to the story, which will become central to the developing plot line.

☞ It was not the usual kind of doll little girls play with. One of Jayanto’s uncles had brought for him from Switzerland a twelve-inch-long figure of an old man, dressed in traditional Swiss attire. Apparently, it was very lifelike.

**Related Characters:** Shankar (speaker), Jayanto

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 191

### Explanation and Analysis



As the trip progresses, Jayanto is able to recall more and more of his childhood memories and eventually shares the memory of his favorite toy, a doll named Fritz. As this passage illustrates, Fritz was not an ordinary doll. Rather, he stood apart thanks to his “very lifelike” appearance. This is a significant quote, though its significance is best understood


in the context of the entire story, specifically the ending. Initially, however, this quote is important because it fills the reader in on the identity of the anonymous European mentioned in a previous passage. Jayanto had associated the deodar tree with “a European,” and the reader will soon learn that “European” refers to the identity of Jayanto’s Swiss doll.

By the end of the story, however, the passage becomes significant in light of the fact that Shankar and Jayanto find a skeleton in the spot where Fritz was buried, and this skeleton is exactly the same size as the doll (12 inches long). This will lead the reader to assume the skeleton belongs to Fritz, and this particular quote, which introduces Fritz as a special kind of toy, will play a role in retroactively generating all kinds of questions about the doll’s identity. For example, what did “very lifelike” actually refer to? Was Fritz really just a doll, or something else? By inspiring this line of questioning, unassuming passages like this one—which hint at something possibly supernatural without necessarily being overt or obvious—contribute to the aesthetic impact of a story like “Fritz” and add to its eerie and uncanny quality.

☞ “But once I had Fritz, I forgot all my other toys. I played only with him. A time came when I began to spend hours just talking to him. Our conversation had to be one-sided, of course, but Fritz had such a funny smile on his lips and such a look in his eyes, that it seemed to me as though he could understand every word. Sometimes I wondered if he would actually converse with me if I could speak to him in German. Now it seems like a childish fantasy, but at the time the whole thing was very real to me.”

**Related Characters:** Jayanto (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 192

### Explanation and Analysis


In this passage, Jayanto elaborates on what Fritz meant to him as a child. The reader has just learned about Fritz’s striking physical characteristics (the details in his attire, his mobile limbs, the smile on his face), and now Jayanto shares that he had become so attached to Fritz that he had stopped playing with all his other toys and developed what he considered a “very real” friendship with him. Filtered


through Jayanto's adult lens, that relationship now feels like a "childish fantasy." However, it eventually becomes clear that this assumption might be another example of memory's fundamental unreliability.

Similar to the way that Fritz's "very lifelike" qualities become an important detail in light of the story's spooky ending, so, too, does Jayanto's "very real" relationship to Fritz. The story's aesthetic development relies on an ability to cast doubt on the reliability of Jayanto's memory—which Jayanto himself calls into question, for instance, when he notices the disconnect between his image of Bundi from the past and his experience in the present—and suspend the reader's belief in the story told. Because of this, when Shankar and Jayanto uncover a skeleton instead of a doll at the end, the reader cannot help but wonder if Jayanto's friendship with Fritz was, in fact, not a fantasy. Thus, in addition to contributing important details about Fritz's identity, this passage also contributes to the effectiveness of the ending by suggesting that there might be an as yet untold supernatural element to Fritz's story. Once again, the quote inspires certain questions: was Fritz really a doll, or something else?

“In other words, Fritz did not exist for me anymore. He was dead. [...] I buried him under that deodar tree. I had wanted to make a coffin. Fritz was, after all, a European. But I could find nothing, not even a little box. So, in the end, I buried him just like that.”

**Related Characters:** Jayanto (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 193

### Explanation and Analysis

Unfortunately, Jayanto's relationship with Fritz came to a tragic end when the doll was destroyed by two stray dogs, and this passage recounts the details surrounding the end of Fritz's existence. Jayanto had brought Fritz with him to Bundi when he was a child and, one afternoon, left Fritz on the grass so that he could go inside to change clothes. When he returned, he found him battered beyond recognition. Believing Fritz was dead, Jayanto decided to hold a funeral for him. However, he was unable to find materials to construct a coffin, so he buried him directly in the ground, underneath the deodar tree.

