

The Ballad of a Small Player Study Guide

The Ballad of a Small Player by Lawrence Osborne

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Plot Summary

In this suspenseful, somewhat dreamy novel by Lawrence Osborne, our protagonist, named only Lord Doyle, is living the runaway life of a baccarat gambler in Macau. A former English lawyer who left the country to escape arrest for laundering money from an elderly client, he has his highs and lows like any other gambler, but cannot seem to quit while he is ahead. After being saved one too many times, he finally learns what really matters to him in life.

Lord Doyle is not really a lord, however all of the gambling establishments assume he is because what else would an Englishman be doing gambling in the East. Often he is greeted with complimentary champagne or a female escort. One night he takes home an escort he feels a connection with, however he keeps imagining her connecting with other gentlemen as well so he never calls her. Her name is Dao-Ming, although he is doubtful even that is truthful.

His gambling remains hit and go until he has one very unlucky encounter with another English native, nicknamed Grandma. She rarely ever loses and even her own husband warns Doyle not to play her later in the novel. During their games, he notices Dao-Ming on the arm of another well-to-do gentleman. Although Lord Doyle wins a hand or two against Grandma, she cleans him out when he does not walk away from the tables while he is ahead. He leaves ultimately distraught, but maintains his calm, gentlemanly facade.

After attempting to collect on a number of bets, he is charging breakfast to a tab at an expensive hotel when he realizes he literally does not have the money to pay the establishment and can either run out scared or try to fake it and charge it to a room. Just as he reaches his lowest and will possibly be dishwashing or deported soon, he is rescued by Dao-Ming. She pays his bill and takes him home with her. They spend a couple days and nights together. She leaves him alone in her house one day, and he takes all of her money and leaves to gamble again. He begins to idolize her, but never calls her with the number she left him. This time, however, he cannot lose at baccarat. He wins and wins and wins. He wins so much the management of his hotel forbids him from betting there because they are afraid of the ghost one of their executives saw over his shoulder in surveillance footage. However, when he finally seeks out Dao-Ming, whose money he has been winning with, he finds out some life-changing news.



Chapter 1 - 2

Summary

The book opens with the narrator entering a gambling casino in Taipa called the Greek Mythology. He liked the cheapness of the place and the fact that the receptionists and workers knew him by sight and assumed he was a lord. It was an old fashioned place that was being invaded by modern gamblers.

As he entered, he observed some rich men betting with little care to whether they won or lost. The narrator began to sweat under the gloves he always wore to gamble. He began to play punto banco baccarat, a game based not on skill, but on luck, which he said was why the Chinese liked it. He sat at a table with a middle-aged Chinese woman who was glaring at him and began to play. At first he was winning; however he soon began to lose and eventually took a break, walking away as if his losses didn't matter to him at all.

At the beginning of Chapter 2, when the narrator returned, the woman who was winning at his table had left and a more innocent and nervous-looking Chinese woman had replaced her. The narrator described her cheap, common clothing and accessories, as well as her less valuable chips and awestruck behavior. As he sat down, the electronic machines that reveal odds switched, putting the luck back in Lord Doyle's favor. He offered the lady champagne and began to win. As he continued to play and chat with her, he realized she was a willing prostitute. They finish their game and head outside. Even though he knew he was too old for her to be attracted to him, he took her to a hotel and pursued an intimate encounter.

Analysis

A quote from Christopher Marlowe in which Faustus asks Mephistopheles "How comes it then that / thou art out of hell?" to which Mephistopheles answers "Why this is hell, / nor am I out of it." sets up the novel. The quote describes the narrator's addiction to the thrill, risk, and carelessness of gambling. Although he seems to be doing well, he is miserable on the inside. He realizes it is his addiction early on in the novel, yet he cannot break away from it because of the mysterious situation he is in. His addiction makes his own existence a hell for him.

The imagery and descriptions used in these first two chapters establish Lord Doyle's appreciation for and understanding of the old China compared to modern society and the need for economy. Old China can be seen in the superstitions he mentioned and the belief in luck and ghosts, but the modern world can be seen in the decorations of the casinos which are trying to incorporate other cultures as well as their own. Lord Doyle's fascination with being viewed as a modern gentleman can be seen in such things as his businesslike decision to get a prostitute for the night. However this modern attitude



often clashes with his old-fashioned views on luck and superstitions, especially in certain aspects like the gloves he wore and which casinos he frequented.

Lord Doyle's attitude toward Easterners can also be seen in many of his comparisons, however. When explaining that the main game to play was punto banco baccarat he stated, "It involves no skill, and that is why the Chinese like it" (14). The first game he played, he highlighted how the Chinese woman across from him glared at him from the start and hated him on sight because he was a "gwai-lo" or foreigner. His strong diction when describing her begins to reveal to readers his patronizing attitude toward Easterners.

Osborne also uses many foreign words and phrases within the first couple chapters of the novel, trying to put the reader in a foreign world, which can sometimes be confusing and require problem-solving skills. He not only does this with a foreign language, but also with gambling lingo. Also, the foreign term gwai-lo literally translates to "ghost person" which foreshadows the ending of the novel.

These opening chapters don't give much information about the narrator, Lord Doyle. They leave the reader questioning many things about him such as where he was really from and what he did to get where he was. He seems very shallow as he was interested only in gambling and picking up women, and allowing the Chinese to believe he was a person of some importance though it appears the title of "Lord" was an assumed title.

Discussion Question 1

What kind of an attitude does the main character have toward Easterners? How can you tell?

Discussion Question 2

What is Lord Doyle's motivation for continuing to gamble? What does this tell readers about his character?

Discussion Question 3

How does the word choice in Chapter 1 and 2 reveal Lord Doyle's perspective on life? What is his perspective on life? Include examples from the book to support your answer.

Vocabulary

archaic, reeks, rancid, lethargy, mitigated, xenophobic, coquettish, vintage, munitions, hiatus, malice, hydrofoil



Chapter 3 - 4

Summary

As they walked along in the rain at the beginning of Chapter 3, Lord Doyle and his lady friend observed a variety of extremely modern as well as traditional Chinese architecture and culture. When they entered the hotel, the woman told Lord Doyle that she was not a whore. Lord Doyle felt like he should apologize for putting her through relations with him as he was so much older than she, so he put a large “gift” next to her purse to avoid ruining the moment. After satisfying each other, Doyle let the woman sleep. He believed the name she had given him, Dao-Ming Tang, was an assumed name. When she woke, the woman told Doyle she was of the understanding that he was a distinguished gentleman because of the yellow gloves he wore when he gambled. She told him she sent money back to the monks in her village monthly, but wouldn't be more specific when he questioned her. He was just as vague when she questioned his wealth. She assumed he was rich because he gambled like he had nothing to lose.

