Burmese Days Study Guide

Burmese Days by George Orwell

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

In Burma, during 1925, several English officials resist a directive to open their closed society somewhat by admitting a non-white member to their club. Most of the English display racist attitudes while Flory, the protagonist, lacks the moral courage to promote his Indian friend's social interests. Membership in the club brings enormous prestige, and a local corrupt Burmese official plots a far-ranging intrigue to ensure his own admission by destroying the reputation of his primary competitor. Meanwhile, the arrival of a beautiful young English woman sets many heads turning and complicates the lives of nearly everyone.

James Flory, the protagonist, has a large birthmark that covers much of one side of his face. This mark causes him to be self-conscious throughout his life, and by the time he is twenty he is introverted, reserved, and sullen. He travels to Burma to work as a manager in a British timber company at twenty and there pursues a life of debauchery and dissipation for fifteen years. At thirty-five he is prematurely aged, depressed, and wants much more than he feels he will ever be able to achieve. He lives in and works nearby to Kyauktada, a small town with a European Club.

The European Club is the social, and thus political, hub of the town. The club's membership is exclusively "white", and non-white native people are not admitted as members. As the British colony of India goes through political development, the club is ordered to accept at least one non-white member. The order outrages many of the virulently racist club members, but must be complied with. The obvious choice for admission is the Indian doctor Veraswami, an intelligent and educated man who is the highest-ranking non-white official in the town. Membership in the European Club would bring enormous prestige. Thus, the local corrupt magistrate and shady underworld figure U Po Kyin desires membership for himself. He therefore plots and intrigues to destroy the reputation of Veraswami so that the single non-white membership slot will be available. Veraswami is protected against most of U Po Kyin's attacks by his close friendship with Flory.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth—a young and beautiful English woman—arrives in the town under difficult circumstances. She is eligible and looking for a mate—and Flory seems to be the most appropriate match. The two pursue a brief and marginally successful courtship while maintaining invalid assumptions about each other. Then a dashing cavalry lieutenant passes through the town on official business and, spurred by her aunt's advice, Elizabeth drops Flory to pursue the officer. After having his way with Elizabeth, the cavalry officer abruptly departs for distant locales. Elizabeth returns to Flory, and as he is willing to overlook her indiscretion, their match seems sure.

U Po Kyin is not finished, however, and he arranges to have Flory's discharged Burmese concubine make a horrible scene during church services. The concubine's wailing charges horrify Flory and scandalize the town. Elizabeth rejects Flory absolutely and he returns to his home in agony, closets himself and his dog in his bedroom, shoots his dog, and commits suicide. Without Flory's protection, Veraswami is soon ruined and

U Po Kyin is indeed elected to the club where he is well-received. Elizabeth marries an older English gentleman of the town and the social situation in the area returns to normal.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

In Burma, during 1925, several English officials resist a directive to open their closed society somewhat by admitting a non-white member to their club. Most of the English display racist attitudes while Flory, the protagonist, lacks the moral courage to promote his Indian friend's social interests. Membership in the club brings enormous prestige, and a local corrupt Burmese official plots a far-ranging intrigue to ensure his own admission by destroying the reputation of his primary competitor. Meanwhile, the arrival of a beautiful young English woman sets many heads turning and complicates the lives of nearly everyone.

In 1925, U Po Kyin is a Subdivisional Magistrate of Kyauktada in Burma, at the time an English colony. He is fifty-six years old and enormously fat—so fat, in fact, that he requires assistance to stand from a seated position. U Po Kyin views his own fatness as desirable and the metaphysical result of devouring the essence of the many people he has defeated in his climb to success. His complexion is yellow. Notwithstanding his girth, his skin is unwrinkled. He wears traditional Burmese dress and speaks Burmese, the local language, as well as English. He chews and spits betel, though his teeth are apparently clean and numerous. From the age of seventeen through twenty, Po Kyin worked in various bazaars doing odd jobs. At the age of twenty he received a large sum of money by blackmail; he used the money to purchase an English government clerkship. During the ensuing years he steadily rose through the ranks of government. He is a cunning, dishonest, and avaricious man who cares nothing for others. He believes his life of greed and sin will lead him to a post-mortal condemnation, but plans to obviate this eventuality by constructing several fine pagodas, religious sites of worship, just prior to his death. U Po Kyin's personal servant is named Ba Taik. Ba Taik is an undersized and pockmarked man who, as an ex-convict, served U Po Kyin without pay. He presents the image of a thoroughly obsequious and dominated man. U Po Kyin's wife is named Ma Kin, though he directly addresses her as Kin Kin. She is an honest peasant woman who retains all the traits of her humble upbringing. Although Ma Kin knows about all of U Po Kyin's machinations and intrigues, she finds them distasteful and urges him to make recompense.

U Po Kyin meets with Ba Sein, a subordinate acquaintance, in his office, with Ba Taik hovering about. U Po Kyin and Ba Sein discuss their most recent intrigue. Ba Taik displays a copy of the Burmese Patriot, a dual-language newspaper of execrable production and dubious reputation. The paper contains an editorial which humorously slanders the name of Mr. Macgregor, the English Deputy Commissioner of the area. After approving of the editorial, U Po Kyin announces that they will henceforth make a concerted attack upon the character of Dr. Veraswami, a local Indian resident. Veraswami will be attacked by having his loyalty to the English Empire called into question by a series of anonymous letters.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The opening chapter of the novel introduces the primary antagonist, U Po Kyin, and establishes his character, background, and motivation. He is easy to comprehend and physically fits the role of a traditional behind-the-scenes villain. Not satisfied to be merely a high-ranking "native" official, U Po Kyin wants to be fully integrated with the English society and accepted by white men as an equal. Although rich, he cares little for money, beyond using it as a tool. U Po Kyin's wife, Ma Kin, acts as a sort of expository device throughout the novel. As the only character not beholden to or terrified of U Po Kyin, she comments upon his plans with impunity. U Po Kyin explains his plans and rationale to his wife, which of course gives the author the fictional construction necessary to reveal these things without narrative comment. As might be expected, U Po Kyin's presence in the narrative is constant but relatively minor beyond the initial chapter. Nearly all of his plans are executed flawlessly and have the intended impact. He suffers a few minor setbacks but proves adaptable, intelligent, and nimble in his reactions. He is always able to turn minor setbacks to his own advantage. More than any other character in the novel, he understands the English mind—far better, in fact, than even the English characters themselves.

In addition to introducing U Po Kyin, the chapter establishes the time and place of the novel's setting. The year is 1925 and the locale is Kyauktada, a fictional town in Burma—at that time a British colony considered to be part of India. From a meta-fictional perspective, U Po Kyin's plan lays out, in broad but correct outline, the entire plot of the novel.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Remembering that it is "English Mail Day", Mr. Flory arises early and visits the Kyauktada European Club, a dingy four-room affair. Flory, addressed in the native patois as "Mr. Porley", is about thirty-five years old, of middle height, and has black, stiff hair. He wears a moustache and has sallow, nearly yellow, skin. His most distinguishing feature, however, is a grotesque and large birthmark which covers most of the left half of his face, running in a large crescent from his eye to his chin. Flory is exceptionally self-conscious about the birthmark and always stands with it away from whomever he is addressing, and often simply covers it with his hand. Flory works as the local representative of an English timbering company. Kyauktada is a small town with a population of four thousand, including perhaps two hundred fifty Indians, sixty Chinese, seven Europeans, two mixed-blood Eurasians, one fakir, and the remainder being Burmese locals. The European Club boasts an exclusively English membership—hence limited of necessity to seven members.

Flory arrives at the club at about 8 A.M. and meets Mr. Westfield on the porch. Westfield is sandy-haired and has a prickly moustache, wide-set grey eyes and abnormally thin calves. Westfield speaks in clipped and soldierly prose and appears to intend most of his own statements as jokes. He is the District Superintendent of Police. Flory and Westfield make small talk and then proceed into the clubhouse. Inside they meet Lackersteen, Ellis, and Maxwell—all of them are drinking. Lackersteen is a local manager of an English timber firm. He is florid and about forty years old; his only concern in life is trying to have a good time which, like most men, he defines as heavy drinking and carousing with younger women. He is married, however, and his wife watches over his behavior like a cat watches a mouse hole. Ellis is the assistant manager of another English timber company. He is a tiny man with wiry hair, pale skin, and sharp features. He is exceptionally restless, speaks in a cockney accent, and is quick to anger but also quickly calms down. Ellis's most pronounced feature is his virulent and vehement racism, which marks him as exceptional even among the other virulently racist Europeans. Maxwell is the somewhat aloof Acting Divisional Forest Officer. He is blonde and twenty-five years old—very young for his position. He is accused of often pursuing sexual relations with local women—a charge he does not deny. The five Englishmen sit and drink and discuss Lackersteen's hangover, the weather, and other minor things.

The discussion soon drifts to a notice recently posted by Macgregor, the club's secretary, which urges the acceptance of a non-European club member. Ellis is astounded and outraged, and pours forth a litany of racist hatred which is quite shocking. Even more shocking is the general consent given to his extreme viewpoint by the other men. After about forty-five minutes, the virulent racism degrades into a series of bawdy sex jokes and profanities. After an hour, Mr. Macgregor and Mrs. Lackersteen arrive. Macgregor is the local Deputy Commissioner and also the Secretary of the

European Club. As such, he is simultaneously the political and social leader of the English community. He wears a silk suit over his large and heavy body. He habitually thrusts his head forward which has gained him the nickname of 'tortoise' among the Burmese. He is forty-five years old, garrulous, and wears spectacles. Mrs. Lackersteen is a fairly attractive woman but has an adolescent body type—Flory considers her "contourless". She is thirty-five years old and displays an amazingly negative racist view coupled with an equally distasteful classist view, aided by a generous amount of ignorance. Having once discovered her husband carousing with three naked, young, and drunk Burmese girls, Mrs. Lackersteen never allows Lackersteen to wander far from home.

Ellis immediately accosts Macgregor, noting that admitting a non-white member to the club is opposed by all. Lackersteen and Westfield support Ellis; they all desire a white-only establishment and object to non-white members. Macgregor is offended by Ellis's use of the word nigger to describe all non-white people and delivers a rather obtuse lecture claiming that Burmese are Mongolians, whereas Indians are Aryans or Dravidians, and they should not be lumped together under insulting epithets. Then all the English, Macgregor included, join in vituperating the local populace and place, wishing that England would quit imposing laws and morality from abroad, and pining for the old days when uppity servants could simply be lashed. Finally, Flory becomes angered at the unbridled racisms and departs. In his absence, Ellis in turn vituperates Flory, noting that he has non-white friends, which certainly makes him suspect. Finally, as 10 A.M. approaches, the heat becomes oppressive and all the men depart to their various stations or houses.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2 is the longest chapter in the book, at nearly twice the length of an average chapter. The chapter introduces John Flory, the primary protagonist of the novel. Although he gives his name as "John" within the narrative text, the flyleaf of many editions name him as "James" Flory, and in a few editions of the text his name is given internally as James. With minor exception, however, he is referred to throughout the narrative as Flory, a name the Burmese humorously mispronounce as "Porley". Flory's dominant and over-arching characteristic is a horrid blue birthmark that spans most of one side of his face. Throughout his entire life he has been ashamed of it and in most scenes of the novel he attempts to hide it, either facing away from other characters or simply covering it with his hand—an action that obviously draws attention to the birthmark. It is so obvious that it could not possibly be missed by anyone. In the chapter, Flory is introduced and described.

The chapter also introduces virtually all of the minor characters in the novel—for the most part a group of unlikable, virulently racist, extremely classist, and brazenly sexist English men. The group includes Westfield, Maxwell, Lackersteen, and—the worst of them all—Ellis. The chapter also establishes the primary tension which runs throughout the remainder of the text. The English residents of the town belong to the European Club, access to which is controlled by race—that is, only white men are allowed as

members. The club has been recently ordered to accept a non-white member—anyone will do, so long as he is non-white. Although white women are allowed in the club, they are not considered members. The club also has steep dues and is thus simultaneously exclusive for reasons of race, gender, and class: it is just as the members like it. The chapter also introduces Macgregor, a bumbling but likable Englishman who is in general unexceptionally competent at his various functions, and Mrs. Lackersteen, Lackersteen's wife. She holds equally racist and classist views as the men and, as will be demonstrated, cares far more for money and station than morality or ethics.

The interaction between the individuals introduced in the chapter remains consistent throughout the novel, though the tempo and intensity varies by the situation. Thus, Macgregor is nominally in charge but rarely takes initiative. Ellis constantly spews forth hateful racist and sexist drivel, which earns him the support of Winfield, Maxwell, and Lackersteen. Flory holds weakly radical views and is somewhat ostracized for them. Mrs. Lackersteen worries about her husband's doings.

Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

After leaving the European Club, Flory walks a block to the house of his close friend, Dr. Veraswami. Veraswami's house's garden adjoins the clubhouse lawns; his house's back faces the roadway, the front points at the hospital. Mrs. Veraswami, an ardent and pious Hindu, hears Flory's call and immediately hides herself from his presence. Veraswami greets Flory and invites him inside. Veraswami is a plump, small, energetic, and eagerly garrulous Indian. He has a bubbling voice, fuzzy hair, and wears spectacles. Veraswami earnestly adores English culture and genuinely feels that the native peoples of India and Burma are literally inferior peoples, himself apparently included. Flory enters the house, reclines in a deck chair, and accepts cigarettes and English alcohol from his guest.

They then embark on what is obviously a ritualized but lengthy and favorite argument. Flory's thesis is that the English colonizers are quite simply robbers, preying upon the Burmese natural resources. Veraswami insists that the English are engaging in valid commerce and points to the many improvements they have made in the country. Flory abhors the English practice of assuming what he insists is a fabricated stance of trying to assist the natives better themselves; his main objection to this charade is not the morality of it—but rather that is causes the English themselves into various moral contortions which are self-damaging. The debate continues as Flory insists colonization is primarily materialistic and exploitative, whereas Veraswami insists it is primarily moralistic and beneficent. Eventually they are interrupted when a well-known beggar, ironically also an employee of the European Club, passes in the street. Both Veraswami and Flory toss a small-denomination coin to the man who then wanders away.

Flory then moves to leave. Veraswami quickly confides in Flory that U Po Kyin has set about to ruin Veraswami's name. Veraswami notes cautiously that, if he were only a member of the sacrosanct European Club, he would be beyond U Po Kyin's grasp. Flory internally considers Veraswami's plight; surely Flory could nominate Veraswami with ultimate success—but at the personal cost of alienating Ellis and possibly others. Flory quickly decides that he will not extend himself for his friend; though friends, he considers Veraswami his social inferior. As Flory walks away without committing to anything, Veraswami cautions him that U Po Kyin will probably also make attacks upon Flory. Flory easily dismisses the social influence amongst the English of any Burmese as laughable.

Flory returns to his bungalow and sleeps through the hottest part of the day. He customarily spends about one week every month in Kyauktada and three weeks at his field labor camp directing operations. Flory's bungalow is small and mostly featureless and only a few hundred yards from Macgregor's bungalow. Flory's boyhood friend and current servant, Ko S'la, prepares and serves tea, waking Flory. Ko S'la informs Flory that Ma Hla May, Flory's native mistress, has arrived. Ma Hla May enters the room and partially disrobes, joining Flory on the bed as Ko S'la departs. Flory insists that she

leave but she caresses him and entices him into sexual intercourse. Afterward, she attempts to again arouse him but he becomes angered and demands in rude terms that she leave, calling her a prostitute and stating that she cheats on him. Ma Hla May remonstrates with Flory, stating that she finds Burmese men repulsive—though she indeed maintains a Burmese lover. Ma Hla May is also upset that Flory does not support her as lavishly as he once did—they have been lovers for about two years. Flory, irritated and feeling guilty, hides his birthmark with his hand and rejects her. He tells her to take some money from his wallet and then insists that she leaves.