This passage is significant for a number of reasons. For one, it touches upon the cultural divide that ostensibly existed between Jayanto, who is Indian, and Fritz, a European. This division is also alluded to in a previous passage, where Jayanto, as a child, lamented the fact that he could not speak to Fritz in German and wondered if this was a barrier to their relating. As far as the reader is concerned, Fritz was a toy. But as a child, Jayanto had attributed very lifelike qualities to him. The language that Jayanto uses to describe Fritz's untimely demise—saying that he no longer “existed” and that he was “dead”—in particular illustrates how “very real” Fritz was for Jayanto and shows that Jayanto likely believed his toy was alive. Moreover, Jayanto even went as far as to respect the specific funerary practices associated with Fritz's European cultural identity (burial instead of cremation).

More importantly, however, this passage elucidates the mystery of the deodar tree. What is especially interesting to note here is that Jayanto initially could not recall why he was so drawn to that tree. This is puzzling considering the fact that the toy he buried meant so much to him. It is from this point on that Fritz's symbolic development begins to take shape, and he comes to represent aspects of Jayanto's past that have been buried but perhaps not altogether forgotten.

I had no doubt that Jayanto had only had a bad dream. All those childhood memories had upset him, obviously, and that was what had led to his dreaming of a cat walking on his chest.

**Related Characters:** Shankar (speaker), Jayanto

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 195

### Explanation and Analysis



While at first the memory of Fritz seems banal, it soon becomes apparent that Jayanto is tormented by it. The night after he tells Fritz's story, Jayanto is awoken by the sensation that something walked across his chest and left brown, circular marks on his quilt. Shankar eventually wakes up and sees the look of anxiety on Jayanto's face. After searching the room high and low for whatever it might have been and finding nothing, Shankar concludes that Jayanto had had a nightmare spurred by the painful memories that had resurfaced from his childhood that day. In other words, he believes Jayanto had had a nightmare about Fritz.


This passage is significant because it illustrates how memory functions as a channel for the past into the present. Memory is not simply the story one tells of the past; it also has the capacity to profoundly and directly impact one's current reality (in Jayanto's case, inciting panic and emotional distress). Shankar is a loyal friend who wants the best for Jayanto, and this passage illustrates how his realism and pragmatism provide a counterweight to Jayanto's sensitivity and emotionality. However, and perhaps most importantly, this passage also injects doubt into Jayanto's story. It suggests that Jayanto's memory, and therefore his perception of reality, is somehow faulty and unreliable, a perspective that is amplified by Shankar's use of the word "obviously." In light of the passage's allusion to a potentially supernatural occurrence, this element of doubt about what really happened, and in particular the hesitation it sparks in the reader, is very important, as it contributes to the formal and aesthetic development of the plot and is arguably necessary for the ending to have the shocking and spooky effect it does.

“Fritz came into our room last night. Those little marks on my quilt were his footprints.”

There was very little I could do at this except catch hold of him by the shoulders and shake him. How could I talk sensibly to someone whose mind was obsessed with such an absurd idea?

**Related Characters:** Shankar, Jayanto (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 197

### Explanation and Analysis

Despite Shankar's attempts to calm Jayanto down after he was awoken by a strange occurrence in the night, it is clear the next morning that he is still very upset. And though their trip to the Fort of Bundi was off to a positive start, Jayanto's demeanor quickly unravels, and he asks Shankar to leave early. Jayanto grows visibly more restless in the car on the way back to the circuit house and eventually opens up to Shankar. While the reader may have already guessed what Jayanto was thinking when he felt something walk across his chest the night before, this passage makes it explicit: Jayanto believes that it was Fritz. Shankar is completely caught off guard by the absurdity of this statement and, motivated by the compassion he feels for his friend, wants


to find a way to convince Jayanto of the implausibility of this idea—to “shake him,” so to speak.

