

Amsterdam Study Guide

Amsterdam by Ian McEwan

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



Contents

Amsterdam Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	5
Chapter 2.....	7
Chapter 3.....	9
Chapter 4.....	11
Chapter 5.....	13
Characters.....	15
Objects/Places.....	19
Themes.....	22
Style.....	24
Quotes.....	26
Topics for Discussion.....	29



Plot Summary

Molly Lane, a restaurant critic, has just died after suffering from a terminal disease that caused rapid deterioration of her physical and psychological faculties. At her funeral, her husband and former lovers have gathered at a crematorium in London to pay her their last respects. One of her former lovers is a composer named Clive Linley. Clive finds it unbearable to think of how horrible it must be to lose one's health so suddenly and he concludes that it is better to die than to suffer in the way in which Molly must have suffered just prior to her death. Clive asks his old friend, Vernon Halliday, who is also one of Molly's former lovers, to euthanize him if he should ever fall suddenly and irreparably ill. Vernon agrees to do so as long as Clive agrees to do the same for him.

After Molly's funeral, her husband discovers photographs of the British Foreign Secretary Julian Garmony. Molly had taken the photographs prior to her death. Molly and Julian were lovers at the time of her death and the photos depicted Julian dressed in women's clothing. The photos were clearly taken in private. George, seeing this as an opportunity to profit financially and to exact revenge over Julian, sells the photos to Vernon, whose London paper the *Judge* is desperately in need of a captivating story in order to improve its declining circulation. Vernon, who dislikes Julian for personal and political reasons, is more than willing to publish the potentially scandalous photos of Julian.

Before doing so, Vernon consults his old friend Clive on the matter. However, their discussion ends in a bitter argument marking the beginning of the collapse of their friendship. Vernon cites two reasons in favor of publication of the photos. First, it would expose Julian Garmony's hypocrisy since he has in the past denounced alternative sexual expressions. Second, it would greatly reduce Julian's chances of becoming Prime Minister, thereby saving the country from almost certain political, social, and economical disaster. Clive opposes publication of the photos because he thinks it is wrong to criticize or persecute someone for his sexual proclivities. Furthermore, such an action would constitute a betrayal of Molly. Thus, Clive begins to perceive Vernon as a man who lacks a certain moral sensitivity. Vernon sees Clive as a self-righteous critic, who fails to appreciate the consequences of not publishing the photos.

Leading up to the publication date, Vernon has successfully rallied his staff's support. Although many of his staff members wished to have their reservations documented in the minutes of their meetings, they expressed support for Vernon's proposal to publish the photos. They even hailed him as an editor with keen journalistic instincts.

Despite these successes, Vernon suffers a professional blow on the eve of publication. Rose Garmony, Julian's wife, holds a press conference in which she unveils one of the photos. She pledges her support for her husband and denounces Vernon. Vernon's staff, who had openly praised him for using the Garmony story to increase circulation of the *Judge*, quickly withdrew their support and Vernon is forced to resign. Before Vernon's disgraceful dismissal from the *Judge*, Clive sends Vernon a card in which the former claimed that the latter deserved to be fired. However, Vernon receives the card



only after he was actually fired. He interprets the content of the card as Clive's way of rubbing salt into his fresh wounds. Feeling unjustly mistreated by his old friend; Vernon plots to extract revenge over Clive by exploiting the liberal euthanasia laws in the Netherlands and his promise to euthanize Clive.

In the meantime, Clive, who has been struggling to complete his Millennial Symphony, takes a short hiking trip in the Lake District in order to find inspiration. On one of his hikes, he witnesses a strange man attacking a woman. He chooses not to intervene. The attack occurs at a moment in which Clive is frantically trying to document a tune inspired by a birdcall. Clive decides that finishing his masterpiece is more important than rescuing a strange woman. Moreover, after he returns to London, Clive fails to report the attack because he wants to avoid becoming tangled in an investigation that would distract him from the completion of his masterpiece.

When Clive confesses to Vernon what he witnessed and his failure to intervene in the attack or report it, Vernon criticizes him for shirking his moral duties. When it occurs to Vernon that Clive might have witnessed an attack perpetrated by the notorious Lakeland rapist, Vernon puts even more pressure on Clive to report it to the authorities. When Clive refuses, Vernon, whose friendship with Clive has already soured over the Garmony photos, notifies the police that Clive has been withholding information that might be important to the arrest of the Lakeland rapist. Clive is asked to identify the alleged attacker in a police line-up, but nothing else is required of him. Clive is furious at Vernon for dragging him into this investigation. Vernon is outraged that Clive did not suffer more severe consequences for failing to be more cooperative with authorities. Vernon is all the more motivated to murder Clive and Clive seeks revenge on Vernon by plotting to murder him under the guise of assisted suicide.

Both Clive and Vernon travel to Amsterdam on business trips. They arrange to meet at a hotel. Each man consults his own Dutch doctor and arranges to have the other killed.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

This chapter opens on a chilly day in February. Molly Lane, a restaurant critic, has died after a sudden illness and her friends and admirers have gathered for her funeral. Her wealthy husband, George Lane cared for her when she fell ill. He did so in order to control who could and could not have access to her in her final months. George has a reputation for being greedy and managerial, but his role as the grieving widower has lifted him above general contempt on this day.

Of Molly's many lovers, three who are of importance attend her funeral. Composer Clive Linley and newspaper editor Vernon Halliday are old friends. Both men despise Julian Garmony, the British Foreign Secretary, whose right-wing political policies offend the more liberal sympathies of Clive and Vernon.

Clive Linley has been commissioned to write the Millennial Symphony. After Molly's funeral, he is inspired to compose several major parts of the symphony. He works until early morning, but he reaches a creative impasse. He resolves to make a trip to the Lake District in search of further inspiration.

He aspires to write a musical piece "that would transcend its unfashionability and seem both to mourn the passing century and all its senseless cruelty and to celebrate its brilliant inventiveness. Long after the excitement of the first performance was over, long after the millennial celebrations, the fireworks and analyses and potted histories, were done with, this irresistible melody would remain as the dead century's elegy." (21-22)

Chapter 1 Analysis

The first chapter serves two main purposes. First, Molly's death and funeral mark the conclusion of her illness and the arguably undignified way in which Molly died motivates Clive to make a crucial pact with Vernon in the following chapter. Second, we are introduced to the principal characters whose actions drive then novel's plot.

Molly died after being unexpectedly diagnosed with a terminal disease, which caused her physical and psychological condition to deteriorate rapidly. Because Molly quickly became unable to care for herself, she had no choice but to be placed in the care of her husband George. As her caregiver, George severely restricted access to Molly's bedside as his way of shutting out all of Molly's lovers whom she clearly loved more than him. For Molly, who was an independent charismatic woman, it was surely undignified to live her final months under the managerial control of George and without the benefit of visits from friends and lovers. The horror of having to suffer a similarly humiliating fate haunts Clive and motivates him to ask Vernon's help in euthanizing him if he should fall ill in a manner similar to Molly.