Flory then gets up, dresses, and takes his black cocker spaniel Flo out for a several hour walk. They go into the countryside and Flory takes in the natural beauty; he finds the oppressive heat and attendant sweating cathartic. They walk to a place known to them, where a huge tree grows out of a riverbank, making a sort of private pool. Flory strips and bathes, then sits for some time. He then dresses and resumes his walk home. When he arrives at his bungalow he enlists the help of Ko S'la in grooming Flo and ridding her of ticks—a task that must be performed every day. After a light dinner, Flory returns to the European Club.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Flory's visit to Veraswami introduces another major character in the novel. The good doctor is the highest-ranking native official in the area and therefore is the obvious choice for the non-white club member. He is also the particular friend of Flory and, by this intimate association with a white man, gains social status from it. Their argument is not necessarily contrived but it is obvious they have argued the same topic so often that they are merely playing a role at this point. Veraswami genuinely believes himself to be of an inferior race to Flory and this distasteful feature of the man is carried throughout the novel. Flory objects to the so-called "white man's burden", primarily because it corrupts the white man, not because it is morally repugnant. His argument is that the thieving British should admit they are simply thieves and get on with the robbery. Veraswami feels the robbery is justified by the manifest blessings bestowed by the English.

The friendship between Flory and Veraswami is a recurrent theme in the novel. As U Po Kyin wants to join the European Club he will have to ensure that Veraswami does not. Yet Veraswami's friendship with Flory prevents U Po Kyin from directly attacking the doctor. Instead, a series of subtle intrigues will play out that—ultimately—will spell disaster for Veraswami and death for Flory. Flory considers his position to be difficult—on the one hand his public support of Veraswami would be decisive in the doctor's social life. But public support for the Indian would be objected to by Flory's associates at the club. Flory lacks the moral courage to stand up for his personal beliefs and his friend until late in the novel when he perceives he has nothing more to lose. This hesitation proves fatal to Flory.

Flory feels himself to be above the racist attitudes of Ellis and others, yet note his reaction to Veraswami's warning of U Po Kyin's intrigue—Flory thinks it laughable that

any Burmese could even touch an Englishman. He is completely incorrect as events will prove out. Another unlikable dimension to Flory is his horrid treatment of Ma Hla May; they have been lovers for two years, and she lives in his house more-or-less as a dedicated concubine. Yet he treats her with derision and open disgust. This lopsided relationship will come back to haunt him. Flory spends more time grooming his dog than having sexual intercourse with his mistress. When Flory is done having sex with Ma Hla May, he discharges her by paying her—a clear indication that, at least in his mind, she is nothing more than a prostitute of convenience. For her day's service, he pays her five rupees—or only about twenty times what he had casually tossed to the beggar outside Veraswami's house. Although loyal to Flory, Ko S'la does not inform him that Ma Hla May is prosecuting an affair with his brother Ba Pe. In fact, Ko S'la could be remarkably helpful to Flory but realizes that Flory would discount any advise he might offer.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

In the evening the Lackersteens, along with Macgregor, drive out of town to pick up their niece. Flory, Ellis, and Maxwell chat at the European Club until Westfield arrives—he is in a rage and waves about a copy of the Burmese Patriot. The other men quickly read the article slandering Macgregor and all of them fly into a rage, though Flory's is mostly an act. They discuss the outrage and Ellis decides that Veraswami must somehow be responsible. As Veraswami is the logical non-white intended by Macgregor for acceptance into the club, Ellis writes a brief note demanding that no non-white (he uses the term "nigger") be admitted into the establishment. All four men sign the notice and it is posted. Flory realizes that he has signed his name to a document denigrating his friend, but lacks the conviction to run counter to the other men's emotional outburst. After signing, Flory drinks heavily and finally staggers out of the club and wanders homeward, reminiscing about his early life.

When Flory, in about 1899 and around age nine, had entered school, he was immediately nicknamed "blueface" because of his birthmark. Some few months later the nickname was changed to "Monkey-bum". His initial education was poor and harsh; he subsequently entered a cheap, third-rate public school and learned virtually nothing in the harsh and often violent atmosphere. Leaving school without future opportunities, Flory accepted a position in Burma and relocated there at the age of twenty, around 1910. He wholeheartedly engaged in a life of debauchery with a few other associates, his daily routine consisting of little more than drinking, smoking, intercourse with prostitutes, and sport shooting. During the next decade he made his living with a timber company and spent his energy on dissipation interspersed with various fevers. Upon the advent of World War I, he was twenty-four years old but remained in Burma pursuing debauchery rather than enlisting. At the age of twenty-seven, he contracted a debilitating disease consisting of a whole-body outbreak of mud-sores; for the next two years he was lightly disfigured by the slow-to-heal pocks. His life of dissipation and fevers left him appearing prematurely aged and sallow.

In 1920, at the age of about thirty, Flory had made his first abortive return to England where he hoped to woo and marry a suitable English woman to return with him to Burma. His voyage lasted only until Colombo in Sri Lanka, whereupon he received notice that several of his business associates had died of blackwater fever, a complication of malaria. He was ordered to cancel his vacation, return to Burma immediately, and resume his post. His return after only a few days away was like a homecoming; Ko S'la and Ba Pe gave him gifts. He found Burma to be his real home and lost all desire to leave. Over the next few years in England, both of his parents died and his sisters got married. By the time of the novel's opening, Flory feels entirely isolated and lonely and greatly desires some friend, or even a wife, in whom he can confide his real and earnest feelings. Instead, he spends his time with Englishmen such as Ellis and pretends to agree with their worldview. He thinks of Mrs. Lackersteen with

disgust—twenty years in Burma and still entirely spiteful of it. Finally home and irritated by the baying of a stray dog, Flory gets out his rifle and shoots at the animal, missing it entirely but bruising his shoulder by the recoil. He cannot sleep due to the humidity and heat, many mosquitoes buzzing about, his own drunken confusion, and the baying of many stray dogs.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The chapter provides strong background on Flory and fleshes out many of the minor characters. As such, little plot is developed in this segment of the novel, but it is of vital worth in establishing Flory's attitudes and personal motivation. He has lived in Burma from age twenty to thirty-five and has adopted it as his home—by a prolonged and unconscious mental process. He has attempted only a single return to England, and when it was interrupted, did not appear to mourn the lost opportunity. He is intrigued by the culture, speaks the language, knows the customs, appreciates the art, and is wholly dedicated to the land. The chapter also establishes his essentially empty life, devoid of meaning—he works, drinks, whores about, engages in meaningless and ritualized conversations, and staggers home to pass out. His one unspoken desire is to find a confidant—perhaps an English wife—with whom he can share his adopted country; he does not realize that such a woman would be nearly unique. The only English wife with whom he is acquainted is Mrs. Lackersteen and she is the very antithesis of what he desires. The chapter's plot development is limited to the circulation of the slanderous article attacking Macgregor—U Po Kyin's schemes are already bearing fruit—and the brief mention that the Lackersteen's niece will shortly be joining the closed society of Kyauktada.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

On the morning of the second day in the novel's primary timeline, Macgregor arises early and does his exercise routine, then goes for a morning walk. He has seen the slanderous article in the Burmese Patriot and attempts to maintain a cheerful disposition in spite of it. Flory watches Macgregor walk by and despises the other man's essential Englishness. Meanwhile, Westfield oversees an arrest and expedient interrogation. Flory then idles about the area, observing the incredible poverty of the many non-white inhabitants and inspecting some of the local squalor. He receives an anonymous letter and reads it—it states that Veraswami is not to be trusted, is the force behind the slanderous article in the Burmese Patriot, and should be avoided. Although Veraswami is his only friend, he immediately decides he will not be drawn into what he terms a "native affair", and thus tears the letter into pieces and drops it into the mud. His contemplation is interrupted by a scream of terror—he rushes to toward the sound.

Flory discovers Elizabeth Lackersteen, a young English woman, facing off with a water-buffalo, a timid creature of no moment. The woman is obviously terrified, so Flory runs forward and bats the animal on the nose, whereupon it retreats. The woman—Flory considers her a girl—is grateful; she is twenty-two years old, has short yellow hair cut off in the Eton crop, and long, slender, youthful hands. She hugs Flory in frightened thanks and he is immediately aware of her youthful body; he feels warmth spread through his body.

Flory and Elizabeth engage in conversation for about an hour. All throughout their talking, Flory faces away from her to hide his birthmark. They talk about gardening, then books and reading, and then about sport shooting. Flory tells her about his one-time killing of an elephant, which she finds fascinating. Flory feels that, perhaps, he has finally located someone in whom he can confide—simultaneously Elizabeth is carried away by Flory's rescue and exuberant discourse. After a while, she gets up to leave. As she walks out she encounters Ma Hla May. The two women come nearly face to face and examine each other for a long period. Ma Hla May, in Burmese, demands to know who Elizabeth is. Flory, in Burmese, responds that Ma Hla May is to immediately leave the house or he will severely beat her; she acquiesces and departs. Flory tells Elizabeth that she was merely the laundress. Elizabeth is surprised to learn that Ma Hla May is in fact female—she thought she had been looking at a young boy. Flory's perception of Elizabeth is based upon at least one notable incorrect assumption: he takes her period in Paris to indicate she is something of an educated libertine, while in fact Elizabeth would rather forget the entire two-year experience.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The chapter introduces the last major character in the novel—Elizabeth Lackersteen. It provides little biographical data on her; this will be provided in future chapters. Instead, the chapter focuses on her appearance and her initial reactions to Flory. This approach of character introduction varies from that previously used in the novel and is an ingenious textual approach that makes Elizabeth as curious and new to the reader as she must appear to Flory and the other English of the town. As seen through Flory's eyes she is young, sexual, attractive, and present—her many vices and unlikable features only gradually become apparent. Note the carefully constructed contrast between Kyauktada before and after Flory encounters Elizabeth. Before they meet, he idles in the street and witnesses the debilitation of extreme poverty and squalor. After they meet he sits in the European Club, isolated from Burma, and engages her in anxious conversation—almost a verbal attack.

Flory's comment upon killing an elephant is a humorous meta-fictional reference to Orwell's well-known essay "Shooting an Elephant". As the current novel is considered to by somewhat autobiographical, the obvious inclusion of such meta-fictional element is doubly intriguing. Notice that Flory anthropomorphizes the killing of the animal into murder. As will become apparent shortly, access to Elizabeth's sexuality is via animals—the killing or controlling of animals appeals to her inner sensitivities. Flory could bed Elizabeth within days if he confined his voluminous conversation to the slaughter of various animals in heavy weather. Instead he makes the fatal mistake of talking about literature.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 Summary

Elizabeth sits in her uncle's house and reads. Her father had been sometimes successful and from fourteen to sixteen years of age she spent a few years at an exclusive public school—the period formed her entire worldview and everything in Elizabeth's experience is either "lovely", or expensive and aristocratic, or "beastly", which is cheap, low, shabby, or bad. After her father's financial failure in 1919 and subsequent death, her mother determined to become an artist and moved to Paris where rents were less expensive. Elizabeth worked as an English-language instructor and lived independently in a tiny apartment; she considers this two-year period of her life to have been rather "beastly". Elizabeth recalls the Parisian literary crowd with horror, and shudders at the thought of any man discarding income in favor of aesthetics. After her mother's death from ptomaine poisoning, she was invited to travel to Burma by her uncle, Dan Lackersteen. Elizabeth found the gay temporary society formed aboard ship engaging and exciting; she was somewhat shocked upon her arrival by the shabby condition of most things in Burma. Mrs. Lackersteen is somewhat dismayed by Elizabeth's acceptance and intends to marry her off as quickly as possible; her counsel to her niece focuses on how to quickly secure a local man as a husband. Lackersteen leers at his niece's youthful good looks.

In the evening, Flory and Elizabeth walk about in private conversation. Flory has been so long in Burma that he forgets English convention and etiquette. In the distance, he hears the drums of a local entertainment gathering and determines, quite incorrectly, that Elizabeth will also find it appropriate and enjoyable. He escorts her to the scene—a giant crowd of locals sitting on the ground and watching a variety show on stage. Elizabeth is shocked as Flory maneuvers them into the crowd. U Po Kyin sees Flory and gestures to him—Flory and Elizabeth move into the center of the crowd. U Po Kyin interrupts the normal show schedule and the main attraction, a Burmese female dancer, takes the stage and begins to execute a provocative dance. Flory is consumed by the moment and in a hushed voice whispers into Elizabeth's ear, narrating the dance and commenting upon Burma's essence in a prolonged monologue. He is engrossed by the performance and the ambiance and fails to notice Elizabeth's reaction. She is repulsed by the proximity of so many non-white people; she is scandalized by the dance; she finds the entire experience "beastly" and entirely unacceptable. After a few minutes she stands up and rushes away, followed by a confused Flory—he has not yet realized she is not the person he imagines her to be. An awkward conversation and apology follows as they walk up the road—they agree to not discuss their attendance.

They enter the European Club and are greeted by the usual crowd; the men anxiously seek Elizabeth's attention. In a quiet moment, Ellis pulls Flory aside and congratulates him—Ellis says that Mrs. Lackersteen has determined that Elizabeth will marry Flory. Flory, still confused, protests. Ellis then delivers a sexist and grotesque monologue comparing Elizabeth and other English girls to frozen joints of meat, packed in England

and shipped to Burma for consumption by the English bachelors. Ellis then engages in various smutty comments about Elizabeth. When the Lackersteens finally leave in the evening, however, Flory remains behind drinking, while Macgregor escorts them home.

Over the next two weeks the town divides along lines of support for Veraswami and U Po Kyin; the latter party is much larger. In Kyauktada a rebellions prisoner escapes and rumors of rebellion begin to circulate—Maxwell, Westfield, and Ellis yearn for rebellion so they can marshal armed forces and kill Burmese rebels. Macgregor requests and receives a contingent of Indian soldiers. However, nothing comes of the chatter. Meanwhile, Flory turns Ma Hla May out of his house, writing her a check for one hundred rupees and sending her away. Ko S'la realizes this indicates Flory will soon be married; the various servants discuss how terrible it is to work in a house ruled by an English woman and many of them threaten to quit their posts if Flory indeed marries.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 Analysis

Chapters 7 and 8 are both slightly shorter than the average chapter length; Chapter 9 is one of the shortest chapters in the novel. Chapters 7 and 8, along with Chapter 6, develop the second day of the novel's primary timeline. Chapter 9 deviates from this by considering a period of about ten to fourteen days. The intense focus given to character development during the first several chapters gives way to plot development in latter chapters—typical construction for any novel. From Chapter 9 onwards, the timeline is greatly expanded so that the entire novel covers the period of perhaps two and a half months.

Elizabeth's character background is provided. She has had a typical, if difficult life. Her father, Dan Lackersteen's brother, was successful in wartime business but failed shortly thereafter. During her "rich" period, Elizabeth attended a private and exclusive school for about two years, from age fourteen to sixteen. This brief but intense period has formed her entire worldview and she desires a return to the halcyon days of access to exclusivity and wealth. She maintains a fairly obvious bipolar division of nearly everything—whatever is poor, squalid, ugly, or non-English she terms "beastly"; whatever is rich, clean, beautiful, or aristocratic she terms "lovely". She has one further minor category for things which could be "lovely" but are fatally marred by devotion to literature or art—these things, usually people, she terms "highbrow", and values them akin to something "beastly". This tripartite division serves her well. In this scheme, Veraswami, U Po Kyin, and literally all of Burma is "beastly"; the European Club and its few English members are "lovely", and Flory vacillates between "lovely" and "highbrow" depending on whether or not Elizabeth listens to his incessant conversation.

After her father's death, Elizabeth is more-or-less dragged off to Paris by her mother who has decided to "become" an artist, apparently without any skill whatsoever. She is dedicated, though, and remains in her "highbrow" studio pursuing an irregular education in the arts until her forecasted death from ptomaine poisoning: alas, had only Elizabeth proved a more conscientious housekeeper! The invitation to visit Burma from Mrs. Lackersteen is accepted—much to Mrs. Lackersteen's horror—and thus Elizabeth, a

tiny spot of unsullied England, arrives in Kyauktada. It is critical to the novel's success to realize how entirely incorrect Flory's assessment of Elizabeth always is. He views her as his soul mate—not because she is, but just because she is there. While he is revolted by Mrs. Lackersteen, he is captured by Elizabeth, yet she is more or less her aunt's creature. In her own way, Elizabeth is far more insightful than Flory: she sees him for what he is, a slightly "highbrow" Englishman with funny ideas and an unfortunate penchant to talk about non-trivial things.