Once again, Shankar's pragmatism and Jayanto's emotionality are pitted against one another, and it is as though the reader has to decide whom to believe. Despite the fact that dolls do not typically walk (which on its own makes Jayanto's theory questionable), Jayanto's reliability has been called into question multiple times throughout the story, so the reader cannot help but wonder whether, on the one hand, there might be more to Fritz's story—or, on the other, Jayanto has gone completely mad. Jayanto's admission occurs at a point in the story when his anxiety and restlessness have come to a head. Though the reasons are unclear, this passage makes it obvious that the uncovering of Fritz's memory has absolutely tormented him.

●● If Jayanto could actually be shown that that was all that was left of his precious doll, he might be able to rid himself of his weird notions; otherwise he would have strange dreams every night and talk of Fritz walking on his chest.

**Related Characters:** Shankar (speaker), Jayanto

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 197

### Explanation and Analysis

Shankar's idea to calm Jayanto's anxiety and get Fritz out of his mind is to dig up Fritz's old burial spot at the foot of the deodar tree. As the passage illustrates, Shankar believes that seeing is believing: if Jayanto can lay eyes on the partially destroyed remains of a doll that had been buried more than 30 years ago, he might be able to let go of the absurd notion that the doll came to life and visited him while he slept.

At this point in the story, the reader can be certain that Jayanto is deeply disturbed by the memories he is uncovering while in Bundi, especially as they pertain to Fritz. And Shankar, though compassionate, is losing patience, as indicated by the ironic way he refers to Fritz as his “precious doll.” Nevertheless, this passage elucidates how Fritz ultimately serves as a symbol of Jayanto's unresolved past, and how Shankar's friendship becomes the container in which Jayanto works through these painful, often buried, memories and emotions. In this light,




Shankar's suggestion to dig up Fritz can be read as a recommendation to confront those unexamined parts of his childhood in order to see the past more clearly. Intuitively, Shankar knows that if Jayanto does not confront his past, those parts that he has hidden from view will nonetheless continue to reveal themselves, and often in distressing ways.

●● The spade slipped from the gardener's hand. I, too, gaped at the ground, open-mouthed in horror, amazement and disbelief.

There lay at our feet, covered in dust, lying flat on its back, a twelve-inch-long, pure white, perfect little human skeleton.

**Related Characters:** Shankar (speaker), Jayanto

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 199

**Explanation and Analysis**

This passage comes at the very end of the story. After some convincing, Jayanto decides to go along with Shankar's idea to dig up Fritz's burial spot. So Shankar talks the gardener into helping them by offering him five rupees. However, the story takes a terrifying turn when, instead of a doll, they uncover a perfectly intact human skeleton, exactly the same size as Fritz, in the spot where Fritz was buried.

This ending hardly offers a resolution: instead of providing an answer regarding the truth about Fritz's identity, it leaves the reader with even more questions (specifically, what was Fritz?). At this point, the supernatural takes over the story. It signals the fraught relationship between memory and reality that had been touched upon throughout the story and serves to highlight how one's experience of the present is determined, at least in part, by how one relates to the past. In particular, the presence of the supernatural plays on the mystery surrounding Fritz's story in order to bring to the forefront all the doubt that had formed regarding Jayanto's perspective (and the accuracy and reliability of his memories). In doing so, it ultimately raises the question: is this *really* Fritz's burial spot? Would Jayanto even know? And for the first time, even practical Shankar is unable to rationalize the horror; all he can manage to do is to stop and stare.



## 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.

## FRITZ

Shankar and Jayanto are having tea in the garden of the circuit house in Bundi. Jayanto appears preoccupied with something, so Shankar asks him how he is doing. Jayanto tells Shankar that he is feeling much better. He is especially happy to be in Bundi, a place he last visited 31 years ago, when he was just six years old. Slowly, he is beginning to recall memories from that time.

*In this opening passage, the reader becomes acquainted with Shankar and Jayanto's friendship. In particular, they get a first glimpse of Shankar's compassion for his friend, as he has become concerned after noticing a change in Jayanto's mood following their arrival in Bundi. The reader also learns that Jayanto once visited Bundi as child, as his memories from that time are slowly resurfacing.*



Despite having pursued different career paths (Shankar is a teacher, and Jayanto works for a newspaper), the two have remained friends since childhood. They had been planning a trip to Rajasthan for a while. Though there are other, more popular destinations in that state, they chose Bundi at the request of Jayanto, who had been insisting on going there. Shankar had never been there before but was familiar with the name thanks to Tagore's poem, "The Fort of Bundi." In terms of historical significance, those other sites might have been more interesting choices. However, Bundi has a reputation as a beautiful town, and Shankar believes it is a perfectly suitable destination for a vacation.