Doyle does not correct her assumption that he was rich. However, he felt ashamed and inferior afterwards, but knew he could never tell her the real reason he had fled from England. As he fell asleep he dreamed of places and people from his past, yet tightened his grip on Dao-Ming. When he first awoke in the morning, he thought he was back in England and panicked, but quickly remembered he was in China. Dao-Ming was gone like all the other prostitutes from his past, but Lord Doyle sensed he would see her again because of their deep conversations and connection.

In Chapter 4, Lord Doyle visited his gaming halls again and lost amongst the crowd of foreigners and native people. He eventually began to win again, but then lost all he had won and more. His attitude remained uncaring. He eventually paused in his gambling and balanced his expenses against his winnings and realized he was not doing nearly as well as he'd hoped. Instead of stopping, however, he bought his way into an even bigger game. Even though he didn't really have the funds to enter the game, the dealer's assumption that he was a Lord got him in. He had a flashback and recounted how he began embezzling from one of his elderly English clients, Mrs. Butterworth. His money came from there, which was why he felt conflicted with guilt over losing it. After losing for a while, the winds of luck change and Lord Doyle walked away from the casino with more money than he went in. However, he wasn't satisfied and promptly lost it all at another casino. After a quick nap, he revisited the casinos and walked away with nearly a half million in cash before noon.

Analysis

The language in these two chapters highlights the theme of tradition and superstitions existing in a modern world. Chapter 3 begins with Lord Doyle's description of modern



Chinese architecture, but then transitions to his belief that there are goddesses who protect the sailors and fishermen and gamblers of the area. Even as he tried to make her more comfortable by turning off lights and making small talk, he dispensed with the niceties enough to put money by her bag before they begin even talking. Although his use of the yellow kid gloves to gamble is part of what draws Dao-Ming to him, they are another sign of his superstitious nature.

His connection to Dao-Ming is cemented in this section because she seemed to understand why he continued to gamble, even though he didn't. After he avoided confirming her assumption that he was a Lord, she knowingly called him a real gambler because he told her he didn't care if he lost money or not. When she voiced her dislike of gamblers and gambling, he admitted that he lost a lot. After she fell asleep, however, he began to feel ashamed of himself. This guilt can be seen in his dreams of home and his confusion upon waking up. This guilt indicated that he did not get his money from honest endeavors. His superstitious nature can be seen in his belief that he will see Dao-Ming again, "because although the city is a reef where confused fish never meet twice unless a goddess intervenes, intervene she sometimes does" (51).

The use of facades within these chapters makes the reader question where Dao-Ming really comes from. Lord Doyle considers telling her the truth of his background and sins, but quickly discards the idea. This leaves the reader questioning whether or not Dao-Ming's tales of sending money home for religious sacrifices are true, or merely an attempt to play the part Lord Doyle wants her to play: "The lord and the whore" (42). Are both of them are using their personas to suit each other, or was Dao-Ming being genuine?

The theme of addiction can once again be seen in Lord Doyle's gambling binges throughout Chapter 4. He gambled carelessly, with reckless abandon. The dramatic irony of this is that the reader is beginning to realize the money he was gambling with may or may not be his. When he ended up winning so much at the end of the chapter, the reader is left wondering if he will stop or continue to risk so much with each game?

The power of money and affluence becomes important in this section of the novel. The reader learns that as a child and young man, Doyle was tormented by his schoolmates because his family was not affluent. They never had money. His father was a vacuum cleaner salesman. He learns the accent and mannerisms of those who are rich by watching them and mimicking them until the actions are second nature. As a lawyer, he wins the trust of an elderly client and begins stealing from her. When he had finally stolen enough that the others in his law firm noticed the money was gone, he ran to China. Because of the tormenting he went through in his childhood, it seems Doyle will do anything to have money, or at least have the appearance of being rich.



Discussion Question 1

Would you describe Lord Doyle as a gentleman? What actions and thoughts within these Chapters make Lord Doyle seem like a real gentleman? What actions and thoughts make him seem less than gentlemanly?

Discussion Question 2

With science and technology advancing and explaining more and more phenomenon, do you believe superstitions have a place in the modern world of today? How does luck play into today's modern world that is number and data driven?

Discussion Question 3

In Chapter 4, Doyle stated, "there will be a place in your mind that wrestles with the superstition" (66). Do you believe superstitions have a place in the world today? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

wizened, embankment, monsoon, venal, crass, impudent, imminence, millennia, expended, placid, pall, venomous, vertigo, cynical, sadistic, vitality, atrium, bantering, ambience, sensual, portents, aquiline, nostalgic, indiscret, embezzlement, senile, gullibility, prole, siphoning, dosh, morose, commiseration, suavely, salacious, belligerent, oblige, guttural, imprecations



Chapter 5 - 6

Summary

Chapter 5 begins with a summary of the different types of baccarat and description of why the game was satisfying to play. The kind of baccarat played in China was a game of chance with no skill involved, called punto banco baccarat. Lord Doyle liked it because it was all or nothing when it came to winning. After he slept the day away, he began to prepare for his battle against Lady Luck at night. He entered the casino with his usual air of importance where he ate and drank lavishly. He balanced his finances and realized he was vastly in the hole, but this didn't alarm him as he believed he would win again, especially with baccarat.

Lord Doyle joined a higher-paying game of baccarat and started off by winning a hand, making him the envy of the room. As he continued to win, the banker questioned his decision to continue betting, not because he was concerned about the Easterner losing, but because he was concerned about Lord Doyle's reaction to eventually losing. As he was winning, however, Dao-Ming walked in. She was on a middle-aged man's arm and dressed very classily. At first Lord Doyle denied that it was her, but when their gazes met, he could not overlook the recognition. He was disappointed, so he decided to put down everything he had won on the hand he was playing and act like it didn't matter to him in the least if he won or lost.

At the beginning of Chapter 6, Lord Doyle looked across the room and spotted the middle-aged woman he had encountered the first night in the story. The banker told him she was known as "Grandma" and came every Wednesday night to clean out the house. The banker himself called her "an opportunist." She saw him from across the tables and made her way over. She began to tattle on him about how he had been down on his luck the first night they'd met. She won the first hand against him while making a number of insults and snide comments about the "Englishman." She was rolling in money and demonstrated that when she spat into a silver spittoon despite the fact that there was a fine attached to the action. Lord Doyle was quickly calculating in his head how deeply in debt he would be if he were to lose what he had allotted for gambling that night, but she easily goaded him into seeming a coward if he backed out of their game. He won a hand, but she quickly recovered and won it back. She made fun of him for not having a credit line at the casino, and then accused him of counting cards, an insult followed by a claim that he'd suckered her in to beat her.