The descriptions of local Burmese culture and life in these chapters—particularly of the pwe—are considered to be some of the novel's finest writing. Nowhere is the essential difference between Flory and Elizabeth illustrated better than in their respective reactions to the dancer at the pwe. Ellis's character is further developed—he is, truly, a wholly unlikable man. Ellis is not only virulently racist, but equally sexist. Ellis is apparently unable to stop vituperating someone and his description of Elizabeth as a joint of corn-fed beef, knackered and frozen in England for consumption in Burma, is horrific.

Chapters 10, 11, 12, and 13

Chapters 10, 11, 12, and 13 Summary

During the fortnight previously discussed in Chapter 9, Flory and Elizabeth continue to spend time in each other's company, often with the Lackersteens, but as often alone. During this time, Flory continues to feel distant from Elizabeth, not understanding her and not connecting with her. Instead of engaging him in meaningful conversation, Elizabeth seems only to discuss trivialities; he finds her actual tastes in literature horrid. As her de facto chaperone, Flory often makes comments vaguely in favor of the Burmese and Elizabeth finds this irritating; she considers them "only a 'subject' people, an inferior people with black faces" (p. 118). She begins to suspect that Flory's ideas and views are not quite properly English. One day they meet for tennis and Flory arrives somewhat early. He is engaged in conversation by two so-called Eurasians—bastards of a Burmese mother and an English father. When Elizabeth arrives she is shocked to find Flory speaking to such men. When one of the men addresses her directly she finds it to be an impertinent affront. Later, when Flory explains their family heritage, she is further shocked and suggests that a subscription should be taken up to send them away—exactly to where she does not envision. She is stunned that any white man could find a native woman—she refers to them as "black" women—attractive. Flory hypocritically asserts that most white men do not. During the conversation Elizabeth realizes that Flory is not quite right in his opinions and thoughts.

On another occasion Flory takes Elizabeth to the local market, ensuring her she will find it interesting. She finds it disgusting and filthy. Flory charges ahead into the thick of the market throng as Elizabeth trails behind in horror. After several minutes he suddenly realizes she is horrified, not entranced. He ushers her toward a local Chinese shop. Just on the steps he receives a letter from a carrier—it is a note from Ma Hla May demanding fifty rupees and threatening a scene. He tells the carrier to inform Ma Hla May that he will not be blackmailed. Inside the shop, Elizabeth is horrified by the Chinese, believing them to be absolutely disgusting savages. She exits the shop abruptly and Flory follows her as an argument ensues. He still does not realize she views the native cultures as squalid and beneath her; his attempts to interest Elizabeth in them has estranged her. They walk back home and begin to chatter about the heat, dogs, and tennis. On these subjects Elizabeth is quite agreeable. They part at the Lackersteen's house and agree that in a few days they will go shooting together; Elizabeth has arranged to borrow her uncle's gun and is quite enthusiastic about the prospects of shooting.

During the time Flory and Elizabeth are developing their initial relationship, Macgregor begins to believe that Veraswami is indeed plotting seditious intrigue. Macgregor has received several anonymous letters denouncing the doctor. One of them predicted a prison break and implicated Veraswami, the prison overseer, as an accomplice. The break had actually occurred as predicted and Macgregor concludes only an insider could have provided the information—putatively this means Veraswami's involvement is

also accurate. Westfield has received letters implying that Veraswami is in cahoots with U Po Kyin; this convinces Westfield that Veraswami is corrupt because U Po Kyin certainly is. Ellis needs no prodding to hate Veraswami. Mrs. Lackersteen receives anonymous letters indicating that Veraswami is behind a gang of natives who kidnap and rape white women—her dominating fear. And Flory has entirely abandoned Veraswami. Thus, the entire European population of the town views Veraswami distrustfully.

Meanwhile, U Po Kyin chats with his wife Ma Kin, exulting in his successes. U Po Kyin is the author of all of the letters; he arranged and executed the prison break. And he is even fomenting a distant rebellion so that, in time, he can step in and crush it before it gains momentum. This will gain for him enormous prestige, possibly a medal, and widespread honors. Ma Kin deplores all of this wicked behavior and questions why U Po Kyin would want to discredit Veraswami in the first place. Then U Po Kyin states that the European Club has been as much as ordered to accept a non-white member—the obvious choice would have been Veraswami, the highest-ranking non-white official. But U Po Kyin's smear campaign has ended Veraswami's chances; naturally, after crushing an incipient revolution, U Po Kyin will be the next choice for club membership. Ma Kin suddenly sees the genius in U Po Kin's plans—she swoons with the giddy expectation of entering into the presence of the English in their own club.

Meanwhile, Flory visits the hospital in search of Veraswami. He walks by corpses and huddles of sick people awaiting treatment. He finds Veraswami, who greets him warmly; they make small jokes about the stench of the hospital while they retire to Veraswami's rooms. There, Flory makes a bungling apology which Veraswami waves off as unnecessary. Veraswami then explains portions of U Po Kyin's various schemes to discredit the doctor. In particular, he knows about U Po Kyin's efforts to bring about a minor rebellion and pin the blame on Veraswami. Veraswami realizes that he has no defense and will probably be successfully smeared and socially defeated. Flory wonders aloud would such be possible were Veraswami a member of the European Club? Veraswami assures Flory that was such the case his standing and good name would be assured. Whereupon Flory uncharacteristically promises to advocate for Veraswami's membership at the next general meeting. Veraswami is overcome with emotion and, literally weeping, thanks Flory for his support. Veraswami assures Flory that even if he is allowed to join the club he will pay dues but never visit the establishment—he does not want to discommode the Europeans with his own filthy presence. Flory then departs and on the way home muses about his newfound courage; he credits it to Elizabeth's strong influence over him.

At home, however, Flory finds a disagreeable scene. Ma Hla May has returned and she wanders around the house, downcast and pleading. She begs Flory to take her back, noting that she has been made useless for anything but prostitution. She even offers to pose as a common servant and live in the house while Flory pursues marriage and a relationship with Elizabeth. Flory, surprised at her tenacity, tells her to get out. She prostrates herself before him, weeping and begging. He finds her display disgusting and nerve-wracking and repeatedly orders her to leave, finally giving her money to convince

her to go. As Ma Hla May stumbles away, distraught, Flory wonders what has become of his life.

Chapters 10, 11, 12, and 13 Analysis

Flory and Elizabeth continue to develop their misaligned relationship. Flory is too captured by her English (white) beauty to notice she is a dismal match for him; Elizabeth is too inexperienced and vapid to focus on Flory's radical ideas long enough to realize he is not suitable for her. Such a situation is obvious and familiar to anyone who has dated more than one person. The novel's theme of race and class division is epitomized by Samuel and Francis, termed Eurasians in the text. The two men had native mothers and English fathers and are thus of mixed race. They consider themselves to be Europeans, and often make reference to their apparently European physiology. The English consider them to be non-white and they are excluded from any society—the natives consider them to be bastards and they are thus excluded from Burmese society. Elizabeth displays a startling ignorance when she is surprised that any English man could have any sort of sexual relation with a non-white woman. Her reaction to the Eurasians is quite telling—she thinks that a subscription should be taken up to send them away. In other words, they are "beastly" and should be shipped off so that she does not have to think about them any more. Where they would go is an open question.

The description of the Burmese market is a masterpiece of fiction. It is often discussed as one of Orwell's best narrative elements in any of his writing and is considered to be essentially correct in every detail. One would surmise that after the disaster of the pwe, Flory would not make the same mistake twice. Yet he is so convinced that Elizabeth will share his love of the local culture that he is entirely blind to her actual worldview. Meanwhile, U Po Kyin's schemes continue to evolve. Using the constructional mechanism of a man confiding to his wife, U Po Kyin's intricate intrigues are explained in the text long before they eventuate. The ignorant Flory receives Veraswami's alarmed reports with a lack of interest—these "native affairs" do not concern a proper Englishman. Ma Hla May's early return and demand for money foreshadows several similar events which occur in the latter portions of the novel. Flory's surprise at her brazen behavior correctly indicates that she is not acting on her own initiative.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

The long-awaited day arrives and Flory accompanies Elizabeth on a shooting expedition. As it would be improper to spend the night afield, they travel only a few hours from the town by canoe, up the river, to a nearby sport-shooting area. The village where they debark has prepared a resting spot while beaters are gathered and the shooting is readied. Elizabeth refuses to enter the native headman's house, and then spurns the refreshments offered. Instead, she clutches her gun—borrowed from her uncle—and finds the feel of it fascinating; she has never before held a firearm. Elizabeth is nearly giddy and talks excessively of shooting, cartridges, and adventure. Flory cautions her that shooting is often boring and unproductive. He tells her about once shooting a tiger, as a youth, and she is captivated by his bravery. Elizabeth finds such "manly" talk to be invigorating and feels it makes up for much of Flory's queerness. Finally the hunt is readied and they walk down a dusty road and through some jungle. The beaters and native trackers offer a propitiatory sacrifice and then the first drive through the brush is held—no game emerges, much to Elizabeth's bitter disappointment. They walk a little further into the jungle.

A second drive sends several game birds overhead the shooting area. Elizabeth swings the gun up wildly, pulling furiously on the trigger guard. When she corrects her pull, she wildly discharges both barrels simultaneously and is thrown back. After she shoots, Flory discharges his gun and brings down two birds without much effort. A larger game bird has flushed later, and the deft Flory—obviously in his element—reloads quickly and brings down the prey. The beaters bring up the birds and Flory shows a particularly beautiful specimen to Elizabeth. She touches the body and is filled with both admiration for Flory and also envy of his accomplishment. Elizabeth is distraught at her inept shooting, but Flory reassures her. On the walk to the next drive area, Flory spies a game bird in a tree. Elizabeth takes a bead on it, and with pounding heart and shaking knees, shoots it out of the tree; the feel of her first kill ravishes her and she feels like kissing the dead bird and hugging it to her breast. She fondles the corpse and only reluctantly gives it up to the bag. She suppresses an extraordinary desire to kiss Flory.

After a few more beats they cross over a wide cultivated field. Halfway across, Flory and Elizabeth detect the clucking of a jungle cock—a real prize in Flory's estimation. They sneak up on it, and just as it startles into the air, Elizabeth, with cool dispatch, drops it with a single shot. Flory and Elizabeth clasp hands and run to the kill, falling to their knees and clasping hands over the dead bird. Flory praises her natural ability with a gun as they kneel face to face. She moves to kiss him, but remembering his horrible birthmark, Flory turns his head aside, quickly stands, and fidgets about. They retrieve the guns and then discern that the beaters and trackers, some distance away, are quite excited. They quickly learn that a leopard has been spotted nearby. Elizabeth is aroused at the news and insists that they start after the animal immediately. Flory warns her that

it may be dangerous, but she is already moving away. They pursue the animal for some minutes; meanwhile, the beaters have circled around and are driving toward them.

The tracker guides Elizabeth and Flory with his hands—she does not mind the touch of this non-white man, nor his proximity or unwashed smell; she is trembling with excitement and uttering silent prayers to God that the leopard will come their way. Flory concentrates on the hunt. They stalk to a good shooting position as the beaters close in from all directions. A faint rustle in the brush and then—against all odds—a leopard steps out onto the trail. As experienced as Flory is he does not hesitate nor offer the shot to Elizabeth but stands and discharges both barrels, loaded with SG cartridges, into the animal. It is severely wounded but not killed, and flails around in the bush, dragging itself toward the shooters. As the trackers run for the trees, Flory fumbles about looking for another SG load; cartridges are strew about on the ground but he can only find birdshot loads. The leopard closes to within a few yards and Elizabeth then mounts her weapon with a steady hand and discharges both barrels into the rustling brush. It is effective in scaring the wounded leopard away and it retreats down the path. Flory indignantly loads with birdshot and trots over to the dying animal, finishing it with birdshot at a range of about ten feet.

Elizabeth, knees quivering, joins Flory over the kill. The beaters and trackers circle them. They sling the animal; the day's hunting is obviously over and the troupe returns to the village amidst much pomp. Flory and Elizabeth walk back together, close by each other, drenched in sweat—Elizabeth enraptured. Flory states the leopard kill shall be hers, and he praises her stoutheartedness and shooting ability. They have an unspoken understanding that they will return to their separate homes, clean themselves up, and meet again at the club—there, Flory will propose marriage, and Elizabeth will accept him.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Chapter 14 provides the false climax of the novel in the long-awaited hunting trip. The description of the hunt is correct in all essential details. Elizabeth shows a remarkable aptitude for shooting—having never held a gun before the day of the hunt, after only perhaps half-a-dozen shots at game on the wing she begins to hit. Flory demonstrates that he is a skilled shotgunner and brings down everything he shoots at. Although the guns used are not fully described, they are almost certainly English side-by-side shotguns in 12 bore. Elizabeth reacts to the dead birds in an obviously sexual manner, being almost overcome with a desire to kiss and fondle their dead bodies. After several drives produce birds, they have the good fortune of taking a jungle cock. The moment welds Elizabeth to Flory—at least transiently so—and she expects Flory to seize the moment, take the initiative, and kiss her. Flory is too concerned over his birthmark to act. He has failed to read Elizabeth and rather than risk rejection, he turns away from the moment—typical Flory behavior.

The hunters then have a remarkable stroke of luck—a leopard is nearby. They hunt the leopard during the day and Flory shoots him. Given the realities of leopard hunting, this

episode requires a fairly strong suspension of disbelief for modern readers. At any rate, the danger is obviated and Flory takes the leopard with Elizabeth's assistance. Here, more than at any other point in the novel, Flory's essential character is revealed—at heart he is a sporting man, in his element, in control of himself, and an expert handler of guns. The leopard is skinned and the skin, which symbolizes the high-water mark of Flory and Elizabeth's relationship, is transported to Kyauktada to be prepared. The moment over the leopard kill is so intense for Elizabeth and Flory that they share a moment of almost telepathic communication—that night he will ask her to marry him, and that night she will accept his proposal.

Chapters 15, 16, and 17

Chapters 15, 16, and 17 Summary

After cleaning up Flory returns to the club; the Lackersteens greet him rather stiffly but he does not notice it. Earlier, a drunken Lackersteen had barged into Elizabeth's room while she was only half-dressed and made obviously sexual advances toward her. Elizabeth finds her position with the Lackersteens untenable and looks forward to Flory's proposal. She still considers him dubious in many ways, but has decided that he is handsome enough and his excellent shooting skills have settled the deal. Flory joins her and they make small chitchat; he finds her bearing intimate and accessible. They walk out onto the veranda and snuggle for a moment. He asks her if she minds his birthmark, and she says she does not. Thus reassured he will not be rejected, Flory finally kisses her. He is caught up in the emotion of the moment and again desires that she should understand him—his attachment to Burma and the culture, and his lightly radical views on English colonialism. He then delivers a lengthy and rambling monologue, starting with a profession of love and then a disjointed recounting of his own internal struggles over the past decade intermixed with speculations about the life she might lead as the wife of a person such as himself. He paces back and forth as he speaks. Meanwhile, Elizabeth's mind wanders—she wonders why his marriage proposal is taking such a wandering course. He finally takes her hand and realizes she has not been listening at all.

He begins his proposal but only gets out the '"Will—"' (p. 180) when Mrs. Lackersteen's high-pitched wail is heard from within, summoning Elizabeth with some alarm. Flory stutters and then decides there is time to press forward. He begins again but only gets out the '"Will you—"' (p. 181) when the ground unaccountably heaves up below him, parting them as they both fall to the ground—the earth shaking and heaving in earthquake. After the quake subsides the moment has obviously passed. All of the English gather inside the club and begin nervously laughing about the episode. The moment is so atypical that even the club's non-white butler is temporarily admitted to their society and he stands and chats about previous earthquakes, telling amusing anecdotes.

Early the next morning Flory goes to the club, intending to propose to Elizabeth before she can have further contact with anyone—something has made him strangely anxious. Before gaining the club, however, he encounters an English man astride a beautiful horse. Flory hails the man. He is twenty-five, lank and straight, and manifestly a cavalry officer. His face is somewhat like a rabbit's, with pale blue eyes and a triangle of teeth visible between the lips. But his expression is hard, fearless, and brutal. Flory finds him offensively young and fit and his clothing is expensive and proper. Responding to Flory's hail, the man offers his name as Verrall, and states in surly tones that he heads a detachment of Military Police newly arrived in response to Macgregor's vague warning of local feelings of rebellion. Verrall is not prone to small talk and views Flory as a

slovenly insubordinate. Verrall then returns to his prior activity—an assistant drives a tent peg into the ground and Verrall, at full gallop, spears it from horseback.