*This passage provides further insight into the long-standing nature of Jayanto and Shankar's friendship. The reader also learns what has brought the two together after so long: a long overdue trip to Rajasthan and Jayanto's wish to see Bundi, in particular. The passage further affirms Shankar's character as an agreeable person and loyal friend: he has gone along with Jayanto's desire to visit Bundi even though other places in the region might have appealed to him more.*



The fact that Jayanto wants so badly to go to Bundi confuses Shankar until they are on the train together and Jayanto shares his reason. As a child, Jayanto had come to Bundi with his father, who traveled to historical places for his job in the Archaeological Department. He wanted to return to Bundi to see if the town still bore any resemblance to his childhood memories.

*This passage lays out Jayanto's motivations for wanting to visit Bundi and in so doing introduces the reader to the story's central theme: the elusive nature of memory. The fact that Jayanto wishes to compare modern Bundi to his memories of it illustrates how memory functions to mediate the relationship between past and present. However, as the passage also suggests a potential disconnect between the past as it exists in Jayanto's memories and present-day reality, it is unclear how trustworthy memory will prove to be.*



The circuit house in which Shankar and Jayanto are staying was built over a century ago under British rule. It is a one-story building with a sloped roof and an east-facing veranda bordered by a huge garden filled with roses in bloom and many species of local birds. That day, Shankar and Jayanto had gone on a sightseeing tour of the town and saw, nestled in the hillside, the famous Fort of Bundi. Except for the presence of electrical poles, the town does not look very modern. On seeing the cobbled streets, low balconies, and elaborately carved wooden doors, one might even believe that they had traveled through time.

Jayanto, who is a very sensitive person, has not had much to say since their arrival. Shankar wonders whether it is because his memories have caused him to feel depressed. Jayanto remembers how he used to feel like he was sitting on a throne when he sat on the chairs in the circuit house as a child. What once appeared enormous and extraordinary to him no longer has that effect. He remarks on the fact that, had he never returned, those memories would have remained unchanged. Shankar responds that this is normal. Though one may get bigger as one gets older, everything else remains the same size.

While walking through the garden after tea, Jayanto stops suddenly and says the word “deodar.” He is looking for a deodar tree that he has just recalled from his childhood and is thrilled to find it exactly where he remembered it being. Shankar wonders why all of a sudden this tree has come to mind. Jayanto frowns, saying he cannot remember anything at all, but mentions something about “a European.”

*This passage describes Bundi’s architectural features. While these descriptions are generally to the point, the passage ends by suggesting that, after visiting Bundi, one might feel as though they have traveled not only through space, but also through time. Though not overt, these lines offer the first real hint that there might something otherworldly or supernatural at work in Bundi, suggesting to the reader that there is perhaps more to the sleepy town than meets the eye.*



*Jayanto is beginning to remember more and more from his childhood and is visibly shaken because of it. Shankar is concerned but seems to think that this depression is linked to a feeling of nostalgia that these memories have provoked. Correcting Shankar’s perception, Jayanto acknowledges that, in fact, he sees now how his memories do not align with his present-day experience of Bundi. He realizes that he had been holding onto a false image from his childhood. The reader can intuit, then, that it is this realization, rather than nostalgia, that is at the root of Jayanto’s psychological distress, and which has aroused his generalized fear and apprehension.*



*This passage illustrates the curious nature of memory and the way that memories can appear spontaneously and without any obvious stimulus. It also shows how the process of remembering can be an involuntary one. Jayanto is elated to locate the deodar tree but cannot explain its significance to Shankar. Nevertheless, the reader begins to understand the profound effect the past is having on Jayanto’s consciousness, even without his full awareness of it. In this sense, memory is presented as an almost supernatural, unconscious force, powerful enough to drive one’s actions and even influence how and where one moves through space.*