In the last hand, however, Grandma won it all, and then tried to prod Doyle into going home to get more money and trying again. He thought about being rational, settling his bills and living on a budget, but then the devil inside him took over and he came to the conclusion that if he gambled, he'd win because he needed to. He did not win, however, and walked out with two chips in his pocket. He managed to keep his facade of English wealth intact. After he saw Grandma off, he paused and thought of what he could do



with the two chips he has left. He turned back to the casino and lost them in another game.

Analysis

An important note to make about the beginning of Chapter 5 is the switch from first to second and third person narration. The author uses this switch in narration to help explain the game of punto banco baccarat, as well as help the reader understand Lord Doyle's addiction to the risk of gambling. It puts the reader in Doyle's shoes, while distancing the reader from him personally because the reader does not know his specific thoughts, merely the mechanical workings of the game he plays.

The author's word choice in these chapters is also very powerful. He gives the game a power beyond that of a card game; he gives it the power to harm and kill by describing it as having "a steel edge to it...a game of ecstasy and doom" (106). This illustrates Lord Doyle's perspective on the game and the life and death hold it had on him: "death by guillotine" (108). Doyle knew when his farce was discovered, it would be over quickly and painlessly.

Another theme that can be seen in this section is that of luck versus laws. This theme can be seen through the author's explanation of the card game in contrast to his use of numbers to survive. He describes this version of baccarat as the more honest game of the three variations because there was no way for the casino dealers to cheat. It was purely a game of luck, dependent upon the cards with only one small choice allowed to the players: a third card or not? With the idea that luck was a variable, this meant the gamblers, if they played enough, would win again at some point. This was how Lord Doyle used luck as a law. He began to see the fault in this law, however, when he attempted to balance his budget and realized he would have to play a bigger hand in order to get himself back on an even line of income.

This chapter also begins to foreshadow Lord Doyle's impending illness. His violent dreams and physical descriptions of himself resemble that of a drug addict or ill person: "My wrists, the sides of my throat were damp..." (110). At this point it is difficult to tell if his illness was physical or because of his addiction.

Food and drink in excess also begin to play an important role as symbols of Lord Doyle's addictive personality. Whenever he got down on his luck he would go to a hotel or restaurant and order gobs of expensive food and drink. This over indulgence is a common coping mechanism.

Grandma becomes a major player in the novel in Chapter 6. Her prosperity and careless attitude are exactly what Lord Doyle hoped to portray, even though he didn't have the means. His unflattering descriptions of her and assumptions about her reveal his superior Western attitude, while his envy of her position shows how he wants the best of both the East and West. Notice also the connection between Grandma and Dao-Ming. The two women seem to show up in conjunction with one another. The first night



Doyle had been gambling with Grandma, he returned to the table to find Dao-Ming there. Now, he had encountered Grandma again at the gambling tables and, for the first time, saw Dao-Ming on the arm of another man at the same casino.

The disruption of time and distortion of day and night also begins to come through in these chapters. It becomes apparent that gambling had no schedule; the addiction called when it did and the gambler responded. Readers see Lord Doyle gaming at all hours of the day and night. The disruption of time can also be seen during the card games. Important games can take several pages to describe while several simple games can be summarized in a sentence or two.

Discussion Question 1

How is the game of baccarat described? Why does the author switch the narration from Doyle's first person point of view to that of a third person narrator? What effect does that have on the reader?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think Lord Doyle's dreams represent? What language and symbolism give you that impression?

Discussion Question 3

What does the character of Grandma symbolize or represent? How do Lord Doyle's descriptions of her give you that impression?

Vocabulary

paradoxical, crux, desiccated, punctual, frugal, exorcism, sultry, indolently, accoutrements, inert, formidable, alacrity, shaman, oblivious, ebbed, croupier, unpretentious, complicity, opportunist, avidity, premonition, imminently, nonchalant, glutinous, dispensed, foredoomed, exceed, reincarnation



Chapter 7 - 8

Summary

After Lord Doyle returned to his room in the beginning of Chapter 7, he slept for an hour, then got up and began thinking of where he could go and from whom he could collect loans. He found several hundred dollars in his room and headed to an American casino, hoping to collect debts.

He met with a man, Solomon McClaskey, who said he could not repay his debt because he himself had bad luck the past night. Lord Doyle saw through his lies, however, and was able to get part of his money back by acting desperate. He got \$3,000 and promised not to play with it, but then Solomon wanted Lord Doyle to take him out to dinner. Solomon ordered 3 bottles of champagne before Doyle pointed out he needed to reserve the money a little.

They discussed why neither man could quit gambling, and then Doyle began to talk about disappearing. Solomon wasn't sure whether he meant running away or committing suicide, so he told Doyle him a sad story about a gambler down on his luck who hung himself. Solomon gave Doyle hope that he could bounce back again. They both admitted they were addicted to gambling and discussed their histories. Solomon tried to get Doyle to come back into the hotel casino, but Doyle realized he must go "home" and make a decision.

At the beginning of Chapter 8, Doyle left the bar and headed back to his hotel room. He gathered several things and headed to the ferry to go to Hong Kong. He rode the crowded ferry with confused tourists, elderly people, low rollers, and a few cleaning staff. He continued to be in disbelief that he was indeed out of money and out of luck. The weather was questionable, but the ferry still set out on time.

As he rode the ferry, Lord Doyle thought of the Buddhists afterlife, including a definition of Chinese hell called the hungry ghost realm. He was thinking about the background of Buddhist beliefs when he checked the weather and considered throwing himself into the turbulent water. The blast of the foghorn surprised him out of his contemplation of suicide and he decided they were too close to civilization for him to end his life.

Once on land, he took the escalator roadways all the way up a mountain in Elgin, and again contemplated suicide. After deciding not to throw himself down the wet concrete escalators, he headed back down the mountain toward Kowloon in a somewhat delirious manner. He assumed the facade of the well-to-do gentleman again in order to eat, however, he continued to spend excessively. When the waitress pressed him for payment, he knew he only had half of what was owed. As it appeared his luck had finally run out for good, he was saved by a glamorous presence.



Analysis

Chapter 7 is a turning point in the novel for Lord Doyle. His money and resources had completely run out and he couldn't even get people to repay what they owed him. Solomon McClaskey represents the typical English gambler's philosophy and attitude. He had his ups and downs, but he could not quit. "Addiction is fate" (190). When one was addicted to something, for example gambling, that became one's fate, he believed. The strength of the addiction would affect the choices or changes that were made no matter what.