In a fit of pride, Flory, a competent if not brilliant rider, insists that Verrall allow him a chance at the game. Verrall obviously finds Flory annoying but directs his subordinates to bring out a horse. Flory, meanwhile, has seen Elizabeth walking toward the club and times his initial gallop to coincide with her proximity—unfortunately for Flory, the saddle girth has not been cinched and as the horse begins to gallop he slips around and off, suffering a fairly serious fall and contusions. Bleeding and stunned, he gains his feet as Elizabeth walks by. Even though he calls out to her several times, she does not acknowledge him and he is further confused by this treatment. A brief argument between Flory and Verrall about the accident ensues—Verrall finds it amusing and points out that Flory should have checked the saddle himself. Verrall then rides away. Flory returns to his bungalow to bathe and put on medicine, wondering what he has done to so offend Elizabeth.

That evening Flory returns to the club but Elizabeth is not there. Instead, Ellis and Westfield engage him a very heated and abusive conversation focused primarily on racist views; Ellis begins to call Flory a "'nigger's Nancy boy'" (p. 191) and lectures him on his duty. When Westfield chimes in and begins to denigrate Veraswami, Flory loses patience and defends Veraswami's character, then vehemently states he intends to recommend Veraswami for membership at the next club meeting. The argument abates when the three Lackersteens enter the club. Flory expects Elizabeth to make herself available to him but she does not; thus, he paces about in agitation. The Lackersteens are all abnormally formal and dressed in their best attire. They sit about with an expectant air. After a while Mr. and Mrs. Lackersteen play bridge with Ellis and Westfield. Flory attempts to talk to Elizabeth but she shuns him. He finally corners her and demands to know how he has offended her. Elizabeth snubs him but he persists. Finally, she flatly states that she has learned he keeps a Burmese prostitute in his house. A stunned Flory walks out into the night.

In fact, the previous night prior to the earthquake Mrs. Lackersteen had been reading about various salaries and postings and had read that Verrall was, in fact, The Honorable Verrall. She had instantly determined that Flory was unsuitable for Elizabeth and her first plaintive shout had fortuitously interrupted Flory's first attempt at proposing marriage. The subsequent earthquake had done the rest. Later in the evening Mrs. Lackersteen informed Elizabeth that Flory kept a Burmese mistress, and explained the odious custom to her scandalized niece. Although the ignorant Mrs. Lackersteen had been somewhat correct, her allegations were entirely fabricated.

As Flory wanders home, he is accosted by Ma Hla May, who demands another sum of money. Flory vituperates her and attempts to drive her off, but she begins to shout and scream at him. The proximity to the European Club concerns Flory and he gives her what money he has as well as some valuable personal belongings to quiet her. She finally leaves off pestering him and he gains his bungalow. He reflects that Ma Hla May's behavior of late has certainly been uncharacteristic.

Chapters 15, 16, and 17 Analysis

Lackersteen reveals his essential nature by making sexual advances upon his niece; she is horrified, but does not know what to do other than fend him off. Her failure to take definitive steps leads him to continue his advances throughout the novel—and they become more extreme as the weeks progress. In the evening, Flory asks Elizabeth directly about the impact of his birthmark and she ignores it; in fact, she seems not to even notice it throughout the narrative until the penultimate chapter when she suddenly sees it in a new way—and then it becomes of great importance. Once reassured, the timid Flory kisses her. Note how absolutely different Flory treats the two women in his life—one he timidly asks if his appearance bothers her before kissing her; the other he roughly ejects from his room after having sex with her, paying her to get her to leave quickly. Of course, only Elizabeth is white. Flory's rambling monologue is humorous and unfortunate for him. Had he simply asked her directly she would have accepted and his entire future would have been different. Instead, he blathers on about things she neither understands nor care about, and squanders the few moments he has. She doesn't listen anyway—probably fortunate for Flory—and when it comes time to "pop the question" he is interrupted first by Mrs. Lackersteen's wail and then by an earthquake. This may be perhaps the only instance in literature of a marriage proposal has been interrupted by an earthquake. The earthquake as a calamity causes the strictly European society to somewhat break down for a moment, and the non-white butler who is an old hand at earthquakes is momentarily allowed to somewhat enter their society. It is a temporary admission.

Mrs. Lackersteen's untimely interruption is explained later in the novel—she had been reading through a published list of posted individuals and their pay grades when she came upon the listing for Lieutenant The Honorable Verrall. The title indicates he is "important" and therefore "lovely", as opposed to the "highbrow" Flory. The danger to her niece must be killed immediately so that the soon-to-arrive Verrall will find her accessible; hence her plaintive wail moments before the earthquake. Here indeed is fate working against Flory. Later that evening, Mrs. Lackersteen casually mentions to Elizabeth that Flory keeps a Burmese mistress—a fact which is only accidentally and partially true. Elizabeth is horrified and Flory's chances are thereby ended with her. The very next day Verrall arrives, and through his horsemanship exploits, he proves his superiority to Flory in all things "lovely" appertaining unto English society. The white wood tent peg target driven into the dark Burmese soil is an easy symbol for Elizabeth's virtue. Verrall easily masters it, again and again, repeatedly penetrating it with his gigantic lance—while Flory cannot even manage the circumstances of his conveyance toward it. In fact, Flory is seriously injured in the pursuit of it and to complete the metaphor, the injury is to the side of his face that is nominally white.

Flory's disgrace spreads when he enters the club. There, he is the brunt of vicious personal attacks by Ellis and Westfield, who consider him to be vacillating in characteristics essential to any Englishman. Their personal slander upon him is really quite atrocious, and were he half the Englishman that Verrall is, he would demand a satisfaction of honor for many of the things said to him. Compare, for instance, his

uncomfortable but submissive reaction to Ellis to Verrall's reaction to Ellis. On the way home from the club, Ma Hla May again pounces on Flory and makes a scene—the capstone to perhaps the worst day in Flory's life.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Flory leaves Kyauktada early the next morning, departing for his work assignment, which he has ignored for an alarming period of time. In his absence, Ellis and Mrs. Lackersteen gossip about him and tell many lies about his character. Elizabeth overhears many of these conversations and quickly comes to believe that Flory is a cad. She receives a letter from him, which professes his love, but declines to answer it. Flory busies himself with work. The Lackersteens wait for Verrall to call on the club to meet Elizabeth, but after several days he has not appeared. They take the snub poorly. In fact, Verrall is not wealthy and is heavily in debt. He moves from assignment to assignment to escape paying his debts, and he holds nearly everything and everyone in utter contempt. Aside from a fine horse, certain forms of athleticism, and a transient dalliance with a beautiful girl, Verrall has little tolerance for anything.

After a full week, Verrall has still not spoken to anyone in town. Lackersteen has neglected his job for so long that it is shocking and must shortly return to the jungle. Mrs. Lackersteen cannot allow him to go unescorted or else he will gain the society of Burmese prostitutes. She is therefore desperate to introduce Elizabeth to Verrall as quickly as possible. So she does the unthinkable and simply takes Elizabeth onto the parade ground and walks up to Verrall. Seeing Elizabeth for the first time, Verrall is immediately interested in the young beauty. He therefore makes apologies for having failed to appear at the club and promises so to do.

That evening, Verrall enters the club and kicks the butler for some minor affront. The butler appears to Ellis when he arrives, and Ellis enters the club in a self-righteous fury. He begins to accost Verrall, but is quickly set in his place by Verrall's menacingly collected response. Ellis is entirely, and quickly, quelled.

Later in the evening, Macgregor, Westfield, and Ellis watch with mixed emotions as Verrall and Elizabeth dance for hour after hour. Mrs. Lackersteen makes sure the music is uninterrupted and Lackersteen drinks heavily. After monopolizing Elizabeth all evening, Verrall asks her to go riding in the morning, and she accepts. Without addressing anyone else, Verrall leaves the club. The other men feel snubbed; Elizabeth and Mrs. Lackersteen return home, delighted in the recent developments. Given the delicacy of the timing involved, Mrs. Lackersteen decides to make a personal sacrifice—Lackersteen will return to the jungle unaccompanied so that Mrs. Lackersteen can remain behind with Elizabeth.

Chapter 18 Analysis

The chapter introduces a late but central conflict into the narrative. Elizabeth, no longer entangled, looks toward Verrall to court upon her. Verrall, accustomed to English society

in such small towns, does not care to entangle himself amongst people he views as bores. He thus reserves his company which the others see as a great affront. Mrs. Lackersteen waits for a few days but then runs out of patience—in a flagrant disregard of custom, she takes Elizabeth and the two women introduce themselves to Verrall. He sees Elizabeth for the first time and considers her a suitable diversion from the boring life. It is obvious to everyone except the Lackersteens that Verrall's interest is purely transient and sexual. Elizabeth, supported by Mrs. Lackersteen, waits for Verrall's marriage proposal.

Contrast Ellis' first encounter with Verrall to Flory's earlier encounter. Ellis takes an aggressive tone from the first and Verrall snubs him, threatens him, and then ignores him. Ellis attempts a laughable attempt at defense by appealing to the difficulties of living in Burma; Verrall dismisses the defense as poor management—in other words, Ellis is at fault, not the country. Ellis does not realize that Verrall is the very type of man to which Ellis aspires—racist, sexist, and solely self-centered. Only Verrall retains a measure of reserve and self-composure. He so intimidates the entire society that they stand on the veranda and watch him dance with Elizabeth as if he were somehow unapproachable. His title, of course, aids him in this. Mrs. Lackersteen's decision to allow her husband to go upcountry unescorted is revealing—she would rather gain Verrall as a relative than retain her husband in morality.

Chapter 19, 20, and 21

Chapter 19, 20, and 21 Summary

April draws to a close and the heat is oppressive. The European Club is full of bickering and scandal-mongering. Rumors drift into town suggesting that Mr. Lackersteen is entertaining Burmese prostitutes by the dozens. Verrall attends the club nearly every evening for an hour or two but refuses to interact with anyone except Elizabeth, whom he monopolizes. Verrall and Elizabeth go riding together nearly every evening; Elizabeth tells lies about her putatively sporting upbringing which Verrall sees through but ignores. Elizabeth comes to love horses and riding and completely falls for Verrall; the sight of him astride his horse is evocative to her. Verrall loathes books and learning and rarely has anything to say except for banal comments about the weather. Verrall and Elizabeth begin to kiss and pet. Elizabeth nearly forgets Flory.

After setting things to right in his work camp, Flory thinks about returning and trying to explain himself to Elizabeth. He finds life meaningless and trivial without her. As a pretext to again meeting her, he decides he will deliver the leopard skin—surely it has been cured by now. He returns to Kyauktada, walking the twenty miles in one night. Veraswami entertains his dwelling at breakfast and talks about U Po Kyin's rebellion. Flory asks about the skin and Veraswami delivers the bad news—it was not cured properly and is more or less ruined.

That afternoon Flory calls at the Lackersteen home. Mrs. Lackersteen tries to brush him off but he is fairly insistent. Elizabeth finally meets him dressed in her riding outfit. The sight of her quite unmans him and his heart pounds. Instead of delivering his deliberated speech he begins to apologize. Elizabeth is unconcerned with him and deflects him with utter coolness, pretending as if they were nothing more than the most-casual of acquaintances. After a few minutes of this Flory presents the leopard skin. It stinks of rot and is stiff and nearly hairless in spots. Elizabeth is disgusted by it but accepts it was obviously faked pleasure. They talk about the weather and then Elizabeth invites him to leave. He asks if they can't go shooting or walking again, but she declines and explains she spends all her free time riding with Verrall. Flory, devastates, returns to his own bungalow. Flory loiters outside and watches Elizabeth and Verrall ride off. Several minutes later their saddles horses trot back into town—Flory realizes that at the very moment they are off somewhere engaged in sexual intimacy. He begins drinking and continues until he passes out. He wakes in the early dawn and weeps, his first tears since coming to Burma. He quickly returns to his work camp.

Several days later Flory later receives a letter from Veraswami informing him that U Po Kyin's rebellion has transpired exactly as planned. By the time the proper authorities arrived, U Po Kyin had already quelled the rebellion and captured the leaders. Nonetheless, Maxwell felt compelled to shoot and kill one rebel as the man tried to flee, causing bad feelings. The rebels' stock of weaponry—pitiably small—was seized. The rebellion is over. Flory continues to work hard through the stultifying heat. Every free

moment he is wracked with envy of Verrall and conjures mental images of Elizabeth and Verrall in intimate and obscene acts. He is tormented by base physical longings and finds his own obsession disgusting. He finds the situation not tragic, but more than painful, and ridiculous. Even so, Flory retains enough sense to realize Verrall will never propose marriage; he knows the man is simply enjoying a transient dalliance.

Elizabeth and Mrs. Lackersteen, however, daily expect a marriage proposal. Verrall's noncompliance makes them curious but does not worry them. Ellis busies himself smearing Elizabeth's name and concocting wild stories about her immorality. As the days pass, Mrs. Lackersteen begins to deliver rather obtuse lectures to Elizabeth and tells her cautionary tales about young women who failed to get married even in Burma. Eventually Lackersteen returns to Kyauktada, more florid than usual and with trembling hands. Even so, the evening he returns he enters Elizabeth's bedroom and makes a determined if unsuccessful attempt to rape his niece. Meanwhile, unknown to anyone in town including U Po Kyin, rebellious feelings are circulating in the area.

A few days later, Flory returns, and with his return the rainy season finally breaks. On the evening of the formal club members meeting, Flory visits the European Club and chats with Westfield. Eventually all the club members arrive except for Maxwell, who has asked Ellis to vote for him as proxy. The official meeting is enjoined and Macgregor delivers a painfully intimate recounting of the club's meager financial records during the previous period. He then explains that the club has been directed to accept one non-white member. However, if the club unanimously votes against such an action, it can be excused—but the vote must be unanimous.

Ellis delivers an angry diatribe about non-whites and his emotional outburst is approved of by Lackersteen and Westfield. Ellis then announces that in fact the vote against non-white admission is unanimous. Flory then stands up and dissents; although fearful, he nominates Veraswami to the club membership. The vote not being unanimous, Ellis immediately realizes that Veraswami will be admitted. He explodes with racist fury and begins to shout and make a commotion. Westfield and Lackersteen are similarly enraged and everyone begins shouting. Macgregor oddly decides to go through with an official vote and produces the ballot box. Ellis deposits his own and Maxwell's ballots, and then dashes the other ballots to the floor, hurling epithets at Flory such as "'You oily swine! You nigger's Nancy Boy! You crawling, sneaking, — bloody bastard!'" (p. 235). Just as the tumultuous scene nears a general brawl, a servant calls anxiously to them, pointing to the river. A boat is disembarking a body wrapped in linens. The corpse is carried into the club and exposed to the men—it is Maxwell's remains, hacked nearly to bits by the relatives of the man he killed some days previously.

Chapter 19, 20, and 21 Analysis

The narrative moves forward to climax as the weather heats up and the rainy season approaches. Mr. Lackersteen is flagrant in his whoring, the English in town become sulky and, if possible, more repellent. Elizabeth's sexuality is aroused by Verrall's mastery of large animals. They begin to kiss, then pet, and later engage in sexual

intercourse. Elizabeth gives herself to Verrall because she is so certain he will propose. She has a lot to learn about "lovely" English gentlemen. The section presents additional characterization of Verrall; but in reality, little is needed—he is so thoroughly a type that his presence and actions are entirely predictable.

Flory returns to town, convincing himself that enough time has passed that perhaps he can again approach Elizabeth to beg forgiveness. He first calls upon Veraswami, who delivers plot development in the form of conversation: U Po Kyin's schemes continue to evolve and continue to succeed. The leopard skin may be seen as symbolic of Flory's relationship with Elizabeth: once a fine trophy, but now stinking, rotting, and ugly. The reason it is in such dilapidation is, ironically enough, yet another result of U Po Kyin's scheming—the man who was to have cured it was the very man U Po Kyin helped escape from prison. Even though his reason should have prevented it, Flory bears the deliquescing mass of leopard remains to Elizabeth and presents it to her as a trophy. She is utterly cool and unconcerned. A true master of the put-off, she feigns an obviously faked pleasure in seeing Flory and then dismisses him without cause for complaint. True to form, it is Mrs. Lackersteen who actually disposes of the reeking mess, just as she had disposed of Flory's chances. All that remains is for poor Flory to watch Elizabeth ride off with Verrall and send the horses home as they engage in sexual intercourse in some distant field. Flory's internal breakdown begins.