The men, whose actions drive the plot in this novel, are linked through Molly. George, Molly's husband, is greedy, and has had a complicated marriage with Molly. George was aware that Molly kept lovers, but he stayed with her in spite of it. However, one does have the impression that George resented Molly's lovers and would jump at the opportunity to exact some kind of revenge. Later, we discover that he has access to photos that could damage Julian Garmony's reputation, and sure enough, George uses these photos against Julian. Julian is depicted as a slick politician, who is always performing for the media. This contributes to the irony associated with the fact that his political career will come under attack precisely because potentially scandalous information about him will be made public through the media. Although not much is said about Vernon yet, we know that he is an old friend of Clive and that he and Clive share a deep dislike of Julian. Thus, Vernon shares with George Lane some motivation for embarrassing Julian if the opportunity arises.

The character who receives the most attention in this chapter is Clive Linley. He is depicted as a moderately successful composer who is given the chance of a lifetime to compose the Millennial Symphony. He hopes that the Millennial Symphony will secure him a place in musical history. Thus, for Clive, making the Millennial Symphony his masterpiece is of great personal and professional importance. Clive's investment in the Millennial Symphony is underscored because he goes to the Lake District looking for inspiration for his work and during a crucial moment on his trip, he must choose between his work and his moral duty.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

In this chapter, a crucial day in the life of Vernon Halliday is described. In an editorial meeting, we learn that it is the *Judge's* policy to criticize harshly the reputation of Julian Garmony. While at the same time, the *Judge* is to feature stories about Garmony on the front page. Amongst the many other stories that are discussed, is an investigative piece on a medical scandal in the Netherlands. Dutch doctors are allegedly exploiting the liberal euthanasia laws to commit murder. In the middle of an editorial meeting, Vernon receives an urgent phone call from George Lane, in which the latter promises information which would presumably support an interesting journal article. Vernon cannot meet with George immediately so the meeting is postponed.

Vernon is served with an injunction prohibiting him from publishing any photographs or likenesses of Garmony. This leads Vernon to suspect that the information about which George Lane had called earlier concerns Garmony.

Vernon receives an urgent phone call from Clive, but Vernon claims that he is unable to meet with Clive because he is too busy.

Vernon visits Clive at his home. Clive asks Vernon to euthanize him if he should ever fall terminally ill or become hopelessly incapacitated so that he can avoid Molly's fate. Vernon tells Clive that he needs to think about it and Clive allows it.

Vernon visits George at his Holland Park mansion. George offers Vernon three presumably scandalous photographs of Garmony. The photos were apparently taken by Molly and copyrighted to her. Since Molly's death, they had become George's property. The photos could potentially ruin Garmony and resuscitate the *Judge*.

On his way home from George's mansion, Vernon stops outside Clive's studio. He leaves a note indicating that he'd be willing to euthanize Clive if Clive would be willing to do the same for him.

Chapter 2 Analysis

From Vernon's treatment of stories concerning Garmony, it is clear that Vernon is not above using the *Judge* as a weapon against Garmony. Vernon's policy is to use the *Judge* to criticize the Garmony's policies. However, Vernon doesn't want any story concerning Garmony to appear on the front page. This is Vernon's way of denying Garmony a place of importance. Indeed, the only time Vernon considers putting a story about Garmony on the front page is when he proposes to publish the scandalous photos of Garmony. Here, the Garmony story is placed on the front page not to underscore Garmony's importance as a newsmaker, but to shame and humiliate Garmony in as public a way as possible.



The photo that Vernon plans to publish on the front page of the *Judge* is one of three photos that George offers him. The scandalous nature of the photos could be used to serve the interests of both George and Vernon. George, who resents all of Molly's lovers including Julian Garmony, now has a way of exacting revenge on Julian. By exposing Julian's private life, Julian will be publicly embarrassed and his political career could be ruined. Vernon, who shares with George a strong dislike of Julian, is in a position to publish the photos and hurt Julian Garmony personally and professionally. Vernon is further motivated to publish the photos because a sensational story about a high profile, public figure could boost the declining circulation of the *Judge*. Furthermore, destroying Julian's political career could prevent almost certain political, social, and economic disaster.

Another crucial event that occurs in this chapter is Clive and Vernon's entrance into a deadly pact. Each of the two men effectively agrees to euthanize the other if the latter contracts a debilitating or terminal illness. However, it is hinted in one of the feature stories discussed in the *Judge's* editorial meeting, that it is possible to abuse legalized euthanasia to commit murder. Indeed, doctors in the Netherlands are allegedly participating in such morally reprehensible activities. Clive and Vernon's pact and the *Judge's* features a story on the Dutch medical scandal, both foreshadowing how the two men will meet their tragic deaths in Amsterdam.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

After attending to a few social engagements, Clive finally leaves for his hiking trip in the Lake District. On the train journey to Penrith, Clive reflects on his friendship with Vernon. Clive subjects this friendship to particularly close scrutiny because of an argument that he had with Vernon the night before his departure. Clive concludes that the argument is symptomatic of certain lopsidedness in the friendship. Clive believes himself to be the giver and Vernon to be the taker. He also blames the argument and the lopsidedness on Vernon's lack of principle.

On the day that Clive had planned to leave for the Lake District, he receives an urgent phone call from Vernon requesting an immediate meeting with Clive. Clive postpones his travel plans in order to meet with Vernon. Vernon arrives late and appears exhausted. Vernon complains that his staff is against him. He shows Clive the photographs of Garmony, in which Garmony is dressed as a woman. He explains that the newspaper has had the injunction lifted so that it is free to publish the photos. Vernon is in favor of publishing the photos, but his staff opposes his plan. Clive sides with the staff and an argument between Clive and Vernon erupts.

Vernon seems so motivated in two ways. First, Vernon takes a personal dislike to Garmony and he would like nothing more than to ruin Garmony's public and personal life. Second, Vernon argues that if Garmony is not stopped, he will make a successful bid to become Prime Minister and the country would be much worse off under Garmony's leadership. In effect, Vernon attempts to justify an attack on Garmony's rights to express himself in the privacy of his bedroom by appealing to consequences of suppressing such an attack.

Clive opposes Vernon's plan of action for two reasons. First, no matter what the foreseeable consequences of Vernon's proposed actions, it is wrong to violate a person's right to sexual expression in the privacy of his own bedroom. Second, the photos were taken in confidence. Garmony trusted Molly with the photos and by exposing the photos, Vernon would be betraying Molly.