Later, while they are having dinner, Jayanto recalls the red eyes and facial scar of the cook who worked at the circuit house when he was a child. Then, after dinner in the drawing room, more of Jayanto's memories slowly return. Eventually, he tells the story of **Fritz**, an incredibly lifelike doll that one of his uncles had brought him from Switzerland shortly before he visited Bundi with his parents. Though Jayanto had lots of toys as a child, as soon as he got Fritz, he forgot about them and devoted himself entirely to his new doll. He spent hours talking to him and even asked himself if Fritz might have responded had he spoken to him in German. Though his parents had warned him about playing with this doll too much, he did not listen.

Shankar asks Jayanto what happened to the doll. After many moments of silence, Jayanto responds that he had brought it to Bundi, where it was ultimately destroyed by a couple of stray dogs in a game of tug-of-war. When this happened, Jayanto believed that **Fritz** was dead and so buried him under the deodar tree. Because Fritz was European, he wanted to hold a funeral for him. He had hoped to build a coffin but, unable to find any sort of box to put him in, had to bury him directly into the ground.

Very tired after a long day of sightseeing, Shankar falls asleep soon after lying down. A little later, he is awakened by a noise and sees Jayanto seated on his bed with his light switched on. Jayanto looks very worried, so Shankar asks if he is feeling well. Jayanto says he felt something walk across his chest while he slept and wondered if there could be any small animals in the circuit house. He was very scared, and after waiting to turn on the light, did not see anything. Believing that whatever might have awoken Jayanto is still inside, Shankar thoroughly searches the room but finds nothing. Then, Jayanto shows him some small, brown, circular marks he has found on his quilt. Shankar reasonably concludes that they could have been put there by a cat.

*This passage continues the story's exploration of remembering through Jayanto. In particular, it highlights the multi-faceted nature of memory, as the specificity with which Jayanto is able to recall the physical features of the old circuit house cook stands in sharp contrast to the vagueness that encapsulated his original memory of the deodar tree. Most importantly, however, this passage introduces the reader to Fritz, the lifelike doll that Jayanto was given as a child and that will become an important symbol.*



*In this passage, the deodar tree's significance is revealed: it marks Fritz's burial place. Between this passage and the previous one, it is clear that Fritz was a very special toy and that there is more to know about the doll's story. More importantly, however, this passage elucidates Fritz's centrality as a symbol of Jayanto's unresolved past. The doll's actual burial in the dirt makes literal the repression of certain childhood memories, which Jayanto is slowly unearthing over the course of this trip.*



*After being awoken by the sensation that something walked across his chest, Jayanto is very worried. And while Shankar is patient and compassionate towards his friend, it is clear that he does not quite believe what Jayanto is telling him. This passage is the first to overtly introduce the reader to possible supernatural elements. At the same time, it injects doubt as to whose experience or perception of reality is most trustworthy, Jayanto's or Shankar's. This doubt is important in cultivating suspense and a key element in fantastique literature, which is defined by hesitation on the part of characters and/or the reader to accept such events as real. The passage also provides important insight into Shankar and Jayanto's friendship—the reader can observe how their dynamic plays out in moments of crisis, with Jayanto's emotionality balanced out by Shankar's pragmatism.*



Knowing that Jayanto was deeply upset by what just happened, but also wanting to get a good night of sleep before sightseeing the following day, Shankar tries to comfort him. He believes that Jayanto has had a bad dream. Shankar then turns off the light and falls fast asleep. The next morning, he sees that Jayanto has barely slept and resolves to offer him a tranquilizer before bed that night. The two then finish breakfast and rent a car to go and see the Fort of Bundi up close.