The rainy season arrives and the changing weather symbolizes the change in narrative. The novel moves to climax. The English meet in the club to consider who, if any, will be admitted. Flory, now without personal hope, finally comes through for Veraswami—ineffectually, of course. He proposes Veraswami which, in the ordinary course of things, would assure his admission. Ellis and his compatriots are outraged and predictably erupt into furious and racist indignation. The scene threatens to devolve into fisticuffs but is interrupted by the arrival of the dead body of Maxwell.

Chapters 22 and 23

Chapters 22 and 23 Summary

Maxwell's death causes a profound shock to everyone in Kyauktada and, indeed, the entire region. Only U Po Kyin is pleased—the event, not of his making, will certainly be to his advantage because it makes the threat of rebellion seem more serious than ever. After the graveside service, the English are quiet and introspective. Given Maxwell's fate, Flory's outburst seems to them all the more monstrous. Elizabeth ignores him. Ellis and Westfield talk of making reprisals against the native populace, hoping for a general bloodbath. The afternoon after the service, Ellis walks from his office to the club and passes by four adolescents. They are smiling and he shouts at them. They respond with guarded insolence and Ellis lunges at them, striking one of them in the eyes with his cane. The other three engage him in a scuffle but he pulls away and gains the porch of the club. While their blind friend wails in pain and confusion, they take pieces of stone and hurl them at Ellis, who jeers at them from the clubhouse. Ellis officially reports the confrontation and claims that he had been attacked out of hand.

That evening all of the English in town gather at the European Club—Verrall and Westfield are in the field chasing rebels. As they play bridge something heavy lands on the roof and then stones begin to clatter against all the walls of the building. The club servants inform them that a mob of some thousands of natives has surrounded the club. The mob is pelting the building with stones. Lackersteen retreats into the club but Ellis and Flory follow Macgregor to the porch. At least two thousand Burmese surround the club and many of them throw rocks. They demand that Ellis be handed over to them so they may punish him for blinding the village boy. Macgregor demands they disperse; the crowd does not and violence is threatened—a stone hits Macgregor in the face, shattering his spectacles. Amidst a thunderous din, the three men retreat into the clubhouse. Mrs. Lackersteen is hysterical with the mortal fear and moral certainty that she will imminently be raped by thousands of non-white men. Ellis begins shrieking sexist and vile epithets at Mrs. Lackersteen, demanding she quit screaming. She continues screaming and Elizabeth begins sobbing as a stone crashes through the window and impacts her elbow. The police do not arrive.

The clubhouse is built along the river and the mob surrounds it on three sides. The situation appears dire; Elizabeth puts her hand on Flory's arm and begs him to think of something. Flory volunteers to dash into the river and swim down to the police station to summon assistance. Ellis approves, as does Macgregor. Flory strips off his shoes, vaults over the back veranda railing, and dashes into the river. He swims downstream and emerges through the mud flats at the police station. The one hundred fifty police have engaged the rear of the mob, but it has been completely ineffective. Flory is jostled about and pummeled, but he finds a few policemen and regroups them. They return to the police station and acquire rifles, then return to the rear of the mob and fire volleys into the air. Almost immediately, the mob begins to disperse. Veraswami emerges from the mob somewhat injured—he had been trying to disperse it. U Po Kyin emerges from

the shadow and begins to announce that he has ended the violence. Flory returns to the club as it begins to rain.

The next day Flory visits Veraswami. Veraswami explains that the riot had been spontaneous and that Flory's victory had earned him respect among the populace. That respect is reflected upon Veraswami and he is now likely beyond U Po Kyin's grasp. Flory admits that Mrs. Lackersteen and the English men also view him as something of a savior. In the afternoon he visits the club and sees Elizabeth—today she speaks to him warmly. They chat and he moves to kiss her, but she demurs. Nevertheless, he has at least been forgiven, even if rejected, and to Flory this makes the essential difference. He knows that Verrall will eventually leave and at that time Elizabeth will again be available to him. That night he returns to his work camp. U Po Kyin is furious at having suffered such a setback. He gathers his subordinates and begins planning. He realizes Veraswami cannot be attacked again; instead, Flory must be destroyed so that Veraswami is again exposed. The group plots Flory's downfall.

A week passes and then one evening Verrall does not appear at the European Club. For a few days Elizabeth and Mrs. Lackersteen sit in confused loneliness, wondering what could be keeping Verrall away. Throughout all this time, Mr. Lackersteen continues to make unwanted and incestuous advances toward Elizabeth. Then one evening a strange young man enters the club. After introductions, he explains he is the new lieutenant, sent to replace Verrall. Elizabeth and Mrs. Lackersteen are dumbfounded and race to the train station only to see the train departing. The station master glumly informs them that Verrall demanded the train depart immediately instead of on schedule. Mrs. Lackersteen is outraged and flabbergasted. Elizabeth is devastated. Mrs. Lackersteen quickly begins to once again talk about Flory.

Chapters 22 and 23 Analysis

Maxwell, a white man, has been hacked to bits by two non-white men in retribution for his killing of their relative. The essence of the situation reflects the basic racism of the English colonial era—natives simply do not kill white men. Ellis is singularly outraged at the idea because it directly threatens his self-image. He lashes out, because he is a physical coward, at some native boys—and blinds one. In the evening the local populace revolts, having had enough enlightenment at the hands of the English. They pelt the European club with stones and demand Ellis be sent out for punishment. Unfortunately for the English, Verrall and his cavalry unit, along with Westfield and many of his police, are out in the country chasing down a fabricated rebellion while the real riot takes place in town. The native police force does react, but ineffectually. The scene is truly disturbing for the English. Macgregor receives a stone to the face and Elizabeth is lightly wounded on the arm by another stone. Mrs. Lackersteen is sure—with a tinge of expectation—that she will shortly be raped by an endless line of non-white men. Flory, heretofore entirely disdainful of a non-white man's ability to influence the English, is corrected in his misperception. When Elizabeth begins to sob, he is spurred to action. Once again, he can become the man of the hour and rescue her from a fate worse, perhaps, than death.

In fact, Flory does act heroically to salvage the situation. He enters the fray and consolidates some policemen, gives the order to arm and advance, and then ensures that the situation does not turn bloody by directing fire over the rioters' heads. Here is Flory at his absolute best, the master of the confusing situation and the savior of his countrymen. His compassion ensures that the riot does not become a massacre and his coolness allows the situation to diffuse. Everything, it would seem, is going in Flory's favor. The English view him as a hero, Veraswami views him as a savior, the Burmese admit him respect, and Elizabeth forgives his prior indiscretions. Flory's future is seemingly secured when Verrall, now bored with his conquests of Elizabeth, leaves the town unannounced. Flory then becomes the greater man by accepting the sullied Elizabeth at face value and forgiving her infidelity. Unfortunately, U Po Kyin is not easily dissuaded from his goal and Flory indeed has an ugly past.

Chapters 24 and 25

Chapters 24 and 25 Summary

A few days later Flory meets Elizabeth at the club and asks her if Verrall is gone. She affirms it and he takes her in his arms. She weeps that he will accept her back after such a terrible insult. Flory muses that within a few weeks they will be married. The traveling Father again visits the town on his one-every-six-weeks rotation. Church is held and all of the English attend, as well as the two Eurasians and a few native Christians. Flory sits by Ellis and is able to ignore his constant invectives and rude gestures about the church by thinking of Elizabeth, imagining her as his wife and boon companion. Elizabeth sits across the aisle from Flory and for her part sneaks glimpses at him—he has, for the first time ever, sat with his birthmark exposed to her. She finds him handsome and manly and thinks that soon they will be married. The service drags on interminably.

Suddenly Flory realizes the service has been interrupted. Ma Hla May has barged into the chapel, appearing as a bedraggled shrew. She shrieks into the chapel, demanding money, and points evilly at Flory. The scene continues for some moments until Ma Hla May begins to expose her body in her rage, shrieking like a maniac. Flory is shell-shocked and sits staring ahead, all color draining from his face and sweat popping out across his brow. Elizabeth sees him, sweating and drained of color except for the livid birthmark, and he suddenly appears to her to be so revolting that she gags. She focuses on his birthmark, livid blue against his yellow skin, and finds it a thing of disgust—an indelible mark of dishonor. Finally, the Father reacts and demands that the shrieking, semi-naked harpy be removed. The two Eurasian men seize her and drag her away. The meaning of the scene is perfectly clear to all present. The Father quickly finishes the sermon as the English sit in shocked silence. Elizabeth writhes with revulsion. Flory realizes that U Po Kyin has been manipulating Ma Hla May all along.

After the service everyone bolts for their homes. Flory rushes after Elizabeth but she flees from him. He runs her down, however, and seizes her by force. She writhes in his grasp and demands to be turned loose. But Flory holds her and demands to know if she can ever forgive him. She struggles and he repeats his question several times; she replies that she finds him disgusting and will never forgive him. Oddly, he then asks her to marry him and she scornfully declines. Flory protests; Elizabeth acts as if she has never seen him before—as if he were some kind of robber. Flory begs her several times to reconsider but she is adamant in her utter refusal. Finally, painfully, Flory releases her and she flees from him, running to the clubhouse, feeling as if Flory were a leper and a lunatic.

Flory kicks his dog viciously and stumbles home. He goes into his bedroom and retrieves a pistol and loads it. He then goes into the courtyard and calls for his dog—the animal senses something is amiss and refuses to come. He grabs the animal and drags it into his bedroom, closes the door, and shoots it in the head. The dog's brains splatter

on the floor—Flory does not want to be thus disfigured and he points the gun to his heart, and discharges it with his thumb. Ko S'la quickly enters the room and sends for Veraswami. Veraswami arrives quickly, but Flory is dead. Veraswami weeps, and then orders the dog, evidence of suicidal intent, quickly buried. Later, he officially lists the cause of death as accidental discharge during routine cleaning—he erroneously refers to Flory's pistol as a revolver.

Fortunately, the Father was still in town and Flory is buried. Nobody, except Elizabeth, is surprised by Flory's end—suicide is common among Europeans in Burma. Flory's death removes Veraswami's source of prestige and within months U Po Kyin has ruined the man's reputation. Veraswami is demoted and reassigned to an urban hospital. Ko S'la inherits the bulk of Flory's wealth but quickly mismanages it and spends the remainder of his days doing odd jobs. U Po Kyin is admitted to the European Club and proves a tolerable member and excellent bridge player. He receives various public honors and then returns home and plans to begin building many pagodas to atone for his wicked life. Unfortunately, he is stricken with apoplexy and dies; Ma Kin is heartbroken as she realizes her erstwhile husband has probably returned to earth as a frog.

After a suitable period of mourning elapses, Macgregor courts and quickly wins Elizabeth's hand in matrimony. Although nearly twice her age, Macgregor's position is assured and his income is respectable. Married, Macgregor settles and becomes less officious; Elizabeth becomes a tyrannical housewife and harries the domestic servants and the wives of lesser officials with proper vehemence.

Chapters 24 and 25 Analysis

What would, in an ordinary novel, be the narrative denouement is in Orwell's extraordinary novel the climax. Everything is seemingly wrapped up and Flory anticipates an imminent marriage to Elizabeth. All of the representative characters in the novel—the English, the Eurasians, and some natives, gather in the church to receive the Christian service. Ellis behaves as expected, Mrs. Lackersteen pumps the organ, and Flory drifts into contemplative window-staring. U Po Kyin then achieves total victory—he sends Ma Hla May into the Christian chapel where she points a claw at Flory and denounces his treatment of her. She demands money promised her, tears her hair, and acts out a carefully rehearsed scene. Even her appearance has been carefully crafted to make her appear as a frenzied hag. In her final expression of agonized abandonment she tears open her clothing, revealing her body to all. This display is so cross-culturally intelligible that the two Eurasian men are the first to react, dragging her out of the church and away.

Flory responds by sinking into himself, turning yellow, sweating, and staring ahead. Elizabeth sees him, suddenly, as indelibly marked by the birthmark, symbolic of his radical nature—he has been stained by Burma, and the stain overpowers the white essence of the man. Elizabeth, in a moment of personal clarity, is so sickened she gags. Flory has lost all hope of being with her. As predictable as a flock of sheep, the English all retreat from the scene to the clubhouse. Flory chases after Elizabeth for a final

pitiable plea of forgiveness, which is casually declined. The piano is symbolic of the two characters' total misunderstanding of each other—Flory pictures a piano as the ultimate symbol of English accomplishment; Elizabeth does not play the piano and has no need of one.

All that remains is Flory's inevitable suicide. Rather than leave Flo to the vicissitudes of the world he drags the poor animal inside and shoots it first. Ma Hla May can be cast off as garbage, but surely not so with a good hunting dog. He then shoots himself through the heart. Note that his livid birthmark fades away to pallid gray upon his death. The final chapter wraps up the immediate fates of most of the characters—they are all entirely unexceptional. At least U Po Kyin loses his opportunity to atone for his many wicked acts.

Characters

U Po Kyin

U Po Kyin, born circa 1869, is a Subdivisional Magistrate of Kyauktada in Burma, at the time an English colony. The "U" in his name is an honorific. U Po Kyin is fifty-six years old and enormously fat—so fat, in fact, that he requires assistance to stand from a seated position. U Po Kyin views his own fatness as desirable and the metaphysical result of devouring the essence of the many people he has defeated in his climb to success. His complexion is yellow. Notwithstanding his girth, his skin is unwrinkled. He wears traditional Burmese dress and speaks Burmese, the local language, as well as English. He chews and spits betel, though his teeth are apparently clean and numerous. From the age of seventeen through twenty, Po Kyin worked in various bazaars doing odd jobs. At the age of twenty he received a large sum of money by blackmail; he used the money to purchase an English government clerkship. During the ensuing years he steadily rose through the ranks of government. He is a cunning, dishonest, and avaricious man who cares nothing for others. He believes his life of greed and sin will lead him to a post-mortal condemnation, but plans to obviate this eventuality by constructing several fine pagodas, religious sites of worship, just prior to his death.

U Po Kyin has a great desire to enter English society; not as a servant, but as an equal. He knows the only way to do this is to obtain admission to the European Club. All of the scheming he pursues within the novel is to this single end—and eventually he is successful. U Po Kyin is behind most of the conflict of the novel, though only through indirect means. He is indeed a mastermind of intrigue and knows the English mind better than the English themselves. Thoroughly antagonistic, U Po Kyin emerges as a begrudgingly likable character inasmuch as he is the only character in the novel honest enough to flatly state his goals and take whatever action is necessary to accomplish them. Ironically, he dies before he is able to contrast his atoning pagodas and thus is likely reincarnated as a frog.

John Flory

John Flory, born circa 1890, is addressed in the native patois as "Mr. Porley". At the time of the novel's opening sequences, around 1925, he is about thirty-five years old, of average height, and has black, stiff hair. He wears a mustache and has sallow, nearly yellow skin. His most distinguishing feature, however, is a grotesque and large birthmark which covers most of the left half of his face, running in a large crescent from his eye to his chin. Flory is exceptionally self-conscious about the birthmark and always stands with it away from whomever he is addressing and often simply covers it with his hand. Flory works as the local representative of an English timbering company. Note that in some editions of the text, Flory's given name is offered as James, and in some modern editions the narrative text gives his name as John while the back-cover blurb offers his name as James.

Flory receives a poor education in third-rate schools where violence and graft were more common than learning. At twenty he left England for Burma and worked there for fifteen years prior to the commencement of the novel. In Burma, Flory anxiously engaged himself in a life of debauchery and dissipation and thus appears prematurely aged. He begins the novel as an alcoholic, chain-smoking chaser of whores who has survived many fevers and illnesses. In his early thirties he slowly realized that his life was meaningless and ineffectual and began to long for companionship. Unlike all of his English associates, Flory holds a deep respect for Burmese culture, speaks the language, and enjoys the company of non-white friends. This earns him the open hostility of several English associates and marks him as something of a radical.