After hiking for some time, Clive finally finds inspiration for the finale of his symphony in the call of a bird. As Clive begins to write down the notes for the finale, he is interrupted by an apparent argument between a woman and a man further along the hiking trail. As the argument grows violent, Clive realizes that he must make a decision. He can either help the woman or depart silently to work on his finale. Clive chooses to ignore the couple and continue working. Clive returns to the hotel and prepares to return to London.



Chapter 3 Analysis

In this chapter, we witness the beginning of the collapse of Clive and Vernon's friendship. Clive and Vernon disagree violently about whether Vernon can justifiably publish the photos of Garmony. When Clive is alone on his trip to the Lake District, he reflects on the lopsidedness of his relationship with Vernon. He concludes that Vernon's lack of moral principle contributed to the asymmetry in the friendship. It is suggested that this lack of moral principle is the basis for the moral disagreement between Clive and Vernon over what ought to be done with the Garmony photos.

After concluding that Vernon is a self-serving, morally, insensitive man, Clive is confronted with circumstances which test the extent to which he is any better than Vernon. On a hike in the Lake District, Clive finds a desperately needed inspiration, but just as he works to document the tune that would complete his masterpiece, he witnesses a strange man attacking a woman. Clive must decide whether he will selfishly continue working on his symphony or selfishly sacrifice his work in order to help the woman. Ultimately, Clive chooses the former, thereby undermining his moral authority in his criticisms of Vernon. This leaves him open to accusations of moral insensitivity.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

On the day before publication of the Garmony story, Vernon notices that he has a new purpose in life ever since he has undertaken the ruin of Garmony. He has not spoken to Clive since their argument and he decides to call Clive as a gesture of reconciliation. During their phone call, Clive confesses to Vernon that he witnessed a violent argument between a couple on the hiking trail and that he chose to work on his symphony rather than rescue the woman. Vernon is only half listening to Clive's confession.

In a meeting with his newspaper staff, Vernon accepts accolades for his journalistic instinct that led him to push for publication of the Garmony photos, which are to appear on the front page of the *Judge* the following day. Although Vernon's colleagues initially had their reservations about the publication of the Garmony story, with the secret aid of Frank Dibben, the ambitious foreign deputy editor, Vernon was able to rally support behind his proposal to publish the photos. Despite the hype of the Garmony story, the staff must also attend to more mundane orders of business. One of the other stories that will appear in the next day's issue is one about the arrest of the Lakeland rapist. The Lakeland rapist attacked a woman in the Lake District at around the time that Clive witnessed what he took to be an argument between a man and a woman on a hiking trail.

As soon as Vernon realizes that Clive may have witnessed the attack, he phones Vernon to urge him to contact the police. Clive refuses claiming that getting involved would interfere with his work. Vernon demands that Clive contact authorities as a matter of moral duty, but Clive retorts that Vernon, of all people, has no right to demand that Clive respect his moral obligations when Vernon, himself, is on the verge of committing an egregiously immoral act.

The Garmony family appears on television. Mrs. Rose Garmony makes a statement to the media. She reveals that she has known of her husband's sexual proclivities from the beginning of her marriage to him. She claims to have supported him throughout her years of marriage to him. She even unveils to the media the photo that Vernon was planning to use on the front page of the *Judge*. She publicly denounces Vernon by comparing his moral stature to that of a flea.

By the weekend, Vernon's fortune has been completely reversed. All the support that his staff had shown him collapses and the staff fall back on their documented reservations. Other newspapers that had earlier jumped onto Vernon's bandwagon now denounced Vernon in their editorials. Moreover, the outing of Garmony as a transvestite has proven to consolidate his political position rather than destroy it. In effect, Vernon's plan has backfired.



Chapter 4 Analysis

This chapter captures the rapidity with which Vernon's fortune is reversed. On Thursday morning, Vernon is hailed as the savior of the *Judge*. He has successfully persuaded his previously uncooperative staff members to support him in the publication of the Garmony photos. The public anticipation of the publication date has focused readers' attention on the *Judge*, thereby drastically increasing the paper's circulation. Vernon is finally receiving the respect and recognition that he deserves from his staff members. However, by the evening, after Rose Garmony has spoiled the surprise of the *Judge*'s story on her husband, Vernon has fallen from grace. He is denounced as an unethical newsman and has lost his job.

Although Vernon's fate is a consequence of his own poor judgment, he is also the victim of the fickleness of his own staff. Frank Dibben, in particular, encouraged Vernon even though he knew that Vernon's plan would more than likely end in disaster rather than success. As such, Frank's apparent support of Vernon is more aptly described as his bid to ruin Vernon and to secure his own place as head of the *Judge*. Moreover, Vernon's other staff members jump on his bandwagon and even praise him for his journalistic instincts. Yet as soon as the story turned sour, they quickly withdrew their support. If Frank and the other *Judge* staff members had made an honest effort to discourage Vernon from pursuing the Garmony story or had given them their loyal support with respect to that story, Vernon would not have suffered professional embarrassment, at least not alone.

In this chapter, we also witness the further disintegration of Clive and Vernon's friendship. Having already clashed over the morality of publishing the Garmony photos, the two men argue again over Clive's duty to act in response to the attack that he witnessed in the Lake District. Clive is too self-absorbed and invested in his work to be bothered to entangle himself in an investigation of the attack. Vernon criticizes Clive for his irresponsibility concerning the attack. Clive is outraged at Vernon's undeserved self-righteousness. Each man takes himself to see the other's moral shortcomings, while failing to see his own. This leads to irresolvable conflict between the two former friends.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Clive hasn't finished his symphony and his deadline is fast approaching. Clive discovers from reading the *Judge* that Vernon has been forced to resign. Clive is still angry at Vernon and seems to take some self-righteous pleasure in the downfall of his former friend. Just then, Clive receives some long awaited inspiration for the completion of his symphony. However, as Clive readies himself to write it down, police officers' call asking for his assistance in identifying the Lakeland rapist.

Vernon's resignation has been solicited and Frank Dibben has replaced him. In the aftermath of Vernon's journalistic blunder, his staff, which had so recently congratulated him on his success in raising the *Judge's* circulation, does not even have the courtesy to bid him a proper farewell. Vernon is understandably bitter, but he is particularly hurt by Clive's postcard in which Clive claims that Vernon deserved to be fired. Although Clive sent the postcard before the Garmony story soured leading to Vernon's dismissal, Vernon receives the card after his resignation and cannot help but feel slighted. Vernon feels betrayed and mistreated by one of his oldest friends.

Vernon seeks revenge on Clive. After reading about the abuse of assisted suicide laws in the Netherlands, Vernon conceives a plan that exploits both these laws and his promise to euthanize Clive under appropriate circumstances.

