The novel centers, in a very ambiguous way, around the life story of the protagonist Jacob Flanders, and is presented entirely by the impressions other characters have of Jacob (except for those times when we do indeed get Jacob's perspective). Thus, although it could be said that the book is primarily a character study and has little in the way of plot or background, the narrative is constructed as a void in place of the central character, if indeed the novel can be said to have a 'protagonist' in conventional terms. Motifs of emptiness and absence haunt the novel and establish its elegiac feel. (Wikipedia)