The theme of addiction is witnessed again through the description of money: "The three grand came out and was passed over like heroin that mustn't be seen" (176). As the men discussed quitting, they reasoned in a circle about why one couldn't quit: "One was never far enough ahead to quit" (183). Whenever they were winning money, they couldn't quit because luck was with them. And when they were losing they couldn't quit because they had to win again to survive.

The weather also continues to foreshadow rough things to come, as the winds picked up and the storm moved in. The hydrofoil was barely allowed to cross to Hong Kong, but it did. Lord Doyle's demise was also foreshadowed in Chapter 7 as the reader begins to see more mentions of death and dying. Solomon's tale about the gambler who committed suicide after he lost everything describes one end result of the addictive nature of men. That man was so overweight from his excessive, addictive eating, that when he went to hang himself the weight of his body severed his body from his head. Although this tale was meant to deter Lord Doyle from thinking of committing such acts himself, it unintentionally forced him to admit he was at the end of his means with nothing left to save him.

Lord Doyle's explanation of the afterlife also hints that death might be forthcoming. The hungry ghosts of suicides and violent deaths awaiting reincarnation sound eerily similar to Lord Doyle's experiences to come. They also have him thinking about jumping into the water to commit suicide. When the "opportunity" was past, Lord Doyle was disappointed in himself. He considered suicide again by riding the escalators to throw himself down them, but again convinced himself his plan was faulty.

Discussion Question 1

How does Osborne's word choice in Chapter 7 and 8 foreshadow events to come?

Discussion Question 2

Would you have repaid Lord Doyle's loan if you were Solomon McClaskey? Why or why not? What about the nature of gambling and the nature of Lord Doyle himself would have affected your decision?



Discussion Question 3

What purposes does Osborne have in explaining the Buddhist afterlife and hungry ghosts to readers? What does this foreshadow?

Vocabulary

ludicrous, agile, impeccable, gimlet, inclement, retorted, ruse, impotent, deported, inescapable, deluded, tureen, drones, impelled, unmediated, ominous, duped, acquisitive, insatiable, fetes, tensile, voluptuous, propriety, calamitous, liaison, amicable, squalor, banal



Chapter 9 - 10

Summary

Dao-Ming rescued Lord Doyle with her appearance and willingness to pay for his food and drinks with no fuss. As he took in her changed appearance, he came to the realization that she had been with a client all night. He continued his facade as a regal lord by kissing her hand and making the excuse that he had left his money at home and was forgetful. She pointedly reminded him that she knew because he forgot to call her after their single interlude. She presented her successful appearance as a result of her real estate business picking up and then questioned why he was in Kowloon. He made up a bland excuse and she suggested maybe he was broke because he couldn't pay his bill. She remarks on their charming cover-up personas — he the rich gambler and she the successful real estate sales lady.

Notice in this section that Doyle asked Dao-Ming how she was doing. Her response is that her life is looking up as far as it can in the realm of hungry ghosts. The significance of the hungry ghosts has just been described in the beginning of Chapter 8. These ghosts are those of people who never found what they were looking for during their lives on Earth as the Chinese believe. They return to Earth as hungry ghosts, unable to be fulfilled. These people are often the victims of suicide.

She offered to buy him food and he eventually agreed. Then she offered to show him her house and he found himself taking the ferry to Wan Chai to wait for a boat to Lamma. As they waited, she admitted she wanted him to call, although she knew he wouldn't. Despite the downpour of rain, they make it across to her house in Ko Long. It was a nice, minimalistic place that she said she had worked on herself.

As soon as he was comfortable, Doyle fell asleep. He had a brief fear that she would search his pockets and find nothing, but then came to the realization that she already understood him, even if he didn't. As he drifted to sleep, she was giving him a warm sponge bath.

At the beginning of Chapter 10, Dao-Ming made Doyle tea and let him sleep. He observed her living space and began to feel safe and vulnerable with her. When he woke up, she was gone, but had left him a note to make himself at home. After an hour or so, he was bored and went to try the door, but it was locked. He heard her coming up the stairs and snuck back upstairs. She brought home food and wine. He admitted he had lost everything and she consoled him. She said that he could change, but compared his gambling to alcoholism. They smoked an opium pipe and talked about his real past before she fell asleep snuggled against him. He continued to reminisce about his past however, and how he came to be addicted to losing and winning money at casinos. When she woke up they smoked more opium, and then she told him about her past. It was not pretty and she told it with little emotion. She admitted she could have studied, but that she wanted “the open sky.” She began to make more tea, but he



hesitantly pulled her close and they snuggled, falling asleep again. He noticed a bump on her neck, but she brushed his hand aside.

Analysis

The symbolism of Dao-Ming as Lord Doyle's rescuer from financial ruin and possible deportation represents his whole belief that the East will save him from ruin merely because he is a Westerner and therefore superior in many ways. Even though he is grateful to Dao-Ming, he judged her because she made a living as a prostitute demonstrating his superior attitude. Her kindness and understanding of his gambling addiction helped him to idolize her, but also allowed him to use her and objectify her. He also judged the way she ate chocolate, her accessories, and how she dressed. Lord Doyle's mention of forgetfulness as an excuse twice — once for not having his money and the second time for not calling Dao-Ming — foreshadows his eventual lapse of mental and physical health. It also symbolizes his egotistical nature, therefore solidifying the Western attitude of superiority seen throughout the novel so far.

The repetition of the mention of statistical odds becomes apparent in this chapter, although it has been alluded to in previous chapters with the talk of luck. The importance of this repetition is that Lord Doyle seemed to continuously beat the odds. Even when he was at the lowest of low times, he was rescued by someone caring and perfect — someone whom he had wronged but had forgiven him anyway.

The storm continues to roll in as they headed to Dao-Ming's home. The stormy backdrop contrasted with the apparent peace Lord Doyle and Dao-Ming have made with each other. The rain pounded down around the boat as they reconnected with each other. The storm continued when they sought cover in Dao-Ming's house, and he slept deeply to recover from his illness and depression.

Lord Doyle foreshadows his illness by thinking he was a sick man for taking advantage of what Dao-Ming seemed to be willingly offering, even thought at one point he'd been a simple client. Foreshadowing can also be seen in his descriptions of her home. There are leaves everywhere and she has let the garden go to ruin, the villa is sparsely furnished, and there are no pictures on the walls. He is also isolated there often, with no neighbors or visitors while Dao-Ming goes into the city to work her real estate business. The end of Chapter 10 also foreshadows sickness in Dao-Ming. When he noticed a curious bump on her neck, she brushes his hand aside and snuggled into him.