Flory is a moral coward, however, and lacks the resolve to do the things he feels are right. This leaves him, often, in untenable positions for which he must later apologize. He usually backs down from confrontations and accepts shocking verbal abuse from various men, most notably Ellis. Aside from this, he is thoroughly capable, intelligent, and somewhat self educated. Flory is an accomplished sportsman, a good shot, and a competent rider. He is widely read and enjoys the food, society, and culture of Burma. After being twice rejected by Elizabeth, Flory takes his own life to avoid shame and failure.

R. Westfield

Westfield is sandy-haired and has a prickly moustache, with wide-set grey eyes and abnormally thin calves. Westfield speaks in clipped and soldierly prose and appears to intend most of his own statements as jokes. He is the District Superintendent of Police. Westfield is outspoken in his racist views, though he does take pride in the capabilities of his local police force, consisting entirely of native Burmese. It is interesting to note that Orwell, the author, was a police officer during the period he spent in Burma.

Westfield is a minor character in the novel, even though he is present in many scenes. In many respects, he is indistinguishable from Maxwell, Lackersteen, and Ellis. Westfield, Maxwell, and Lackersteen can perhaps best be understood as a sort of chorus with Ellis as the leader. Together, they represent the worst of English colonial society.

Dan Lackersteen

Lackersteen, born circa 1884, is a local manager of an English timber firm. Florid, and about forty years old, his only concern in life is trying to have a good time, which, like most men, he defines as heavy drinking and carousing with younger women. He is married, however. Upon her return from their first lengthy separation, Mrs. Lackersteen discovered her husband drunk and naked, carousing with three drunk, naked, and young Burmese girls. She has subsequently watched over him like a cat watches a mouse hole. Lackersteen is usually drunk, getting drunk, hung over, or some combination of the three. Lackersteen is outspoken in his racist views, though he

particularly emphasizes them in the presence of Mrs. Lackersteen in an attempt to gain her admiration.

Lackersteen's orphaned niece, Elizabeth, enters the novel in the introductory chapters. The lecherous man pursues sexual relations with his own niece in his own home. After she rejects him a few times, he actually attempts to rape her. Whenever possible, Lackersteen drinks heavily and engages prostitutes. Although he is present in many scenes, Lackersteen is a minor character in the novel. In many respects, he is indistinguishable from Maxwell, Westfield, and Ellis.

Mrs. Lackersteen

Mrs. Lackersteen, like Flory, was born around1890. She is a fairly attractive woman, but has an adolescent body type—Flory considers her "contourless", and Lackersteen apparently finds her only mildly attractive. She is thirty-five years old and displays an amazingly negative racism coupled with an equally distasteful classist view aided by a generous amount of ignorance. Having once discovered her husband carousing with three naked, young, and drunk Burmese girls, Mrs. Lackersteen never allows Lackersteen to wander far from home. She views her husband's drinking as problematic, though she frequently drinks herself. Mrs. Lackersteen relocated to Burma at the age of fifteen and has lived in the country for twenty years, yet still cannot speak a word of the local language. She is considered by Flory to be a scandalmonger and the epitome of the ugly side of British colonialism. She is a unique character because she is the only married English woman presented in the novel, and one of only two English women. She hopes to marry Elizabeth off as quickly as possible and decides first that Flory, and later Verrall, are the most-suitable match. Mrs. Lackersteen proves a capable chaperone and manager of the naïve Elizabeth, and all of Mrs. Lackersteen's promptings are heeded.

Socially, she is fairly inept and lives her life in terror of a native uprising which, she is sure, will surely lead to gang rape by non-white men. She is obviously terrified of this situation and ponders about it often, with a certain dreadful expectation. At times comic, she is usually pitiful and hardly likable as a character. Although present in many scenes of the novel, she remains a minor character due to her transparent nature and predictable reactions. Even so, her vulnerable position makes her somewhat more likable than most of the other minor characters—but only somewhat.

Elizabeth Lackersteen

Elizabeth, born around 1903, is the young and attractive niece of Dan Lackersteen. She is tallish and slender, with her yellow hair worn short in an Eton crop. Her hands are long, slender, and youthful. She wears spectacles and has clear, pale blue eyes. Her father had been sometimes successful, and from fourteen to sixteen years of age she spent a few years at an exclusive public school—the period formed her entire worldview. Everything in Elizabeth's experience is either "lovely", or expensive and

aristocratic, or "beastly", which is cheap, low, shabby, or bad. After her father's financial failure in 1919 and subsequent death, her mother determined to become an artist and moved to Paris where rents were less expensive. Elizabeth worked as an English-language instructor and lived in a tiny apartment; she considers this two-year period of her life to have been "beastly". After her mother's death from ptomaine poisoning, she was invited to travel to Burma by her uncle, Dan Lackersteen. Mrs. Lackersteen is somewhat dismayed by Elizabeth's acceptance and intends to marry her off as quickly as possible.

Elizabeth soon pairs with Flory, the man her aunt has selected. She seems almost oblivious to Flory's disfiguring birthmark and is instead concerned with his somewhat ineffectual radical ideas about proper relations between the English and Burmese. Elizabeth flatly considers the natives to be an inferior, subject people and wants little to no contact with them. She finds Flory's interest in them incomprehensible and somewhat revolting. The way to Elizabeth's heart and sexuality lies through the mastery of animals—when Flory kills them on a shooting trip she is transported with ecstasy and gives him to believe a marriage proposal would be accepted. Later, Mrs. Lackersteen changes her mind and decides that Verrall would be a better match than Flory. Elizabeth is easily manipulated. Verrall's mastery of horses captivates Elizabeth and within a couple of days she surrenders her chastity to Verrall. After a week or so of sexual intimacy, Verrall has tired of his conquest and abandons Elizabeth without even a goodbye. Under Mrs. Lackersteen's guidance, Elizabeth returns to Flory.

Elizabeth finally comes into her own after Flory is denounced by Ma Hla May. She looks at Flory and finally sees him as nothing more than the disfiguring birthmark, and she finds him so disgusting she almost gags. Flory's subsequent suicide surprises Elizabeth but does not much affect her. A few months later she accepts Macgregor's invitation to marriage and eventually becomes a proper wife of a mid-level official.

P. W. Ellis

Ellis is the assistant manager of another English timber company. He is a tiny man with wiry hair, pale skin, and sharp features. He is exceptionally restless, speaks in a cockney accent, and is quick to anger but also quickly calms down. Ellis' most pronounced feature is his virulent and vehement racism, which marks him as exceptional even among the other virulently racist Europeans. His hideous racism is matched by an equally disgusting sexism. Ellis revels in imaginary discussions of reprisals against natives for presumed wrongs—on numerous occasions he delivers speeches full of what violence should be done to the non-white residents of the area. Ellis is constantly antagonizing Flory because of Flory's friendship with Veraswami. Ellis refers to the doctor as "Very-slimy" and to Flory as "nigger's Nancy Boy", among other things. His tirades are really quite grotesque, and as a character, he is exceptionally unlikable. His attitudes are complemented by his cowardice. Even though he is present in many scenes, Ellis is essentially a minor character. His one-dimensional racist hatred is so predictable that he is never an interesting narrative element. In many respects, he is indistinguishable from Maxwell, Lackersteen, and Westfield. In fact, these other

characters can perhaps be best understood as a type of chorus—they echo Ellis' opinions in a less antagonistic way.

C. W. Maxwell

Maxwell, born in 1900, is the somewhat aloof Acting Divisional Forest Officer. He is blonde and twenty-five years old—very young for his position. He is accused of often pursuing sexual relations with local women—a charge he does not vehemently deny. As an English official, he is nominally superior in standing to Flory or Ellis, on par with Westfield, while obviously inferior in rank to Macgregor. In one scene, Maxwell and Ellis are saddened that they have never had the occasion to shoot a native, and they long for the "good old days" of open warfare and rebellion. Maxwell gets his chance eventually and guns down a fleeing native man—the act is obviously unnecessary, though officially overlooked. A few relatives of the murdered man find Maxwell alone a few weeks later and hack him to pieces with machetes. Maxwell thus earns the dubious distinction of becoming a sort of martyr. His death indirectly leads to a large riot in Kyauktada. Maxwell is a minor character in the novel even though he is present in many scenes. In most respects, he is indistinguishable from Westfield, Lackersteen, and Ellis.

Macgregor

Macgregor, born in 1882, is the local Deputy Commissioner and also the Secretary of the European Club. As such, he is simultaneously the political and social leader of the English community. He is forty-three years old and wears a silk suit over his large and heavy body. He habitually thrusts his head forward which has gained him the nickname of "tortoise" among the Burmese. He is garrulous, and wears spectacles. Although he shares the generally racist outlook of most of his English compatriots he lacks their hatred and violence. In general, he is portrayed as a capable and likable, if not vivacious, official. After Flory's suicide, Macgregor waits what he deems a respectable amount of time and then courts Elizabeth. Though only half his age, she finds him suitable and they are quickly married. Of all the minor English characters in the novel, Macgregor is easily the most likable and, really, the only decent one in the lot.

Ko S'la

Ko S'la, born in 1890, was Flory's servant since the men were both twenty years old. In their younger days, their relationship was more like that of boyhood friends, but as they have aged it has become more of a master-servant relationship. Ko S'la is an abbreviated form of Maung San Hla. Ko S'la wears traditional Burmese clothes and speaks Burmese, though he understands English. He is dark skinned,short and square-shouldered, and usually puts on a harassed appearance. He wears a black moustache, and is the same age as Flory. As a young man, Ko S'la had secured Burmese girls for Flory's entertainment and also had borrowed money from Chinese lenders on Flory's behalf. Somewhat later, Ko S'la had married a woman named Ma Pu, had five children,

and then married a second woman named Ma Yi. He is unkempt and lazy, but devoted to Flory. Ko S'la finds Flory childish, but also pities him because of the horrific birthmark.

Throughout the novel, Ko S'la is dedicated and loyal to Flory, though he lacks the imagination and insight to be truly useful to him socially. After Flory's suicide, Ko S'la inherits the bulk of Flory's wealth. He uses the money to establish a shop in the bazaar, which quickly fails. Thereafter, he takes a variety of odd jobs as he can find them and remains fairly unsuccessful. He is a minor, though amusing and likable, character.

Ma Hla May

Ma Hla May is Flory's Burmese mistress. She wears traditional clothing but ensures it is of fashionable cut and expensive manufacture. She wears jewelry and keeps her hair coiled in a black cylinder. She is a tiny, straight woman with a slender body, nearly prepubescent in contour. She has an oval, copper-colored face and narrow eyes and always wears various scents. Flory finds her outlandish but very beautiful. She protests her complete fidelity to Flory and states that she finds Burmese men repulsive—but in fact maintains Ba Pe, Ko S'la's younger brother, as her lover. Even so, Ma Hla May considers herself to be the common-law wife of Flory. She is seductive in crude but effective ways and entices Flory simply by disrobing and caressing him. She finds Flory's fascination with her small breasts strange and annoying, believing that the Burmese ideal of beauty of necessity minimizes the breasts as sexual. Ma Hla May's main complaint of Flory is that he no longer supports her in lavish style; in fact, he treats her as little more than a prostitute, though they have been lovers for about two years.

When Flory becomes acquainted with Elizabeth, he ejects Ma Hla May from his home. As a fallen women, she is ostracized from Burmese society and has little recourse except to enter a brothel. Her appearance shockingly declines after Flory abandons her and in later scenes she appears as a frenzied hag. U Po Kyin engages Ma Hla May to do some of his dirty work and she pursues Flory with crude blackmailing attempts. Flory is so unbalanced by her unexpected appearances that he pays her off. In the final chapter of the novel, Ma Hla May delivers a rehearsed performance, shrieking and pointing at Flory as he sits in church. For this she receives payment from U Po Kyin. Later in life, the pitiable and ruined woman indeed ends up in a brothel. Ma Hla May is one of the most memorable and pitiful characters in the novel.

Lieutenant The Honorable Verrall

Verrall is the son of a minor peer and hence is titled. Born in1900, he is twenty-five, lank, with a straight bearing. He takes pains to appear a proper cavalry officer, though during the novel he is the lieutenant of a native military police contingent. His face is somewhat like a rabbit's, with pale blue eyes and a triangle of teeth visible between the lips. But his expression is hard, fearless, and brutal. Flory finds him offensively young and fit, but Elizabeth finds him imminently handsome. Verrall's clothing is expensive and proper; his belongings are few but always first-rate. Verrall cares only for horses and

polo and anyone not interested solely in those two topics he considers a bore. Verrall is heavily in debt and lives a fortunate life, frequently moving between postings to avoid paying his debts. In general, he finds nearly everything disgusting and beneath him except a fine horse, athleticism, and a transient dalliance with a pretty girl—in that order. Verrall is introduced late in the novel and departs the narrative after only a few chapters. Although a minor and one-dimensional character, he is memorable and central to the plot development.

Objects/Places

Burma

Burma, during the time considered by the novel, was a region of India; both regions were colonial possessions of the English Empire. In 1948, Burma gained independence from the United Kingdom and today the country is known as the Union of Myanmar. Burma has a diverse population which was further complicated by the English-sponsored importation of large numbers of Indians and Chinese laborers. Burma's complex history during the period of 1886 through the time of the novel is interesting but largely unimportant to the novel's development.

Kyauktada

Kyauktada is a small town in Burma and is generally considered to be a lightly fictionalized representation of Katha, Burma—a town today known as Kathar in the Sagaing Division of Myanmar on the bank of the Ayeyarwady River. Kyauktada has a population of four thousand, including perhaps two hundred fifty Indians, sixty Chinese, seven Europeans, two mixed-blood Eurasians, one fakir, and the remainder being Burmese locals. The town was a backwater until 1910, when it was selected as a District Headquarters and also received a rail terminus. Its local business appears to be mainly as a marshalling area for English timbering companies. The town, in 1925, is the dominant setting for most of the novel.

Burmese Patriot

The Burmese Patriot is a small local newspaper printed in Burmese and English. It has poor production quality and is printed on paper of the lowest grade. It is significant, however, for being local and bilingual and for running the initial editorial which slandered Macgregor.

Kyauktada European Club

The Kyauktada European Club boasts an exclusively English membership—hence limited of necessity to seven members. It is the social hub of Kyauktada and is therefore of prime political significance as well. The clubhouse is one of the recurrent settings in the novel. The club has a single floor divided into four rooms. One room is a library containing about five hundred moldering novels; a second room is a largely unused billiards room; a third room is a card-playing room, and the fourth room, most frequently inhabited, is the lounge. The club is physically run down. The admittance of a non-white member to the club's exclusive member list is one of the dominant themes of the novel.

Pagodas

Pagodas are religious structures of worship; in the novel they are akin to a Buddhist shrine. Paying for the construction of a pagoda is seen, locally, as expiatory for much sin. Hence, U Po Kyin intends to build several very fine pagodas prior to his death so that he will be reincarnated as a man instead—due to his grievous and many sins—as an animal. From time to time a decaying pagoda is mentioned in the novel.

Betel

Betel is the name given in the novel to an admixture of leaves and other materials frequently chewed by Burmese individuals. The betel leaves have a variety of minor medicinal properties which are not particularly discussed in the novel. U Po Kyin, for example, is an inveterate taker of betel.

White Man's Burden

The White Man's Burden was the title of an English-language poem by Rudyard Kipling, originally published in 1899. Flory uses the term in the colloquially-derived sense to indicate the putative necessity of imperialist expansion justified by a policy of noble civilizing enterprise. In other words, it was the duty and burden of the white man to colonize foreign non-white nations in order to bring them civilization and white morals and culture. In this world view, individuals like Ellis would be seen as selfless servants working to promote the moral betterment of unthankful indigent populations such as the Burmese.

The Pwe

Flory takes Elizabeth to a local pwe, or variety show. The pwe takes place upon a stage and features a variety of acts; Flory reports that a pwe typically lasts all day long. The local populace gathers around the stage and sits on the ground—in the novel, they sit across the roadway. Flory finds the pwe to encapsulate the essence of Burma—Elizabeth finds it a disgusting display of the culture of what she terms an "inferior" people.