Clive flashes back to his experiences at the police station. He recalls the experience as more pleasant than he had expected. Although many of the alleged criminals in the police station caused Clive to cringe, he is treated with a great deal of respect and deference by the police officers. Clive comes to have a new respect for members of the police force.

At the police station, Clive's task is simple. Clive must identify the Lakeland rapist in two different lineups. The first one seems to go well, but in the second lineup, Clive mistakenly picks out a police officer from the lineup.

Clive arrives in Amsterdam and makes an appearance at the rehearsal of his symphony. He is deeply dissatisfied with his work. His professional discontent seems to be influencing his moral judgments because he is convinced that the only thing that could make him feel better about the symphony would be exacting revenge on Vernon.

It appears that Clive has helped Vernon to make arrangements to fly to Amsterdam and to meet him there. Clive is unaware that Vernon plans on "assisting" Clive in ending his life. Indeed, Clive has similar plans for Vernon. Clive confirms instructions with a doctor for ending Vernon's life with a mysterious powdered drink.



At the reception for the British Symphony Orchestra, Clive prepares a glass of champagne with the mysterious white powder for Vernon. When Vernon arrives, Clive offers him a glass.

Clive and Vernon leave the reception in order to have some time to themselves before they head out for dinner together. Each retires to his respective room. Clive collapses into his own bed and begins to hallucinate that Molly and Paul Lanark, a music critic whom Clive detests, have come to visit and compliment him on his symphony. In reality, a doctor and nurse have come to administer a lethal injection to Clive.

In his own room, Vernon collapses on his bed and begins to hallucinate. He has returned as editor of the *Judge* and he has been recognized for his good work on the Garmony story amongst others. He is conducting a meeting. Both Molly and Frank Dibben are present. It seems that Molly and Frank are lovers and Frank is requesting that Vernon authorize using the paper's financial resources to fund some of the expenses associated with Molly and Frank's affair. Vernon's hallucination ends when he passes out.

George Lane and Julian Garmony, who have lost his cabinet post despite favorable public support during his scandal, meet at the airport. George and Julian are on their way to Amsterdam to retrieve the bodies of Vernon and Clive respectively. In the VIP lounge, Julian asks George whether he was the one who sold the scandalous photos to the *Judge*. George denies it and tries to deflect the blame to Vernon and Clive by claiming that Clive inherited the copyright to the photos upon Molly's death.

Upon their return to London, Julian mentions to George that he heard a rumor that Vernon and Clive's deaths were not coincidental suicides, but rather, they were the result of a mutual murder. Julian explains that some rogue doctors have been exploiting the liberal Dutch laws on euthanasia to murder clients' unwanted family members.

George contemplates asking Mandy Halliday, Vernon's widow, out on a date and Julian considers organizing a memorial service for Molly.

Chapter 5 Analysis

In the days leading up to Clive and Vernon's mutual murder, each man plots to murder the other for seemingly self-serving reasons. Clive is under a lot of pressure to complete his symphony and he is disappointed when he is unable to create the masterpiece that he had hoped to produce. His anger at Vernon and his disappointment in himself push him into a psychological state in which he is able to convince himself that revenge on Vernon is the only way to relieve his mental anguish. Similarly, Vernon who is still upset at Clive for criticizing him misplaces the blame for his professional demise on Clive and in his angered and depressed state, he is able to persuade himself that revenge on Clive would relieve his stress. Moreover, since each man takes himself to be morally superior to the other, each man is in a position to pretend that his victim is getting what he deserves.



Characters

Molly Lane

Molly Lane is the deceased woman whose former lovers include Clive Linley and Vernon Halliday. At the time of her death, Molly was married to George Lane and was having an affair with Julian Garmony. Molly was a restaurant critic and photographer.

During her affair with Garmony, Molly took three photographs of Garmony, which could potentially ruin his political career. After her death, the Garmony photos fall into George's hands. George puts the photos up for sale, hoping to exact revenge on Garmony for making a fool of him. George ultimately sells the photos to Vernon thereby setting in motion the latter's professional fall.

Molly's death was the result of a mysterious illness, which affected her physically, intellectually, and psychologically. Her condition deteriorated quickly and she was placed in the care of her controlling husband, George during the final months of her life. Clive is particularly upset by Molly's condition when she was struck so suddenly by illness. Clive is determined not to suffer a similar fate. He requests that Vernon euthanize him if he should ever become terminally ill or permanently incapacitated. Vernon promises to euthanize Clive under the appropriate circumstances if Clive will do the same for him. This pact between the two men is later exploited by both men in order to commit mutual murder.

George Lane

George Lane is Molly's greedy, wealthy husband, who made his living as a publisher. He owns one and a half percent of the *Judge*, the daily journal for which Vernon Halliday is the editor-in-chief. Most of the other journals in which he owned a share of are known more for their sensational content than for their journalistic integrity.

While they were married, George and Molly had a complicated arrangement. Molly always treated him badly and had extra marital affairs. Nonetheless, the marriage was never dissolved. Their marriage doesn't seem to have been a very intimate relationship because they were content to live in separate parts of their mansion.

When Molly fell ill, George took it upon himself to care of her himself. He moved her out of her wing of the mansion into his side of the house. He controlled strictly who was permitted to visit her. When she finally died, he refused to have a memorial service for her because he wanted to avoid having her former lovers compare notes at the pulpit and having them exchange glances while he made his own speech.

After Molly's death, George obtains some photos that she took of Julian Garmony. He sells the photos to Vernon Halliday in the hopes that Vernon will publish them in the *Judge*.



Clive Linley

Clive Linley is a composer, who has been commissioned to write the Millennial Symphony. When he and Molly were students in the late 60's, he was her lover.

Clive has a high opinion of himself as a composer and even considers himself a genius. Nonetheless, Clive has trouble finishing the symphony and heads to the Lake District for inspiration. There, he witnesses an assault on a woman, but opts not to intervene. Instead, he retreats and works on his symphony.

When he confesses to his old friend that he didn't help the woman or report what he saw, he and Vernon have a terrible argument which contributes to the collapse of the friendship. Clive plots to murder Vernon in Amsterdam.

Vernon Halliday

Vernon Halliday is the editor-in-chief of the struggling daily journal, *Judge*. He was Molly's lover in the mid-70's and is an old friend of Clive Linley.