Chocolate and tea are used as symbols for comfort. Chocolate was what Dao-Ming ordered when she rescued Lord Doyle from her debt at the hotel. It was what she pulled out when he began to feel sick. Food in general was used to heal in multiple situations.

Discussion Question 1

How do lies and secrecy help us survive in the world? Are there appropriate times to bend the truth or outright lie? When could it be beneficial to keep a secret?



Discussion Question 2

In what ways does Lord Doyle act superior? Why does he believe he is superior to those around him? What might this superiority represent?

Discussion Question 3

What do you predict will happen in Lord Doyle and Dao-Ming's relationship?

Vocabulary

fraud, diverged, condescending, tersely, impaled, tetchy, incredulous, extricate, cloying, pungent, nostalgia, imponderable, infarcation, jaunty, fractious, fermented



Chapter 11 - 12

Summary

Dao-Ming continued to take care of Lord Doyle through Chapter 11. As they were walking the island, Doyle inwardly observed that money had been the guiding factor in their relationship. Money had brought them together during their first sexual encounter. Then Doyle's lack of money had brought them back together again. As they ate lobster in a fancy restaurant, the staff watched them and spoke badly of her. Lord Doyle brought up his need to gamble again. She asked where he would get the money from and he admitted he'd beg from one of his boys. She admitted she'd stolen before, but wouldn't give him money if he begged. When they drink, Doyle noticed Dao-Ming doesn't get drunk, no matter how much she consumed. He thought her scarf was hiding something and while they were making love he again noticed a swelling on her neck. He observed that there was a distance or space between them even during that intimate act.

In Chapter 12, Lord Doyle woke alone and thought of ways to leave and take some of her money with him. He had found her stash of money, but the thought that she was saving it to send back to her hometown kept him from taking it. He continued to wait, but eventually got hungry and took a few bills to eat. He inquired at the restaurant if anyone had seen Dao-Ming, but no one has much to say about her. Finally the old man who owned the restaurant sat down and asked how the lobsters were. Lord Doyle inquired about his friend, but the owner laughed and said that Doyle had been staying in the house on the hill by himself, coming down by himself to order food and eat. As Doyle returned to the house on the hill, he realized that everything in it was ambiguous and could belong to anyone, but not necessarily Dao-Ming. He stuffed all of the money he had found in his pockets and got ready to leave. He wrote her a brief apology note, suddenly realizing she was not coming back. He looked down on his hand and realized she had written a phone number and a farewell message on the inside of his hand while he had been sleeping. He headed to the ferry to begin his gambling cycle again. He continually promised himself that he would return the money to her once he won it back.

Analysis

Information in these chapters continues to develop theme of the changing relationship between Dao-Ming and Lord Doyle. Both these characters lead secret lives. But their fortunes seem to have reversed. Dao-Ming has become a thriving prostitute while he has become the destitute criminal who has lost what he stole by gambling. Their secrets kept them apart to begin with. In the beginning, he saw her as no more than a kind prostitute, while she believed he was something special, a gentleman of sorts. As he began to see her as more than just a prostitute, money drove a wedge between them. She thought they were on even keel with money, while he knew they were not. Her suspicions that he was lying, and his admission that he was helped them to close that



gap, but also kept them skeptical about each other. When they were drinking, he noticed she was not affected, an observation that caused him to question her. He also noticed her attempt to cover the swelling in her neck. Money was always between them, too. Interconnected to that money were their differences in lifestyle. Lord Doyle thrived in the city because there was always something to distract him or rescue him. In the country and the villa, he was too isolated and couldn't bear his own company. There was a distance between them, even in the way they make love.

Chapter 11 begins with an emphasis on the fact that the setting was a nuclear power station. The streets were even named after parts of the plant. This hints at a reason for Dao-Ming's lump in her neck, which Lord Doyle had noticed again. The gossiping of the restaurant patrons and workers foreshadowed Lord Doyle's possible irrationality. The use of the word 'decomposition' also hints at the supernatural and death.

Dao-Ming's character takes on even more of an innocent personality when she told Doyle that he was welcome to steal from her as long as he didn't beg. This example shows how important Lord Doyle's outward appearance was to Dao-Ming. He thought only of how he didn't believe he could change. Even though he knew gambling would be his demise, he did not want to do anything differently. Her endless patience and understanding of his addiction helped endear her to the reader but also made Lord Doyle's representation of her questionable.

The irrationality within Lord Doyle truly comes to the forefront in Chapter 12 when he promised himself he would pay Dao-Ming's money back to her even though he knew he never would. His lack of shame from stealing the money she had told him was to go toward the monastery in her hometown was the beginning of his downward spiral. It was almost as if his decision to take the money in order to gamble again brought him out of his stupor. This instance shows just how strongly Doyle is addicted to gambling. He was willing to steal even from the one person who was willing to bail him out of debt just so he could play again.

When Doyle was told that he had been coming down the mountain to eat alone, the audience begins to question his sanity. The tone of mystery continues to grow when Doyle packed and headed back to Macau to gamble again. The house in which he and Dao-Ming had been staying was full of items that could belong to anyone, hinting that Dao-Ming may never have existed, or may have merely used the house for her business as a prostitute. The phone number he found on his hand was another mystery. Is it something he has concocted in his mind to get over his guilt of stealing from her? Did Dao-Ming write it? Is it really there? Mysterious things continue to happen as he rode the ferry back to Macau. It rained, but he could see the moon. The repetition of Lord Doyle's empty promise that he would repay Dao-Ming adds to the impression that Lord Doyle was out of touch with reality; his mind clouded by his addiction to gambling. His unrealistic outlook was so twisted that he blamed Dao-Ming for his stealing because she rescued him instead of letting him be deported. It is also in Chapter 12 that Lord Doyle refers to himself as a ghost.



Discussion Question 1

Where do readers see separation or distance between Lord Doyle and Dao-Ming? How does this distance or separation foreshadow events to come?

Discussion Question 2

What mysterious or confusing elements take place within this section? How do these mysterious or confusing parts help build an unreliable narrator and specific tone or mood?

Discussion Question 3

How does Lord Doyle's character change in this section? What do these changes in his personality and attitude reflect about addiction and society?

Vocabulary

dervish, cicadas, virtuoso, mammalian



Chapter 13 - 14

Summary

As Lord Doyle returned to the Lisboa in Chapter 13, a member of the staff stopped him and asked him to pay his bill before midnight that night. He began his rich facade again, saying he'd just run up to his room and get the money. When the staff pressed him to pay immediately, he lied and said he didn't have his wallet on him. As they continued to see through his excuses, he finally just walked to the elevator and headed to his room. He went into his room and took a bath, but the number from Dao-Ming did not wash off. After he was clean and refreshed, he snuck out of his hotel and headed for the casino Neptune.