Black Beetles

Mrs. Lackersteen regales Elizabeth with cautionary tales about young women who fail to marry in Burma, stating that they return home to work as scullery maids in kitchens infested with black beetles. For Elizabeth, black beetles become symbolic of personal failure. Ironically, Burma is literally crawling with beetles of all sorts and Mrs. Lackersteen is tormented by more black beetles than any English scullery maid.

Flo

Flo is the name of Flory's black cocker spaniel, a dog evidently trained for field shooting. He lavishes care on the animal and it accompanies him everywhere; he treats it better than he treats his live-in concubine. Moments before shooting himself in the chest, Flory drags Flo into the bedroom and shoots the animal in the head.

Themes

The White Man's Burden

Rudyard Kipling published a poem entitled "The White Man's Burden", which is referenced in the text. The poem summarized the concept that the English, or white man, were morally responsible, hence burdened, for the betterment of non-white societies by instilling English values and Christian morality. In a practical sense, the white man's burden was used as the justification for the colonization and exploitation of non-white society and culture, including India and Burma. Characters such as Ellis typify the worst aspects of this ideology—Ellis feels that the natives should completely acquiesce to British domination and exploitation because, he argues, it is in their own best interest to be trampled by the white man. Another ardent supporter of the white man's burden is, curiously, Veraswami. Veraswami considers himself literally inferior to Flory and the other English men, and finds his own race and culture second-rate to the glories of England. In Veraswami's world view, Ellis is essentially correct for holding the natives in contempt because, he argues, they are contemptible.

Flory has a different opinion, one which is more modern, but in the novel is considered to be dangerously radical—he believes that English and Burmese culture are different—but more or less of equal worth. He has some friends among the Burmese and Indians, speaks the language, loves the land, and appreciates the culture. He is also "marked" with a dark birthmark on the face which symbolically links him to the non-white culture of the area. Like Samuel and Francis, the two so-called Eurasians in the narrative, he is neither English nor Burmese, but struggles to find his place in the space between the two cultures. Flory's primary objection to the white man's burden is that he sees it as a banal lie, or justification. He feels that if the English would simply admit they were there to rob the land and the people, the moral effect of such honesty would be less corrosive than the feigned interest in "bettering" the native populace.

The Vicissitudes of Love

Flory loves prostitutes and then he rejects them. He loves Elizabeth but she does not reciprocate. He kills some animals and she is enthralled. She hears a lie and she rejects him. He sulks around until she forgives him. Meanwhile, a younger, handsome man steals her away and she gives herself to him. After taking her chastity he abandons her. She returns to Flory who forgives her indiscretions. Flory's rejected prostitute causes a scene and professes her undying love for him. Elizabeth is scandalized and rejects him utterly. Flory kills his dog and then commits suicide. Elizabeth marries someone else. Such are the vicissitudes of love, a minor but constant theme running throughout the narrative.

The theme is bolstered by several other characters and their own complex relationships. U Po Kyin and Ma Kin are married and ostensibly in love. In fact, they are each other's

closest confidants; Ma Kin worries about U Po Kyin's immortal soul and encourages him to abandon his wicked ways. Ko S'la marries two women and loves them both, after his way. They reciprocate, but fight among each other constantly. Ma Hla May loves Flory after a fashion, but pursues a relationship with Ko S'la's younger brother. Once Flory rejects her, however, apparently so does her Burmese lover. Veraswami is married, his wife is proper and completely self-effacing. Among the English, only the Lackersteens are married. To Lackersteen this is a source of annoyance as it prohibits him having a good time. For Mrs. Lackersteen it is a matter of station and society more than anything else. When she has a chance to pair Elizabeth with The Honoralbe Verrall, her concern for her husband's legendary—one might say infamous—indiscretions become secondary. Elizabeth first finds Flory interesting, then loves him, and then hates him. Then she loves Verrall but is abandoned by him. She returns to Flory, who isn't such a bad sort after all. But then she hates him once again because he has apparently loved before her. Fortunately, Macgregor will do.

The many relationships of love presented in the novel are varied, complex, and often painful. They are as ridiculous as they are commonplace and they impact virtually all of the characters in the novel. Although not a dominant theme in the novel, the love relationships presented are constant, rich in texture, and interesting, and form a remarkable complicated secondary theme.

The Colonial Life

The novel's core examines the colonial lifestyle, and it is probably for this aspect more than any other that the novel has endured. The narrative is set in a historically interesting period when the British Empire spanned the globe. The Empire's influence after World War I was stronger than ever. Despite constant conflict and rebellion, the Indian colony, including Burma, was firmly controlled and managed by a distant government. Like the American Colonies, Burma would eventually shake off the English yoke, but for many, many decades it was completely subjected. Some characters in the novel—for example, Ellis—refer to Burma as India and consider all of the native peoples to be the same—non-white. Others, like Macgregor, espouse a somewhat paternalistic sensitivity and can at least distinguish Indians from Burmese. Flory, on the other hand, is fully aware of the subtle cultural differences and appreciates the non-white cultures for what they are.

Even so, every aspect of existence for Flory and the other English are dominated by the inescapable fact that they are ruling colonizers in a foreign, subjugated land where they are not particularly welcome. Their social circle is extremely limited, the lives away from work centered exclusively on the European Club, and their entire mental outlook dominated by a ridiculous attempt to distinguish themselves as innately superior to their subjugated acquaintances. On the other hand, the non-white characters hold a range of complex opinions about the situation, from Veraswami, who idolized the English, to U Po Kyin, who sees their methodologies as superior, to Ko S'la, who likes one Englishman individually, to the leaders of the various local rebellions, who want the

English out of the country or dead or, preferably, both. Thus, the theme of the colonial lifestyle is the over-arching theme of the text.

Style

Point of View

The narrative is told in the third-person, omniscient viewpoint by an unnamed and entirely effaced narrator. The narrator is completely reliable and exposes interior thoughts and motivations of many characters. The narrative focuses most closely on Flory, the protagonist, but also often focuses on U Po Kyin, the antagonist. Of the major characters, the narrator offers the least omniscient insight into the mind of Elizabeth. There is a largish cast of minor characters and many of them—Ellis, Maxwell, Winfield—are fairly interchangeable. These characters often represent, or typify, an entire class of individuals and are best interpreted as such. That is, Ellis' virulent racism is best seen as endemic to the entire colonial lifestyle rather than as an eccentricity of the single character.

The third-person point of view is traditional and in this case highly appropriate to the type of text developed. It allows the narrator to present characters in various complex situations and, through explanation of their history and motivation, to present their subtle variations of reaction in a credible method. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how the novel could be carried off from the first-person point of view simply because most of the characters are basically unlikable or naïve individuals. The point of view selected and the implementation of the point of view in the narrative make the text enjoyable, successful, and accessible.

Setting

The novel is entirely set in the country of Burma, at the time a region of the Indian colony of the British Empire. Today, Burma is known as Myanmar and because it is politically closed to the outside world it is not a well-known modern location. During the time described in the novel, several thousands of English men and substantively fewer English women lived in the country and functioned as government officials and representatives for British companies harvesting the local natural resources using native labor. As a colony, Burma was subject to financial exploitation at the hands of the British Empire. Most natives are aware of and resent this type of relationship. Burma is the general, or overall, setting, and most of the subtleties of setting come from the larger setting.

The specific setting of the novel is the town of Kyauktada, a fictional town in the northern part of the country. The town has an unexceptional history and is only politically significant because of recent organization developments. It appears to be a hub of rail transit for teakwood, but this is not significant in the novel. The town also lies astride the Irawaddy River, a major waterway which facilitates logging operations. In no respect is the town considered notable; it is intended to function as "any" town in Burma during the

period. Within the town several locations are developed, including Flory's bungalow, Veraswami's house and hospital and, of course, the European Club.

Language and Meaning

The novel was written in English and modern American editions retain British spelling, punctuation, and usage. The text also contains Anglicized versions of several Burmese words or phrases, though they are always directly defined or defined by the circumstances in which they are used. Much of the novel's characterization is delivered in dialogue form. Much of the dialogue exchanged between minor character is virulently racist and sexist and the attitudes and beliefs of many English characters is shockingly hate-filled. The novel's language is well-crafted and professional, though it infrequently lacks the extensive polish which typifies the author's latter novels.

Meaning within the text is easily derived from dialogue, narrative comment, and plot construction. The text is intended to be accessible and easily understood, though of course the complex nature of racism and colonialism are difficult to fully grasp through casual reading. Indeed, the more educated the reader is, the more meaning can be extracted from the novel.

Structure

The 287-page novel is divided into twenty-five unnamed but enumerated chapters of unequal length. Chapters average slightly more than eleven pages; the longest chapters are Chapter 2, at twenty pages, and Chapter 22, at eighteen pages; the shortest chapters are Chapters 9 and 25, at five pages each. Chapters are presented in largely chronological format, though different chapters focus on the events surrounding different characters and thus there is some overlap. Chapter divisions are clearly marked and structurally appropriate; they mark either large shifts in place, steps forward in time, or responses of different major character.

The novel's primary timeline covers a period from early April to mid-June, 1925. The primary chronology is very straightforward and easily accessible, though during Chapters 18 through 20 there is some confusion as Flory experiences four weeks of time whereas Elizabeth appears to experience perhaps six weeks of time—the segment is slightly confusing as chronology is established with vague periods such as weeks or fortnights. The only primary deviations from the basic chronology are flashback sequences where character histories are developed. Such deviations are clearly defined and easily followed.

The novel's construction is traditional in nearly all respects. Initial chapters introduce the major characters and provide characterization, setting, tone, and general plot development. Middle chapters continue characterization but focus more on plot and relationship development as well as introducing minor characters. Concluding chapters provide rising action, thematic and narrative climax actions, and denouement. The final

chapter reads as a type of epilogue, briefly following the careers of major characters in a sort of biographical construction.

Quotes

"The article to which U Po Kyin turned was of a rather different stamp from the rest. It ran:
"'In these happy times, when we poor blacks are being uplifted by the mighty western civilization, with its manifold blessings such as the cinematograph, machine-guns, syphilis, etc., what subject could be more inspiring than the private lives of our European benefactors? We think therefore that it may interest our readers to hear something of events in the up-country district of Kyauktada. And especially of Mr. Macgregor, honoured Deputy Commissioner of said district.
"'Mr. Macgregor is of the type of the Fine Old English Gentleman, such as, in these happy days, we have so many examples before our eyes. He is "a family man" as our dear English cousins say. Very much a family man is Mr. Macgregor. So much so that he has already three children in the district of Kyauktada, where he has been a year, and in his last district of Shwemyo he left six young progenies behind him. Perhaps it is an oversight on Mr. Macgregor's part that he has left these young infants quite unprovided for, and that some of their mothers are in danger of starvation, etc., etc., etc." pp. 9-10

"'And butler!'
"'Yes, master?'
"'How much ice have we got left?'
"'Bout twenty pounds, master. Will only last today, I think. I find it very difficult to keep ice cool now.'
"'Don't talk like that, damn you—"I find it very difficult!" Have you swallowed a dictionary? "Please, master, can't keeping ice cool"—that's how you ought to talk. We shall have to sack this fellow if he gets to talk English too well. I can't stick servants who talk English. D'you hear, butler?'
"'Yes, master,' said the butler, and retired.
"'God! No ice till Monday,' Westfield said. 'You going back to the jungle, Flory?'
"'Yes. I ought to be there now. I only came in because of the English mail.'
"'Go on tour myself, I think. Knock up a spot of Travelling Allowance. I can't stick my bloody office at this time of year. Sitting there under the damned punkah, signing one chit after another. Paper-chewing. God, how I wish the war was on again!'
"'I'm going out the day after tomorrow,' Ellis said. 'Isn't that damned padre coming to hold his service this Sunday? I'll take care not to be in for that, anyway. Bloody knee-drill.'
"'Next Sunday,' said Westfield. 'Promised to be in for it myself. So's Macgregor. Bit hard on the poor devil of a padre, I must say. Only gets here once in six weeks. Might as well get up a congregation when he does come.'
"'Oh, hell! I'd snivel psalms to oblige the padre, but I can't stick the way these damned native Christians come shoving into our church. A pack of Madrassi servants and Karen school-teachers. And then those two yellow-bellies, Francis and Samuel—they call themselves Christians too. Last time the padre was here they had the nerve to come up

and sit on the front pews with the white men. Someone ought to speak to the padre about that. What bloody fools we were ever to let those missionaries loose in this country! Teaching bazaar sweepers they're as good as we are. "Please, sir, me Christian same like master." Damned cheek."' pp. 26-27

"The doctor shook his head. 'Really, Mr. Flory, I know not what it iss that hass made you so cynical. It iss so most unsuitable! You—an English gentleman of high gifts and character—to be uttering seditious opinions that are worthy of the Burmese Patriot!'
"'Seditious?' Flory said. 'I'm not seditious. I don't want the Burmans to drive us out of this country. God forbid! I'm here to make money, like everyone else. All I object to is the slimy white man's burden humbug. The pukka sahib pose. It's so boring. Even those bloody fools at the Club might be better company if we weren't all of us living a lie the whole time.'
"'But, my dear friend, what lie are you living?'
"'Why, of course, the lie that we're here to uplift our poor black brothers instead of to rob them. I suppose it's a natural enough lie. But it corrupts us, it corrupts us in ways you can't imagine. There's an everlasting sense of being a sneak and a liar that torments us and drives us to justify ourselves night and day. It's at the bottom of half our beastliness to the natives. We Anglo-Indians could be almost bearable if we'd only admit that we're thieves and go on thieving without any humbug.'
"The doctor, very pleased, nipped his thumb and forefinger together. 'The weakness of your argument, my dear friend,' he said, beaming at his own irony, 'the weakness appears to be, that you are not thieves.'" p. 39

"Presently she got up and dressed herself, and lighted a cigarette. Then, coming back to the bed, she sat down and began stroking Flory's bare shoulder. The whiteness of his skin had a fascination for her, because of its strangeness and the sense of power it gave her. But Flory twitched his shoulder to shake her hand away. At these times she was nauseating and dreadful to him. His sole wish was to get her out of his sight.
"'Get out,' he said.
"Ma Hla May took her cigarette from her mouth and tried to offer it to Flory. 'Why is master always so angry with me when he has made love to me?' she said.
"'Get out,' he repeated.
"Ma Hla May continued to stroke Flory's shoulder. She had never learned the wisdom of leaving him alone at these times. She believed that lechery was a form of witchcraft, giving a woman magical powers over a man, until in the end she could weaken him to a half-idiotic slave. Each successive embrace sapped Flory's will and made the spell stronger—this was her belief. She began tormenting him to begin over again. She laid down her cigarette and put her arms round him, trying to turn him towards her and kiss his averted face, reproaching him for his coldness.
"'Go away, go away!' he said angrily. 'Look in the pocket of my shorts. There is money there. Take five rupees and go.'
"Ma Hla May found the five-rupee note and stuffed it into the bosom of her ingyi, but she still would not go. She hovered about the bed, worrying Flory until at last he grew angry and jumped up.