Vernon is described as a bland man without much personality or charisma. "He was widely known as a man without edges, without faults or virtues, as a man who did not fully exist. Within his profession Vernon was revered as a nonentity... Years back he had been the bland and hardworking lieutenant for two gifted editors in succession and had shown an instinctive talent for making neither friends nor allies" (32-33)

Although, according to this description, Vernon is not the kind of man to inspire avid support or violent opposition. He becomes a more controversial figure within the paper after he proposes publication of the Garmony photos. When Vernon suggests that the *Judge* pursue the Garmony story, he faces fierce opposition. After successfully campaigning to have the story on the front page, Vernon seems to win the support, respect, and even admiration of his colleagues. However, when the story is spoiled by Rose Garmony's press conference, the backlash against Vernon is particularly vicious.

In addition to his professional problems, Vernon experiences difficulties in his friendship with Clive. Clive vehemently opposes the publication of the Garmony photos and Vernon is upset by his friend's moral criticisms of his professional decisions. Vernon takes Clive's criticisms so personally, that when Clive confesses to having failed to intervene during a witnessed assault, Vernon criticizes Clive harshly causing the friendship to disintegrate even further. Ultimately, Vernon plots to murder Clive by exploiting the Dutch euthanasia laws and a promise he made to the latter.

Julian Garmony

Julian Garmony is Molly's lover at the time of her death. He is the Foreign Secretary of Britain and has a reputation for his ultra-conservative political views. Amongst his right



wing views, is an intolerance for alternative sexual lifestyles and expressions. He is in a position to make a bid for the Prime Ministry in the next election and both Vernon Halliday and Clive Linley, believe that if he is successful, it would be disastrous for the country.

After Molly's death, George Lane comes to possess three photographs of Julian. The photos show Julian dressed in women's clothing and are taken in private by Molly. George sells the photos to Vernon with the hope that they will be published in the *Judge*.

Rose Garmony

Rose Garmony is Julian Garmony's wife. She is a pediatric surgeon, who has dedicated her life to saving the lives of children. When rumors that Julian Garmony's unusual sexual proclivities will be publicized in a scandalous light, she arranges a press conference and publicly pledges her support for her husband and denounces Vernon Halliday for planning to publicly humiliate her husband. Rose's press conference spoils the *Judge's* expose of Julian Garmony and contributes to Vernon's downfall in the journalistic profession.

Frank Dibben

Frank Dibben is the *Judge's* deputy foreign editor. There is a great deal of friction between Frank and Vernon Halliday. After Vernon purchases the photos of Garmony, he launches a campaign within the paper to persuade his colleagues to support the publication of the photos. Surprisingly, Frank secretly helps Vernon to do so. Frank acts as a spy for Vernon, by informing him which staff members oppose publication and those that need to be convinced. He also lets him know which of Vernon's arguments have been effective in winning supporters.

However, it becomes apparent that Frank secretly acted as Vernon's ally only to set Vernon up for a professional disaster. After Rose Garmony's surprise press conference spoils the *Judge's* story on Garmony, Vernon loses all the support of his staff and is asked to resign. Since Frank so discreetly encouraged Vernon to pursue the Garmony story, Frank was able to catalyze Vernon's dismissal from the *Judge*, while at the same time, securing an important place for himself within the *Judge* after the Garmony disaster.

Lettice O'Hara

Lettice O'Hara is the features editor for the *Judge*. One of the stories that she oversees is an article about a medical scandal in the Netherlands. According to the story, Dutch physicians have been exploiting their country's liberal euthanasia laws to commit murder.



Lakeland Rapist

The Lakeland Rapist is a serial rapist, who has been assaulting women in the Lake District. On his hike in the Lake District, Clive purportedly witnesses the Lakeland Rapist attacking a woman on a trail. Clive opts not to intervene, nor does he report what he saw. Later, the police approach Clive and request his assistance in identifying the Lakeland Rapist in a couple of lineups.

Paul Lanark

Paul Lanark is an alcoholic music critic. Clive Linley lacks any professional respect for Lanark. At the symphony reception in Amsterdam, Clive runs into Paul and they exchange some insults until Vernon Halliday joins them. Vernon accuses Paul of being mixed up in a pedophile ring and Paul leaves in a huff.

Susie Marcellan

Susie Marcellan is Clive's current girlfriend. She sides in New York City.

Guilio Bo

Giulio Bo is the conductor of the British Symphony Orchestra.



Objects/Places

Amsterdam

Although most of the events described in the novel occur in London, the plot culminates in Amsterdam. Early in the novel, Clive and Vernon make a pact. They agree that one friend will euthanize the other if the latter should find himself in a sufficiently unfortunate condition. When the friendship sours, each man plots to exploit the liberal Dutch euthanasia laws to murder the other. When business engagements require both Clive and Vernon to travel to Amsterdam, both men use their visit to Amsterdam to perform their respective murders.

The Judge

The *Judge* is the daily journal for which Vernon Halliday is the editor-in- chief. Disagreements between past editors-in-chief and the board of directors lead to the successive dismissal of four such editors leaving an opening for Vernon to become the paper's leader. As editor-in-chief, Vernon tries desperately to reverse the *Judge's* declining circulation.

As a result of the paper's falling circulation figures, there is considerable pressure for the paper to publish sensational stories. However, such a strategy for resuscitating the paper offends the paper's "grammarians," who would rather see the paper die than publish stories that compromise their journalistic integrity.

Judge House

Judge House is the building in which the *Judge's* offices are located. Crucial editorial staff meetings are also held in Judge House. During some of these meetings, Vernon spends a great deal of time and effort convincing his staff that the paper ought to publish the scandalous Garmony photos. Ironically, Vernon's success in persuading his colleagues to go ahead with the Garmony story marks a disastrous event for the paper and Vernon's editorial career.

Millennial Symphony

Clive Linley has been commissioned by an unnamed committee to write a symphony celebrating the upcoming millennium. Although the millennium is still a few years away, the committee and Giulio Bo, the conductor of the British Symphony Orchestra, are placing a great deal of pressure on Clive to finish the symphony so that it can be rehearsed and performed soon. The committee hopes to have a completed piece early enough so that a tune taken from the symphony could " 'play itself' into the public consciousness" (22) by the time the millennium arrives.



When Clive encounters a creative obstacle while working on the Millennial Symphony, he heads to the Lake District to find inspiration. On his trip to the Lake District, Clive is forced to make a crucial, moral decision. In particular, on his hike to Allen's Crag, Clive witnesses an assault on a strange woman, but he must decide between rescuing the woman and retreating to work on his symphony. Clive chooses the latter.

Beethoven's 9th Symphony

Despite Clive's best efforts to meet the final deadline for completing the Millennial Symphony, he is unable to complete to his own satisfaction. Effectively, he doesn't have enough time to write a proper variation of the thematic tune in the symphony. He submits his imperfect work to the Boston Symphony Orchestra. As it is rehearsed, there is a rumor that Clive's symphony borrows heavily from Beethoven's 9th symphony.