In Chapter 14, Lord Doyle admitted he hated betting on weekends and Thursdays because of foreigners and tourists. On that night, however, he didn't have a choice. He observed a variety of people, from hookers to high rollers to losers. Lord Doyle's confidence was back and he was sure he could not lose. He decided to convert all of his cash so he could use it all. He even brought out the yellow gloves and began to win. He won two big hands in a row and everyone headed over to his table to watch. After he won a hundred thousand, he headed to the bigger betting rooms. He entered these games with the cockiness of a Westerner and began winning. And winning and winning. He began to feel an attitude of irritation from the house staff because of his many wins. He took off his gloves to air out his fingers and remembered the numbers from Dao-Ming on his palm. He became nervous that the banker would think he was cheating. He bet everything on a final hand and won. He was able to pay off his debts at his hotel, upgrade his hotel room to a suite, try on some expensive watches (which he can't quite afford yet), and be recognized on the street as the man who had won nine hands of baccarat in a row.

Analysis

In Chapter 13, the theme of Addiction is illustrated in the way that Lord Doyle avoided paying for his necessities and going directly to the gambling tables, using the excuse that he needed to make enough money to pay back Dao-Ming. He knew that he would never pay her back and had repeatedly said as much, but he still used it as an excuse to gamble first. The flimsy excuses he gave to the receptionist at the hotel Lisboa contributed to the superior attitude and lack of reality that continued to feed Lord Doyle's addiction. The vivacious and lively descriptions of the casinos and gamblers also illustrate the game's effect on Lord Doyle. He lived for the risk of the game. This poses the question, had he become ill because he was not gambling? Was he sick because he was finally being taken care of? A tone of mysterious paranoia begins to take over the novel as Lord Doyle began to feel watched, at first for owing money and then for winning money. The mysterious number on his hand had also not washed off. In ignoring these discrepancies in reality, the reader is left questioning what is really



happening to Lord Doyle. His incredible confidence that he will win only adds to the picture of his seemingly unstable mentality.

The conflict of power between money and superstition is seen within Chapter 14 as Lord Doyle began to win back his money with nothing but the highest betting hand. Although initially as he won, he was congratulated and a crowd gathered, eventually he felt more and more judged by the superstitions of the Easterners. Even as he continued to win, he continued to flout the Chinese belief in chance and fate. The symbolism in Lord Doyle's yellow gloves is seen in this chapter as well. It is ironic that his superstition of wearing gloves was at odds with the Chinese bankers and their suspicions and superstitions. When he was honest with them about the mysterious numbers on his hand, it almost hurt his credibility more. The power money has over people, however, can be seen in how people held back their superstitions to make Lord Doyle happy, for example the bellboys and receptionists at his hotel.

A tone of reminiscence can be seen in the flashbacks Lord Doyle has while he is betting. These flashbacks help the reader understand his obsession with winning, with his parents and grandparents emphasizing that aspect so heavily. These moments of inattention to the game however, bring into question once gain his touch with reality.

The theme of excess is not only seen in Doyle's gambling addiction or love of food as a coping mechanism, but also just his general need to spend money and seem wealthy. He even realizes that he's won back enough money to pay back Dao-Ming and still have enough to get him by for several months, but it is not enough for him. After his winnings, he updates his suites and continues to play the role of well-to-do gentleman.

Lord Doyle's obsession with taking risks and addiction to gambling are effectively illustrated in Chapter 14, especially when he wonders what would have happened if he played a tenth hand.

Discussion Question 1

What obsessive or addictive quality traits does Lord Doyle represent in this section and how? What might these traits represent in the bigger picture of society?

Discussion Question 2

What purpose does the flashback have? Why did Osborne give us those details about Lord Doyle?

Discussion Question 3

What does the fact that Lord Doyle wonders what would have happened if he'd played a tenth hand tell you about his character? What could it foreshadow?



Vocabulary

intercept, inexpressible, theatrically, omnipotent, amended, obstruct, primeval, obsequiously, ruminating, zenith, escapades, dissipated, malodorous, paraffin, dotards, synchronicity



Chapter 15 - 16

Summary

Lord Doyle begins Chapter 15 wary of the attitudes of Easterners around him. He walked to a Cathedral and wondered about the magical quality of his winning streak. While in the Cathedral, he prayed for a tenth win and swore to bet everything on it. For dinner he went to a European restaurant, one of the few in China. As he ate alone in a corner, partitioned off from everyone, he began to think that his transition from failure to lucky made him supernatural. He walked the city of Macau, daydreaming about what he would do with the money he would win, the places he had been and would go, and the number nine.

That night, he had the wild idea to place a single huge bet, even though he'd resolved earlier to take the day off. As he stopped to consider this idea, he noticed Dao-Ming's numbers on his palm and tried to rub them off. Despite his efforts, they did not come off. He headed to a casino so he didn't have to make the decision whether to call her or not.

He entered the European style casino and made his way to a table. He didn't have his gloves with him but decided it didn't matter. He had to know. He laid down his money, and when the cards are turned he had won again. This time he escaped quickly. He tried to give money to a woman he accidentally ran into outside, but she looked at his wild eyes and wouldn't take it. He was for a moment afraid she had seen the ghost behind him, too; and that the supernatural power he had was real.

At the start of Chapter 16, Lord Doyle ran into one of his gaming buddies who owed him money. Adrian Lipett was in the hole and began to ask Lord Doyle for money when Doyle claims his money is for his retirement fund. Lipett was jealous and tried to guilt Lord Doyle into loaning him money. Lord Doyle agreed to loan him a small amount, but then Lipett came up with the idea to have Doyle play the money for him, since he's so lucky. They bantered back and forth and shared another drink before they went to play. When he turned a worthless hand, Doyle was relieved because the pressure was off. Lipett was distraught, however, when all three hands Doyle played for him turned out to be duds. They walked around the city for a while, discussing superstition versus luck. When Lipett's lady friend found him, he once again begged Doyle for a loan to satisfy her high-end needs. Doyle gave it even though he knew he would never get the money back. Doyle left for his hotel room, knowing it was Lipett's lack of luck, not his own, that caused him to lose the three hands.

Analysis

In this section of the novel, Doyle had become almost fearful because of his continued string of good luck. He'd gone to a casino and won even though he wasn't wearing his lucky gloves. On the street, he discovered that he couldn't even give the money away.