*Consistent with his character, Shankar attempts to calm Jayanto down by offering a reasonable explanation for why some brown, circular marks might have appeared on his quilt. Yet in spite of these earnest attempts, it is clear the next morning that they did not help and that Jayanto is still very frightened by what happened. Shankar has yet to concede that Jayanto might have experienced something spooky or mysterious and, instead, appears certain that his friend had merely had a bad dream. Regardless, it is impossible for the reader to know what actually happened, and the passage ends up inciting questions regarding Jayanto's childhood and the aspects of his past that might be returning to haunt him, both literally and figuratively.*



While they are at the fort, more of Jayanto's childhood memories return. Jayanto's delight makes Shankar believe he has forgotten all about **Fritz**. After about one hour, however, Shankar understands this is not the case. He finds Jayanto standing alone on the terrace, staring into space. He is so engrossed by his thoughts that he jumps when Shankar says his name. Shankar doesn't understand how Jayanto can be so sad in such a beautiful place. Jayanto asks him if he has seen enough of the fort and if they can return to the circuit house.

*This passage illustrates how memory also has the capacity to spark positive emotions—Jayanto's current joy contrasts with the apprehension and distress that have been overwhelming him until now. This is a good sign, and Shankar is relieved to see this, but his relief is ultimately short-lived. Jayanto's demeanor soon transforms, and he once again appears anxious and fearful. Jayanto's relationship to the past is continuing to adversely impact his present-day mood and attitudes. Nevertheless, though he is worried, Shankar remains loyal to his friend and leaves the Fort of Bundi at Jayanto's request even though, as he admits to the reader, he does not really want to.*



In the car, Shankar offers Jayanto a cigarette, which he refuses. Jayanto grows increasingly restless, which worries Shankar, who pleads with him to tell him what the matter is. Jayanto confesses that he believes it was **Fritz** who had come into their room that night. Though Shankar finds this idea to be absurd, he calmly reminds Jayanto that he had not seen anything. Jayanto says that though he saw nothing, he is certain that whatever had walked across his body had two legs. Shankar is determined not to let this childhood memory ruin his friend's experience. Later, in the bath, he gets the idea to dig up the area where Fritz is buried. He thinks that if they find some remnant of the doll, it might squash Jayanto's idea about Fritz having entered their room and calm his anxieties.

*Jayanto's anxiety reaches fever pitch as he admits he believes that something supernatural occurred in their room last night. Despite Jayanto's visible panic, Shankar's realism and pragmatism prevail. Instead of being spooked by Jayanto's improbable ideas, he becomes set on finding a way to calm his fears. In one sense, by encouraging Jayanto to dig up Fritz, Shankar is calling on him to unearth the painful truth about his past in order to set himself free emotionally in the present. Nevertheless, the intensity of Jayanto's emotional state continues to spur more questions about Fritz's identity, building suspense and leading the reader to wonder what it is that actually happened to him.*





At first, Jayanto likes the idea of unearthing Fritz but wonders how they will find a shovel and who will do the digging. Shankar says there is surely a gardener who would be willing to do it if they gave him a tip. Jayanto is uneasy about this but eventually persuaded. That afternoon, Shankar approaches the gardener with their request. The gardener acquiesces, and the three of them make their way to the deodar tree. There is no sign of Fritz at first, but the gardener keeps digging. Shankar hears a peacock and looks away briefly, turning back when Jayanto makes a strange sound. Shankar then notices Jayanto is trembling and pointing at the ground. They all become frozen with fear, as in the ground, where Jayanto had once buried Fritz, they find a perfectly intact, foot-long, human skeleton.

*The story reaches its chilling climax when Shankar and Jayanto convince the gardener to dig up Fritz's burial spot and instead of a decayed doll, they find a pristine, doll-sized, human skeleton. Unexpected and shocking, this ending leaves nothing resolved, and the truth about Fritz's identity remains a mystery. Yet when Fritz is read as a symbol of Jayanto's unresolved past, the conclusion illustrates how these repressed memories have continued to impact his emotional experience of the present. Indeed, it is Jayanto's gradual confrontation with the past—which took place over the course of the story—that generated his feelings of fear and apprehension. In the end, these intense emotions appear to be linked to some unresolved grief from his childhood, from which he has attempted to shield himself by burying them deep in his psyche. In Jayanto's case, the truth about the past remains mysterious, and it is left to the reader to speculate whether attempting to confront that truth (thanks to Shankar's loyalty and compassion) will prove to be good for Jayanto or will simply add to his horror and lack of resolution.*





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