Boston Symphony Orchestra

The Boston Symphony Orchestra is the musical company that will be performing Clive's Millennial Symphony when it is completed. The orchestra has been sent to Amsterdam to begin rehearsals of Clive's piece. Clive later joins the orchestra in Amsterdam, where he meets his tragic fate.

Photos of Garmony

George Lane possesses three photographs of Julian Garmony taken by his late wife, Molly Lane. In all three photos, Garmony is dressed in women's clothing. If the photos are published, Garmony's political career could be destroyed. Garmony, who is well known for his ultra-conservative political views, could lose the support of right-wing conservatives, who do not tolerate alternative sexual expression. Moreover, he would be exposed as a hypocrite who privately indulges in the very sexual expression that he publicly denounces.

A bidding war for the photos begins and George Lane ends up selling them to the *Judge*. Vernon Halliday is determined to publish the photos in order to expose Garmony's hypocrisy and to prevent Garmony's bid for the Prime Ministry. Although the *Judge's* staff is initially opposed to publication of the photos, Vernon launches a campaign within the paper to gain support for their publication. Vernon eventually persuades his staff to go along with him.

Wiltshire

At their farmhouse in Wiltshire, the Garmonys hold a press conference on the day before the scheduled publication of the first Garmony photo. Rose Garmony unveils a copy of one and the same photo. Rose delivers a compelling speech, in which she pledges her support for her husband and denounces Vernon for his morally



objectionable project of publishing such photographs. This press conference marks the beginning of Vernon's personal and professional fall from grace.

South Kensington

Clive's studio is located in South Kensington. Here, Clive works on his Millennial Symphony. However, as he prepares to write the finale for the piece, he encounters a creative impasse. He plans a trip to the Lake District in search of inspiration.

The South Kensington studio is also the venue for a crucial meeting between Clive and Vernon. After Vernon obtains the Garmony photos, he visits Clive in his studio to discuss what should be done with them. During the meeting, the two friends disagree violently about the best course of action. Vernon favors publication of the photos for two reasons: (1) it could boost the *Judge's* declining circulation; and (2) it could spoil Garmony's bid for the Prime Ministry, thereby saving the country from economic and social disaster. Clive opposes publication of the photos because it would wrongly imply that it is permissible to mock alternative sexual expressions. It would also constitute a betrayal of Molly.

Lake District

When Clive has trouble finishing the Millennial Symphony, he plans a trip to the Lake District in order to find inspiration. While hiking in the Lake District, Clive finds the inspiration that he sought, but just as he begins to write down the tune for his symphony's finale, Clive witnesses a violent struggle between a man and a woman. Clive hesitates as he considers the choice that he faces. He can either, abandon his work and help the woman, or retreat and complete his symphony. Clive decides on the latter.

Later, Clive discovers that the altercation that he had witnessed was quite probably, a woman being attacked by the Lakeland rapist. Clive had done nothing to help the woman at the time of the attack and he had not even bothered to report the attack to the authorities. After Vernon and Clive's friendship turns sour, Vernon informs the police that Clive witnessed the attack and failed to report it. Vernon hopes that Clive will have to face serious legal consequences. Much to Vernon's dismay, Clive is only required to identify the suspected rapist in a couple of lineups at a police station in the Lake District.

Holland Park

George Lane's mansion is located in Holland Park. It is in George's mansion, that he offers Vernon the scandalous photos of Garmony. This sets in motion the chain of events leading to the end of Vernon's journalistic career.



Themes

Hypocrisy

Part of the scandal surrounding the Garmony photos involves the exposure of Julian Garmony's hypocrisy. According to his publicly expressed political views, alternative sexual expressions or lifestyles are not to be tolerated. Yet, in the photos that Molly took, Julian himself indulges in cross-dressing.

Vernon Halliday and Clive Linley each have opposing opinions about what should be done about the Garmony photos. Their differences contribute to each man accusing the other of hypocrisy. Vernon wants desperately to publish the Garmony photos in order to save the *Judge* and his position at the *Judge*. He also wants to prevent Garmony from becoming Prime Minister. Clive believes it wrong to persecute someone for his sexual proclivities and criticizes Vernon for even considering publication of the Garmony photos. When Clive confides in Vernon that he witnessed a possible assault in the Lake District, Vernon reprimands him for his inaction. Clive, however, justifies his inaction by appealing to the demands of his work. The men's differences in moral judgements concerning the Garmony photos and the Lake District assault cause them each to accuse the other of hypocrisy. On one hand, Vernon accuses Clive of hypocrisy because the latter is quick to criticize the former for doing something that is arguably, morally wrong. Clive seems unwilling to take right action concerning the Lake District assault. On the other hand, Clive accuses Vernon of hypocrisy because Vernon demands that Clive act rightly and that he report to the police immediately. Yet at the same time, Vernon is acting wrong by publishing the Garmony photos.

Betrayal

Vernon Halliday's professional demise seems driven principally by two major acts of betrayal. First, Vernon betrays Molly by publishing the Garmony photos and secondly, Frank Dibben betrays Vernon by helping him into a position from which he will fall very publicly and disgracefully, thereby ruining Vernon's career.

When Vernon discloses to Clive his plans to publish the Garmony photos, Clive accuses Vernon of betraying Molly. Clive argues that Julian Garmony trusted Molly enough to let her take the photos. Now that Molly is deceased, if Vernon acted in a way such as to violate the trust between Molly and Julian, Vernon would, in effect, be betraying the trust between himself and Molly.

As Vernon pursues the Garmony story at the *Judge*, he receives the discreet help of Frank Dibben. Frank acts as though he supports Vernon by encouraging him and by helping him to convince other staff members that it is in the paper's best interests to publish the photos. However, when a surprise press conference spoils the story on the eve of publication day, it becomes clear that Frank was secretly helping Vernon so that



when the story went sour, Vernon would be left alone to defend himself while Frank could secure himself a position of importance within the paper.

Euthanasia

Throughout the novel, euthanasia is in the background and it is pushed to the forefront when the plot culminates in Amsterdam. After Molly's funeral, Clive is so moved by the rapidness of Molly's physical and psychological deterioration that he asks Vernon to promise to euthanize him if he ever suffers a fate similar to Molly's. After some consideration, Vernon agrees to do so, only if Clive will do the same for him.

Meanwhile, journalists at the *Judge* have been working on a story about euthanasia, according to which Dutch doctors have been abusing the liberal euthanasia laws in the Netherlands to commit murder. Indeed, Clive and Vernon meet their tragic fates precisely because each man plots to murder the other under the guise of committing euthanasia.

Revenge

Much of the plot in *Amsterdam* is driven by the desire of various characters to exact revenge on others. By making the Garmony photos available to Vernon, George Lane gets revenge over Julian Garmony for making a fool of him. After Vernon and Clive's friendship sours, each man plots to murder the other in order to gain revenge. In both Vernon and Clive's cases, it seems that each man seeks revenge for the other's having made plain what his moral shortcomings are.