"'Get out of this room! I told you to go. I don't want you in here after I've done with you.'
"'That is a nice way to speak to me! You treat me as though I were a prostitute.'
"'So you are. Out you go,' he said, pushing her out of the room by her shoulders. He kicked her sandals after her. Their encounters often ended in this way." pp. 54-55

"The Indian Empire is a despotism—benevolent, no doubt, but still a despotism with theft as its final object. And as to the English of the East, the sahiblog, Flory had come so to hate them from living in their society, that he was quite incapable of being fair to them. For after all, the poor devils are no worse than anybody else. They lead unenviable lives; it is a poor bargain to spend thirty years, ill-paid, in an alien country, and then come home with a wrecked liver and a pine-apple backside from sitting in cane chairs, to settle down as the bore of some second-rate Club. On the other hand, the sahiblog are not to be idealized. There is a prevalent idea that the men at the 'outposts of Empire' are at least able and hardworking. It is a delusion. Outside the scientific services—the Forest Department, the Public Works Department and the like—there is no particular need for a British official in India to do his job competently. Few of them work as hard or as intelligently as the postmaster of a provincial town in England. The real work of administration is done mainly by native subordinates; and the real backbone of the despotism is not the officials but the Army. Given the Army, the officials and the businessmen can rub along safely enough even if they are fools. And most of them are fools. A dull, decent people, cherishing and fortifying their dullness behind a quarter of a million bayonets.
"It is a stifling, stultifying world in which to live. It is a world in which every word and every thought is censored. In England it is hard even to imagine such an atmosphere. Everyone is free in England; we sell our souls in public and buy them back in private, among our friends. But even friendship can hardly exist when every white man is a cog in the wheels of despotism. Free speech is unthinkable. All other kinds of freedom are permitted. You are free to be a drunkard, an idler, a coward, a backbiter, a fornicator; but you are not free to think for yourself. Your opinion on every subject of any conceivable importance is dictated for you by the pukka sahibs' code." pp. 68-69

"Ma Hla May came forward with her hand on her hip. She had come from within the house, with a calm air that asserted her right to be there. The two girls stood face to face, less than six feet apart.
"No contrast could have been stranger; the one faintly coloured as an apple-blossom, the other dark and garish, with a gleam almost metallic on her cylinder of ebony hair and the salmon-pink silk of her longyi. Flory thought he had never noticed before how dark Ma Hla May's face was, and how outlandish her tiny, stiff body, straight as a soldier's, with not a curve in it except the vase-like curve of her hips. He stood against the veranda rail and watched the two girls, quite disregarded. For the best part of a minute neither of them could take her eyes from the other; but which found the spectacle more grotesque, more incredible, there is no saying.
"Ma Hla May turned her face round to Flory, with her black brows, thin as pencil lines, drawn together. 'Who is this woman?' she demanded sullenly.
"He answered casually, as though giving an order to a servant: 'Go away this instant. If

you make any trouble I will afterwards take a bamboo and beat you till not one of your ribs is whole.'
"Ma Hla May hesitated, shrugged her small shoulders and disappeared. And the other, gazing after her, said curiously: 'Was that a man or a woman?'
"'A woman,' he said. 'One of the servants' wives, I believe. She came to ask about the laundry, that was all.'
"'Oh, is that what Burmese women are like? They are queer little creatures! I saw a lot of them on my way up here in the train, but do you know, I thought they were all boys. They're just like a kind of Dutch doll, aren't they?'" p. 87

"Elizabeth watched the dance with a mixture of amazement, boredom and something approaching horror. She had sipped her drink and found that it tasted like hair oil. On a mat by her feet three Burmese girls lay fast asleep with their heads on the same pillow, their small oval faces side by side like the faces of kittens. Under cover of the music Flory was speaking in a low voice into Elizabeth's ear commenting on the dance.
"'I knew this would interest you; that's why I brought you here. You've read books and been in civilized places, you're not like the rest of us miserable savages here. Don't you think this is worth watching, in its queer way? Just look at that girl's movements—look at that strange, bent-forward pose like a marionette, and the way her arms twist from the elbow like a cobra rising to strike. It's grotesque, it's even ugly, with a sort of wilful ugliness. And there's something sinister in it too. There's a touch of the diabolical in all Mongols. And yet when you look closely, what art, what centuries of culture you can see behind it! Every movement that girl makes has been studied and handed down through innumerable generations. Whenever you look closely at the art of these Eastern peoples you can see that—a civilization stretching back and back, practically the same, into times when we were dressed in woad. In some way that I can't define to you, the whole life and spirit of Burma is summed up in the way that girl twists her arms. When you see her you can see the rice fields, the villages under the teak trees, the pagodas, the priests in their yellow robes, the buffaloes swimming the rivers in the early morning, Thibaw's palace—'" pp. 104-105

"He had puzzled as late as midnight over a whole pile of confidential papers, including the five anonymous letters he had received, besides two others that had been forwarded to him by Westfield, pinned together with a cactus thorn.
"It was not only the letters. Rumours about the doctor had been pouring in from every side. U Po Kyin fully grasped that to call the doctor a traitor was not enough in itself; it was necessary to attack his reputation from every possible angle. The doctor was charged not only with sedition, but also with extortion, rape, torture, performing illegal operations, performing operations while blind drunk, murder by poison, murder by sympathetic magic, eating beef, selling death certificates to murderers, wearing his shoes in the precincts of the pagoda and making homosexual attempts on the Military Police drummer boy. To hear what was said of him, anyone would have imagined the doctor a compound of Machiavelli, Sweeny Todd and the Marquis de Sade. Mr. Macgregor had not paid much attention at first. He was too accustomed to this kind of thing. But with the last of the anonymous letters U Po Kyin had brought off a stroke that was brilliant even for him." pp. 135-136

"One of the beaters laid down his dah and glanced appraisingly at the tree; then he walked to a great creeper, thick as a man's thigh and twisted like a stick of barley sugar, that hung far out from a bough. He ran up the creeper as easily as though it had been a ladder, walked upright along the broad bough, and brought the pigeon to the ground. He put it limp and warm into Elizabeth's hand.
"She could hardly give it up, the feel of it so ravished her. She could have kissed it, hugged it to her breast. All the men, Flory and Ko S'la and the beaters, smiled at one another to see her fondling the dead bird. Reluctantly, she gave it to Ko S'la to put in the bag. She was conscious of an extraordinary desire to fling her arms round Flory's neck and kiss him; and in some way it was the killing of the pigeon that made her feel this." pp. 166-167

"'You don't mind?'
"'No.'
"'I mean, you don't mind my—this thing of mine?' he shook his head slightly to indicate the birthmark. He could not kiss her without first asking this question.
"'No, no. Of course not.'
"A moment after their mouths met he felt her bare arms settle lightly round his neck. They stood pressed together, against the smooth trunk of the frangipani tree, body to body, mouth to mouth, for a minute or more. The sickly scent of the tree came mingling with the scent of Elizabeth's hair. And the scent gave him a feeling of stultification, of remoteness from Elizabeth, even though she was in his arms. All that that alien tree symbolized for him, his exile, the secret, wasted years—it was like an unbridgeable gulf between them. How should he ever make her understand what it was that he wanted of her? He disengaged himself and pressed her shoulders gently against the tree, looking down at her face, which he could see very clearly though the moon was behind her." pp. 177-178

"'Pike-san pay-like! Pike-san pay-like!'
"He turned sharply. The 'pike-san pay-like' ('Give me the money') was repeated. He saw a woman standing under the shadow of the gold mohur tree. It was Ma Hla May. She stepped out into the moonlight warily, with a hostile air, keeping her distance as though afraid that he would strike her. Her face was coated with powder, sickly white in the moon, and it looked as ugly as a skull, and defiant.
"She had given him a shock. 'What the devil are you doing here?' he said angrily in English.
"'Pike-san pay-like!'
"'What money? What do you mean? Why are you following me about like this?'
"'Pike-san pay-like!' she repeated almost in a scream. 'The money you promised me, thakin. You said you would give me more money. I want it now, this instant!'
"'How can I give it you now? You shall have it next month. I have given you a hundred and fifty rupees already.'
"To his alarm she began shrieking 'Pike-san pay-like!' and a number of similar phrases almost at the top of her voice. She seemed on the verge of hysterics. The volume of

noise that she produced was startling.
"'Be quiet! They'll hear you in the Club!' he exclaimed, and was instantly sorry for putting the idea into her head.
"'Aha! Now I know what will frighten you! Give me the money this instant, or I will scream for help and bring them all out here. Quick, now, or I begin screaming!'
"'You bitch!' he said, and took a step towards her. She sprang nimbly out of reach, whipped off her slipper, and stood defying him." p. 197

'Here, you—what's your name—Verrall!'
'What?
'Have you been kicking our butler?'
Verrall's sulky blue eye appeared round the corner of the Field, like the eye of a crustacean peering round a rock.
'What?' he repeated shortly.
'I said, have you been kicking our bloody butler?'
'Yes.'
'Then what the hell do you mean by it?'
'Beggar gave me his lip. I sent him for a whisky and soda, and he brought it warm. I told him to put ice in it, and he wouldn't—talked some bloody rot about saving the last pieces of ice. So I kicked his bottom. Serve him right.'
Ellis turned quite grey. He was furious. The butler was a piece of Club property and not to be kicked by strangers. But what most angered Ellis was the thought that Verrall quite possibly suspected him of being sorry for the butler—in fact, of disapproving of kicking as such.
'Serve him right? I dare say it bloody well did serve him right. But what in hell's that got to do with it? Who are you to come kicking our servants?'
'Bosh, my good chap. Needed kicking. You've let your servants get out of hand here.'
'You damned, insolent young tick, what's it got to do with you if he needed kicking? You're not even a member of this Club. It's our job to kick the servants, not yours.'
Verrall lowered the Field and brought his other eye into play. His surly voice did not change its tone. He never lost his temper with a European; it was never necessary.
'My good chap, if anyone gives me lip I kick his bottom. Do you want me to kick yours?'" p. 208

"MY DEAR FRIEND [the letter ran],—You will much regret to hear that the WILES OF THE CROCODILE have matured. The rebellion—the SO-CALLED rebellion—is all over and finished. And it has been, alas! a more Bloody affair than I had hoped should have been the case.
"All has fallen out as I have prophesied to you it would be. On the day when you came back to Kyauktada U Po Kyin's SPIES have informed him that the poor unfortunate men whom he have Deluded are assembling in the jungle near Thongwa. The same night he sets out secretly with U Lugale, the Police Inspector, who is as great a Rogue as he, if that could be, and twelve constables. They make a swift raid upon Thongwa and surprise the rebels, of whom they are only Seven!! in a ruined field hut in the jungle. Also Mr Maxwell, who have heard rumours of the rebellion, came across from his camp

bringing his Rifle and was in time to join U Po Kyin and the police in their attack on the hut. The next morning the clerk Ba Sein, who is U Po Kyin's JACKALL and DIRTY WORKER, have orders to raise the cry of rebellion as Sensationally as possible, which was done, and Mr Macgregor, Mr Westfield and Lieutenant Verrall all rush out to Thongwa carrying fifty sepoys armed with rifles besides Civil Police. But they arrive to find it is all over and U Po Kyin was sitting under a big teak tree in the middle of the village and PUTTING ON AIRS and lecturing the villages, whereat they are all bowing very frightened and touching the ground with their foreheads and swearing they will be forever loyal to the Government, and the rebellion is already at an end. The SO-CALLED weiksa, who is no other than a circus conjurer and the MINION of U Po Kyin, have vanished for parts unknown, but six rebels have been Caught. So there is an end.
"Also I should inform you that there was most regrettably a Death. Mr Maxwell was I think TOO ANXIOUS to use his Rifle and when one of the rebels try to run away he fired and shoot him in the abdomen, at which he died. I think the villagers have some BAD FEELING towards Mr Maxwell because of it. But from the point of view legal all is well for Mr Maxwell, because the men were undoubtedly conspiring against the Government.
"Ah, but, my Friend, I trust that you understand how disastrous may all this be for me! You will realise, I think, what is its bearing upon the Contest between U Po Kyin and myself, and the supreme LEG-UP it must give to him. It is the TRIUMPH OF THE CROCODILE. U Po Kyin is now the Hero of the district. He is the PET of the Europeans. I am told that even Mr Ellis has praised his conduct. If you could witness the abominable Conceitedness and the LIES he is now telling as to how there were not seven rebels but Two Hundred!! and how he crushed upon them revolver in hand—he who only directing operations from a SAFE DISTANCE while the police and Mr Maxwell creep up upon the hut—you would find is veritably Nauseous I assure you. He has had the effrontery to send in an official report of the matter which started, 'By my loyal promptitude and reckless daring', and I hear that positively he had had this Conglomeration of lies written out in readiness days BEFORE THE OCCURRENCE. It is Disgusting. And to think that now when he is at the Height of his triumph he will again begin to calumniate me with all the venom at his disposal etc. etc." pp. 224-225

"Flory's face was ghastly. After the first moment he had turned his head away from the door and set his teeth in a desperate effort to look unconcerned. But it was useless, quite useless. His face was as yellow as bone, and the sweat glistened on his forehead. Francis and Samuel, doing perhaps the first useful deed of their lives, suddenly sprang from their pew, grabbed Ma Hla May by the arms and hauled her outside, still screaming.
"It seemed very silent in the church when they had finally dragged her out of hearing. The scene had been so violent, so squalid, that everyone was upset by it. Even Ellis looked disgusted. Flory could neither speak nor stir. He sat staring fixedly at the altar, his face rigid and so bloodless that the birth-mark seemed to glow upon it like a streak of blue paint. Elizabeth glanced across the aisle at him, and her revulsion made her almost physically sick. She had not understood a word of what Ma Hla May was saying, but the meaning of the scene was perfectly clear. The thought that he had been the lover of that grey-faced, maniacal creature made her shudder in her bones. But worse than that, worse than anything, was his ugliness at this moment. His face appalled her,

it was so ghastly, rigid and old. It was like a skull. Only the birthmark seemed alive in it. She hated him now for his birthmark. She had never known till this moment how dishonouring, how unforgivable a thing it was." pp. 273-274

"Flory's death had several results. The first and most important of them was that Dr. Veraswami was ruined, even as he had foreseen. The glory of being a white man's friend—the one thing that had saved him before—had vanished. Flory's standing with the other Europeans had never been good, it is true; but he was after all a white man, and his friendship conferred a certain prestige. Once he was dead, the doctor's ruin was assured. U Po Kyin waited the necessary time, and then struck again, harder than ever. It was barely three months before he had fixed it in the head of every European in Kyauktada that the doctor was an unmitigated scoundrel. No public accusation was ever made against him—U Po Kyin was most careful of that. Even Ellis would have been puzzled to say just what scoundrelism the doctor had been guilty of; but still, it was agreed that he was a scoundrel. By degrees, the general suspicion of him crystallized in a single Burmese phrase—'shok de'. Veraswami, it was said, was quite a clever little chap in his way—quite a good doctor for a native—but he was thoroughly shok de. Shok de means, approximately, untrustworthy, and when a 'native' official comes to be known as shok de, there is an end of him.
"The dreaded nod and wink passed somewhere in high places, and the doctor was reverted to the rank of Assistant Surgeon and transferred to Mandalay General Hospital. He is still there, and is likely to remain. Mandalay is rather a disagreeable town—it is dusty and intolerably hot, and it is said to have five main products all beginning with P, namely, pagodas, pariahs, pigs, priests and prostitutes—and the routine-work of the hospital is a dreary business. The doctor lives just outside the hospital grounds in a little bake-house of a bungalow with a corrugated iron fence round its tiny compound, and in the evenings he runs a private clinic to supplement his reduced pay." pp. 283-284

Topics for Discussion

Flory's definitive physical characteristic is his large birthmark—in most other respects he is an average physical specimen. He feels that the birthmark sets him essentially apart, and his upbringing is obviously complicated by it. Discuss how external features such as a birthmark are often used to justify discrimination.

Flory erroneously believes that Elizabeth could become his companion and could be taught to love Burma and the local culture. Elizabeth often overlooks Flory's views which are, to her, radical. Why do you think that people who are falling in love so often overlook each other's faults or shortcomings?

Do you find Ellis to be unlikable? Which aspect of his personality bothers you the most? Is he more unlikable than, say, Maxwell or Winfield?

Dan Lackersteen only wants to live life in order to have what he calls a 'good time'. What does Lackersteen mean by a 'good time'? Is Lackersteen's good time a good time for all?

Veraswami is portrayed as a likable chap, whereas U Po Kyin is portrayed as a corrupt mastermind. Both portrayals may be true, but in the final analysis, which character would you rather claim as a friend? Why?

The novel is full of racist characters and racist ideals. Is the novel itself a racist narrative? The novel is full of sexist characters and sexist ideals. Is the novel itself a sexist narrative?

Mrs. Lackersteen and Ma Hla May are described in physical terms that make them seem fairly similar in body to an adolescent boy—in Flory's words, they are without much contour. In fact, Elizabeth actually mistakes Ma Hla May for a boy after seeing her up close. Elizabeth wears her hair short in the Eton crop, a new style which is surprising but also which Flory finds arousing. Is this focus on asexual, adolescent body types a suggestion that Flory is homosexual? Discuss.

Everyone in town knows that Verrall will depart once he has deflowered Elizabeth—everyone except Mrs. Lackersteen and Elizabeth. How could Mrs. Lackersteen so misjudge Verrall's transparent motivation? Is she simply captivated by his title? What assumptions are generally made about nobility?

Why does Flory shoot his dog? Why does Flory shoot himself? Why does Flory shoot himself in the heart instead of the head?