Style

Point of View

Amsterdam is written in the third person from the perspective of a narrator, who is carefully observing the principal characters. The focus of the narrator's attention shifts back and forth between composer, Clive Linley and journal editor, Vernon Halliday. The objectivity and impartiality suggested by the third person perspective gives the reader the impression that the narrator is telling this moral tale at a safe distance from the characters and events, thereby lending him credibility as someone whose words are not colored by any personal stake in the manner in which the character's actions are described. As such, although the characters in the novel exchange the accusations and moral judgments, determination, of which, if any, of these moral judgments is left to the reader.

Setting

Amsterdam is set principally in England, but its plot culminates in Amsterdam. In England, euthanasia is illegal, but it is legalized in the Netherlands. However, Molly's death and her illness preceding it motivates Clive and Vernon to make a promise to euthanize the other should he fall terminally and terminally ill. After Clive and Vernon make their pact, they each experience personal professional difficulties in England. Vernon's career at a London-based newspaper collapses when he imprudently pushes for the publication of scandalous photographs of Julian Garmony. Clive hopes that the Millennial Symphony will be his most memorable contribution to musical history, but during a moment of inspiration in the Lake District, he is confronted with a moral decision which haunts him long after the moment has passed. As each man grapples with his own personal, professional, and moral demons, Clive and Vernon are unable to provide each other with the support that would sustain their strained friendship. After the friendship sours, each man plots to murder the other by exploiting the pact. Although all of the events leading to mutual murder plots occur in England, each man must arrange to euthanize the other in the Netherlands, if he is to do so legally. The opportunity arises for each man to carry out his plan when both, Clive and Vernon, have coinciding business trips to Amsterdam. It is here that both men meet their tragic fates.

Language and Meaning

Amsterdam is narrated using language that is clear and accessible. Such a choice in language contributes to the impression that the story is fundamentally a story about ordinary men. The principal characters in *Amsterdam* include a famous composer, who immodestly compares himself to Beethoven; a foreign secretary, who lives under the watchful gaze of the public eye; and the editor of a well-known newspaper. The men to whom these titles belong are from a moral point of view. They are viewed as ordinary



men. They are proud men who must grapple with serious moral questions. The foreign secretary, Julian Garmony is a successful politician with strong right-wing convictions. He publicly voices without apology, but in the privacy of his own bedroom, he indulges in precisely the kind of sexual expression, which he openly denounces. Clive Linley is a composer who desperately wants to make his mark in musical history and whose chance to do so comes when he is commissioned to compose the Millennial Symphony. However, his professional ambitions cloud his judgment at a crucial moment in which he must choose between acting selflessly by helping a woman under attack and acting selfishly by directing his attention to the commissioned symphony. Finally, Vernon Halliday wants to prove himself worthy of his position at the paper by publishing a sensational story about Julian Garmony's sexual proclivities and by preventing Julian from ascending to the Prime Ministry. However, he is willing to do so at the cost of violating Julian Garmony's right to privacy and free sexual expression. Although each character holds a unique role in society, these men struggle with personal, social, and moral questions which face ordinary persons all the time.

Structure

Amsterdam is composed of five chapters, each of which is further divided into subsections. The subdivision of the chapters serves two purposes. First, it enables the narrator to shift the focus of his attention from Clive to Vernon in an organized way. Second, since the events that drive the plot are presented out of order, the subdivisions within the chapters impose a structure on the narrative that temporal order would have provided, if the events had presented chronologically.

Quotes

"Instead it seemed to Vernon that he was infinitely diluted; he was simply the sum of the people who had listened to him, and when he was alone, he was nothing at all. When he reached, in solitude, for a thought, there was no one there to think it. His chair was empty; he was finely dissolved throughout the building, from the city desk on the sixth floor, where he was about to intervene to prevent the sacking of a long-serving subeditor who could not spell, to the basement, where parking allocations had brought senior staff to open war and an assistant editor to the brink of resignation. Vernon's chair was empty because he was in Jerusalem, the House of Commons, Cape Town, and Manlia, globally disseminated like dust; he was on TV and radio, at dinner with some bishops, giving a speech to the oil industry or a seminar to the European Union specialists. In the brief moments during the day when he was alone, a light went out. Even ensuing darkness encompassed or inconvenienced no one in particular. He could not say for sure that he absence was his." (Chapter II, Part i, pg. 31-32)

"Lately he had realised that he was learning to live with non-existence. He could not mourn the passing something - himself - that he could no longer quite recall...He knew so many people who had died that in his present state of dissociation he could begin to contemplate his own end as a commonplace - a flurry of burying or cremating, a welt of grief raised, then subsiding as life swept on. Perhaps, he had already died." (Chapter II, Part i, pg. 33-34)

"In his corner of West London, and in his self-preoccupied daily round, it was easy for Clive to think of civilisation as the sum of all arts, along with design, cuisine, good wine, and the like. But now it appeared that this was what it really was - square miles of meagre modern houses whose principal purpose was the support of TV aerials and dishes; facotires producing worthless junk to be advertised on the televisions and, in dismal lots, lorries queuing to distribute it; and everywhere else, roads and the tyranny of traffic...As far as the welfare of every other living form on earth was concerned, the human project was not just a failure, it was a mistake from the very beginning." (Chapter III, Part i, pg. 68-69)

"There were the memories of the conversation, and then something beyond - what had been said, and then what he would like to have said to Vernon now that he had had hours to reflect. It was remembering, and it was also fantasizing: he imagined a drama in which he gave himself all the best lines, resonant lines of sad reasonableness whose indictments were all the more severe and unanswerable for their compression and emotional restraint." (Chapter III, Part i. pg. 72)

"We knew so little about each other. We lay mostly submerged, like ice floes, with our visible social selves projecting only cool and white. Here was a rare sight below the waves, of a man's privacy and turmoil, of his dignity upended by the overpowering necessity of pure fantasy, pure thought, by the irreducible human element - mind." (Chapter III, Part ii, pg. 76-77)



"Because of Molly. We don't like Garmony, but she did. He trusted her, and she respected his trust. It was something private between them. These are her pictures, nothing to do with me or you or your readers. She would have hated what you're doing. Frankly you're betraying her." (Chapter III, Part ii, pg. 81)

"Clive kept on because the shrinking and apprehension were precisely the conditions - the sickness - from which he sought release, and proof that his daily grind - crouching over that piano for hours every day - had reduced him to a cringing state. He would be large again and unafraid. There was no threat here, only elemental indifference. There were dangers, of course, but only the usually ones, and mild enough - injury from a fall, getting lost, a violent change of weather, night. Managing these would restore him to a sense of control. Soon human meaning would be bleached from the rocks, the landscape would assume its beauty and draw him in; the unimaginable age of the mountains and the fine mesh of living things that lay across them would remind him that he was part of this order and insignificant within it, and he would be set free." (Chapter III, Part iii, pg. 84)

"What was clear now was the pressure of choice: he should either go down and protect the woman, if she needed protection, or he should creep away round the side of Glaramara to find sheltered place to continue his work, if it was not already lost. He could not remain here doing nothing." (Chapter III, Part iii, pg. 94)

"Even as he was easing himself back down the slope, he understood that his hesitation had been a sham. He had decided at the very moment he was interrupted." (Chapter III, Part iii, pg. 95)

"...If he had approached the couple, a pivotal moment in his career would have been destroyed. The melody could not have survived the psychic flurry. Given the width of the ridge and the numerous paths that crossed it, how easily he could have missed them. It was as if he weren't there. He wasn't there. He was in his music. His fate, their fate, separate paths. It was not his business. This was his business, and it wasn't easy, and he wasn't asking for anyone's help." (Chapter III, Part iii, pg. 95-96)

"Despite the dissenting voices, a broad consensus was emerging that the *Judge* was a decent, fighting paper, and that the government had been in power too long and was financially, morally, and sexually corrupt, and that Julian Garmony was typical of it and was a despicable person whose head was urgently needed on a plate. In a week, sales were up by a hundred thousand, and the editor was finding he was arguing into silence from his senior editors rather than protests; secretly they all wanted him to go ahead as long as their principled dissent was minuted. Vernon was winning the argument because everyone, lowly journalists included, now saw that they could have it both ways - their paper saved, their consciences unstained." (Chapter IV, Part ii, pg. 108)

"To Clive, this variation had become a crucial feature of the work's conclusion; it needed to suggest the future's unknowability. When that by now familiar melody returned for the very last time, altered in a small and significant way, it should prompt insecurity in the



listener; it was a caution against clinging too tightly to what we knew." (Chapter V, Part i, pg. 146-147)

"That little message to him from Clive embodied and condensed all the poison of this affair - the blindness of his accusers, their hypocrisy, their vengefulness, and above all the element that Vernon considered the worse of human vices - personal betrayal." (Chapter V, Part ii, pg. 160-161)

"In a language as idiomatically stressed as English, opportunities for misreadings are bound to arise. By a backward movement of stress, a verb can become a noun, an act a thing. To refuse, to insist on saying no to what you believe is wrong, becomes at a stroke refuse, an insurmountable pile of garbage. As with words, so with sentences. What Clive had intended on Thursday and posted on Friday was, You deserve to be *sacked*. What Vernon was bound to understand on Tuesday in the aftermath of his dismissal was, You *deserve* to be sacked. Had the card arrived on Monday, he might have read it differently. This was the comic nature of their fate; a first-class stamp would have served both men well. On the other hand, perhaps no other outcomes were available to them, and this was the nature of their tragedy." (Chapter V, Part ii, pg. 161)

"It can happen sometimes, with those who brood on an injustice, that a taste for revenge can usefully combine with a sense of obligation." (Chapter V, Part ii, pg. 162)

"This should have been the symphony's moment of triumphant assertion, the gathering up of all that was joyously human before the destruction to come. But presented like this, as a simple fortissimo repetition, it was literal-minded bombast, it was bathos; less than that, it was void: one that only revenge could fill." (Chapter V, Part iii, pg. 173)

"The absence of the variation had wrecked his masterpiece, and he was clearer than ever now, if such a thing were possible, about the plans he had made. It was no longer fury that drove him, or hatred or disgust, or the necessity of honouring his word. What he was about to do was contractually right, it had the amoral inevitability of pure geometry, and he didn't feel a thing." (Chapter V, Part iii, pg. 175)

Topics for Discussion

Arguably, both Vernon Halliday and Clive Linley have behaved in morally objectionable ways. Vernon has acted wrongly by publishing scandalous photos of Garmony while Clive's failure to intervene in the assault in the Lake District constitutes a failure to perform a good act. Is Vernon's commission of a bad act morally equivalent to Clive's omission of a good act?

Legalized euthanasia is controversial for many reasons, of which one was mentioned in *Amsterdam*. Although neither the narrator nor any of the characters took any particular position on the question of the legalization of euthanasia, it has been suggested that some Dutch doctors have abused the euthanasia laws to commit murder. Is assisting someone to commit suicide importantly different from murdering that person? If so, what are the features that distinguish assisted suicide from murder?

One of the reasons that Clive cites in objection to Vernon's publication of the Garmony photos is that it constitutes a betrayal of Molly. Clive argues, "We don't like Garmony, but she did. He trusted her, and she respected his trust. It was something private between them. These are her pictures, nothing to do with me or you or your readers. She would have hated what you're doing. Frankly, you're betraying her." (81) Is Clive's argument convincing? If there is, indeed, a bond of trust between Molly and Julian, is the moral status of Vernon's actions influenced by it? If so, give a plausible explanation for why this should be so.

When Clive and Vernon's friendship collapses, each man plots to kill the other. Each man has a complicated set of reasons for killing the other. Some of the reasons are self-serving and some are based on giving the victim his just desert. What are Clive's reasons for killing Vernon? And, Vernon's for killing Clive? Is either man justified in killing the other?

One of the reasons to which Vernon appeals in order to justify publication of the Garmony photos is articulated in the following passage:

"If Garmony's not stopped now, if he gets to be prime minister in November, they've got a good chance of winning the election next year. Another five years. There'll be even more people living below the poverty line, more people in prison, more homeless, more crime, more riots like last year. He's been speaking in favour of national service. The environment will suffer because he'd rather please his business friends than sign the accords on global warming. He wants to take us out of Europe. Economic catastrophe!" (79-80)

Vernon seems to think that violating a man's right to privacy is permissible if so doing results in better consequences than not so doing. Are there certain inviolable rights such that violation of these rights is never permissible even if doing so would benefit others or prevent the suffering of others? If so, are the right to privacy and the right to free sexual expression (in private) included in those inviolable rights?



One of the crucial turning points in the plot of *Amsterdam* is Rose Garmony's press conference, in which she spoils the surprise associated with the *Judge's* publication of the photos of Julian Garmony. Suppose that this press conference hadn't occurred. How would things have turned out differently for Vernon? For Julian? For Clive?

Just before Clive dies, he hallucinates a visit from Molly, in which she suggests that she was the woman being assaulted in the Lake District. Clive is apologetic. Would Clive's moral obligation to intervene in the witnessed attack have been greater if the victim was a friend or family member than if it was a stranger? Why or why not?