He believed the woman to whom he'd tried to give it looked at him as if she could see the ghost that was following him. He realized as he ate a meal in his partitioned room at a restaurant that he had become what he'd always wanted to be, a rich lord. Now that he'd obtained the position, however, it didn't seem as good as he'd always thought it would be. Instead of being fulfilled by his power and money, Doyle feels empty, lonely and confused.

Meanwhile, Doyle became more and more oppressed by his wealth and his good fortune. He ran into an old gambling buddy who tried to hit him up for a loan even though he already owes Doyle money. It was almost a test for both Doyle's luck and Lipett's lack of luck when they decided instead to have Doyle play a game on Lipett's behalf. Though Doyle breathed a sigh of relief at his first loss, he became convinced that it was because of Lipett's overriding bad luck that he lost the money, not that his string of luck had actually been broken.

The numbers that Dao-Ming wrote remained on Doyle's hand despite his many attempts to wash them off. They served as a constant reminder to him that he had stolen money from her and that he had not called her as he had promised. He seemed angry with Dao-Ming, the girl from whom he had stolen, that she could have cursed him as she did with the numbers he could not erase. He believed this may have been her idea of the perfect revenge though it is doubtful Dao-Ming was the type of woman who would seek revenge.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think it was Dao-Ming who left the numbers written on Lord Doyle's palm? Why did she choose this part of his body to put them on? What purpose do you think they serve?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the interaction between Doyle and Lipett. How does Lipett represent a typical gambler? In what ways does Doyle try to make it appear he's changed as a gambler?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think the woman Doyle met in the street wouldn't take his money from him? What might you do if you were that woman faced with a similar situation?

Vocabulary

formulaic, fragmentation, elongated, shoals, portent, impassive, halogens, lugubrious, quid, fresco, cupolas



Chapter 17 - 18

Summary

In the morning, a note is delivered to Lord Doyle asking him to stop by a hotel executive's office to discuss his winnings. He met with the man, who showed him a tally of how much he had won. The executive could not believe Doyle's luck and assumed he was a high roller. The man questioned Doyle about his background, but Doyle told him nothing. Finally, the man got to the point of the meeting and admitted that a Chinese executive had seen a ghost standing behind Doyle in one of the surveillance videos. Because of their superstitious nature, the executive said hotel staff were asking Doyle not to play at that casino again, not because they were afraid of losing, he said, but because they were afraid of the spirit world. He was allowed to play one final hand whenever he wanted, but if he were to win that hand, he had to leave. If he lost, the man agreed to rethink the deal. Lord Doyle was incredulous, but the Chinese executives were completely serious. For several days and nights, Lord Doyle tried to drink his ghost away.

At the beginning of Chapter 18, Lord Doyle dressed up in his finest and put on his gloves to go gamble. The management tried to persuade him to play in a private room, but he admitted he liked the crowd, whether he won or lost. Before they started playing, Lord Doyle asked if there was a betting maximum in case he wanted to place all of his money in one bet. The bankers laughed and called him crazy. While he waited for the dealers to call management for the answer, he got excited about making his bet. When the dealer came back and tried to recommend not betting everything because it was irrational, Doyle asked if other gamblers were always rational and concluded that he had decided to be completely superstitious.

Lord Doyle chose his table to play at and the table was closed to anyone else because of the amount of money he was betting. Then, Mr. Cheng asked to join the table and Lord Doyle welcomed him. After they make small talk for a while, Lord Doyle won the hand with another "natural" or nine. Doyle and Cheng went to the lounge for a few drinks. As they talked, Doyle discovered that Cheng's wife was the infamous Grandma. Cheng had so much money, he could hardly lament losing tonight, but he complained that his wife was cleaning him out with her gambling addiction. Cheng invited Doyle to his private gaming club, then requested that if Doyle saw his wife, he avoid playing her. Doyle recapped the night, realizing he had won eleven million dollars.

The following morning, all of the cash was brought to Doyle's room in seven suitcases, meaning he had eleven suitcases of money stashed in his room. He no longer trusted the management of the casino because his luck had been so fortunate. They offered him a fancier suite and all of his things are moved there. The hotel workers were constantly around him making sure he didn't play another hand, so after a break of a day or so, he left to begin gambling again, taking five hundred thousand dollars with him.



Analysis

Grandma is fleshed out as Doyle has the opportunity to gamble his last allowed hand at the Lisboa hotel against the man who claims to be Grandma's husband. Doyle learned that Grandma was a gambling addict, like himself, who believed she was getting revenge on her husband for his affairs by throwing away his money. Grandma's attitude toward Doyle can also be explained by her relationship with her husband. Just as her husband is a cheating jerk, she assumed all men were the same. Note that as Doyle cries out against the hotel employee's suggestion that he isn't being rational because he wanted to put all of his money on a single bet, he mentioned Grandma in his list of people he wondered if the staff considered rational. Doyle may take the suggestion made by the hotel staff to be rational and not play all of his money at one time too seriously because he is questioning his own rationality.

Of all the people for Doyle to play with during his last hand at hotel Lisboa, it is ironic that it is Cheng, the man who turns out to be the husband of Grandma. It was Grandma to whom Doyle had lost all of his money to in the first place. It was after this loss that he came to be eating a meal in the Intercontinental for which he didn't have the money to pay. Dao-Ming, who seems to have the opposite of Grandma's personality, rescued Doyle from the predicament he had been put into by his loss to Grandma. Instead of staying with Dao-Ming, Doyle is pulled back into gambling by its allure. In order to go back to gambling, he stole money from Dao-Ming. Now, with that stolen money, he was up against Grandma's husband who had plenty of money to bet against Doyle. Even with the money that Doyle stole from Dao-Ming and what he won from Cheng, he still doesn't have enough to satisfy him.

Unlike his wife, Cheng said he was not addicted to gambling. He described the casino as a hospital for gambling addicts, only giving these people their fix, like a methadone clinic instead of trying to help them get better. He additionally explained to Doyle the way that the casinos exploit the weaknesses of the addicts. Cheng seems to be included in the novel as a way to show Doyle there is way to be rich other than gambling. He argues that of all the times he'd gambled, he's only won big three times. Still, he has a business that provided him with enough money to be rich without gambling and even support his wife's gambling habit.

The superstitious nature of the Chinese is important in these chapters as it is the superstitions that these people hold that caused them to ask Doyle not to gamble there again. One of the executives believed she saw a figure standing behind him in one of the videos. They also believed his winning streak was not merely luck. Note, however, that Mr. Souza will not let Doyle see the video when he asks. He tells him there is nothing on the tape, but won't let Doyle see for himself. This act of refusal kept Doyle wondering if there really was or really wasn't a ghost with him.



Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Mr. Souza would not let Doyle watch the surveillance video when he asked? Do you think Doyle would have seen a ghost? Whose do you think it might have been?

Discussion Question 2

How does Grandma seem to be connected to Doyle's unusual set of circumstances? Do you believe she is somehow involved in what is happening to Doyle? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Mr. Cheng unwittingly instructs Doyle to "remain thirsty." Evidently he means for Doyle to remain thirsty as far as winning money is concerned. How is this instruction ironic in Doyle's circumstance?

Vocabulary

denatured, pantomime, mawkish, voyeurism, incendiary, dour, quid pro quo, sang-froid, pigeon-blood, vat, pangolin, quandary, mineshaft, obsequiously



Chapter 19 - 20

Summary

In Chapter 19, Lord Doyle went to the Landmark to see if his winning streak would continue. As Doyle walked in, he witnessed three fanatics at the high-stakes tables lose it all to the banker. As he played again, he turned over another natural, then another, and then another. The odds of him continuing to turn over nines or naturals were so slim that no one knew what to think. Although no statistical laws had technically been broken, they have been stretched beyond imagination. He closed up shop before 8 am and was still feeling lucky.

Doyle was beginning to get bored with his constant luck, however, since much of the allure of his gambling addiction came with adrenaline rush at the idea of losing everything. He began to think about investing because he knew he shouldn't lose everything and because he was not feeling as healthy as he had been. He began to believe he was entering a state of mental breakdown, which he said felt slightly unreal. He thought about running away again and starting over new with his fortune. He began thinking of what he might do with the rest of his life.

The following morning, journalists pursued Doyle wanting to report on his winnings. They assumed he was an English lord and concluded that since he had been banned from a casino for winning that the casinos were robbing the gamblers. He ran away from that hotel, got drunk and stayed in a different hotel for the night. A monsoon came in during the night bringing heavy rains. Lord Doyle felt trapped by the money he had won.

At the beginning of Chapter 20, Lord Doyle decided he would go gambling with no concern for losing. He continued to win, however, and was soon giving away his money to workers, spending it on heroin, and getting drunk again. He reminded himself that he was playing with borrowed money, then began to pity everyone addicted to gambling. He began thinking of Dao-Ming more and more, and eventually remembered her number on his palm. He looked at it again and realized it coincided with the sequence he had been playing the tables. Finding a payphone, he dialed the number and the first time listened to it ring until it was cut off. On a whim, he called a second time and someone answered. He made an appointment to see Dao-Ming the following Thursday at 6 pm and was so excited he went out to eat and gorged himself. He imagined what Dao-Ming was doing at that moment and imagined her alternately alone in her home, getting ready for a job, and pining for him. No one anywhere seemed to recognize Doyle anymore when he went out. He also continued to win at baccarat, but no one seemed to notice.

After a day or two, he decided to give all of his money to Dao-Ming when he saw her Thursday. He planned, however, to triple it first. He headed to a casino where he played regularly, but the staff seemed to barely recognize him because he had been so ill. He joined a private game at table 9 and wagered everything on a single bet again. This



time he lost it all. He was stunned and wandered the casino before eventually leaving, realizing he had no urge to gamble anymore.

Analysis

Consider in this section the predicament Doyle was in. He was not just winning each game he played, but consistently drawing a combination of cards that left him with the best score possible, a nine, or natural. It had already been explained several times there was no real way to cheat at baccarat, so no casino employees can accuse him of cheating, counting cards or working the system. Statistically, it was not even that unusual for him to be able to continue to win as the game was based on luck, not mathematics.

As Doyle became richer, note that he became less and less healthy. He suffered from unexplained fevers and ate but never got full. He is additionally less and less satisfied with winning. It was almost as if it were the turns in luck in gambling that made the game so interesting to Doyle. Now that he'd become almost assured of winning, the game had lost its excitement for him.

Doyle finally called the number Dao-Ming left on his hand in this section of the novel. The calls themselves are questionable, as he first doesn't get an answer, then talked to a lady who seemed friendly only after he asked for a two-hour appointment. In preparation for his meeting with Dao-Ming, he decided he should triple the money he is to return to her. Interestingly, it is only after he has made this decision that he lost a game for the first time since the days he spent with her. This could be symbolic, as it appears it is some sort of ghost Dao-Ming had attached to him that had been governing his winning streak. It could be that Dao-Ming knew that he wouldn't pay her back all of the money if he did indeed win it, or that the money didn't really matter to her at all, that caused the end of Doyle's winning streak.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think that Doyle's winning streak was broken only after he'd made a promise to himself to pay her back triple what he'd stolen from her?

Discussion Question 2

How is Doyle's call to Dao-Ming's phone number unusual?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Doyle's failing health. What do you think is the cause of his demise?

Vocabulary

rapt, mitigate, aberrant, satiation, abeyance, epicenter, asado, fallacy, theorem, slog, proletariat, assiduously, jongleurs, mellifluous, fetid



Chapter 21

Summary

Lord Doyle took the ferry to Hong Kong, on his way to see Dao-Ming. He described the Chinese courtesans and how he was not even sure he had made an appointment with the right Dao-Ming. He finally found the apartment he believed was Dao-Ming's, but the door was opened by an old lady. She told Doyle that Dao-Ming had hanged herself a few weeks ago. In disbelief, he began to leave, but stopped when he heard a door open. Then he began to walk faster, afraid of whom it might be.

He found a bar and ordered a drink but began to feel ill and was eventually asked to leave. He wandered to a park and fell asleep on a bench. He dreamed of many different events, places, and people, but woke up to an unnamed hand on his forehead, comforting him, silently understanding him.

Analysis

In this section of the novel, Lord Doyle learned the shocking news that Dao-Ming was dead. The lady who gives Doyle the news seemed unconcerned about the girl who'd lived in the apartment prior to her. In fact, she dismissively told Doyle to go find another whore when he continued to question her about Dao-Ming's family and circumstances. It seems that when Dao-Ming suggested to Doyle she wanted someone to look after her during their first encounter, she was really hoping he'd take the hint and take care of her. It was only after he learned she was gone that Doyle seemed concerned about her. He ran from the apartment complex, feeling as if someone were following him.

Doyle's luck continued to worsen as he is actually kicked out of a bar because he looked so sick. The bar tender refused to serve him another drink and asked that he leave, fearing Doyle would make the other customers sick. With no money and no friends to speak of, Doyle laid down on a bench in a park. He woke to feel a hand on his forehead. This figure is assumed to be Dao-Ming, or the ghost of Dao-Ming. There are several reasons that point to this "form" being Dao-Ming. First, Doyle described the moment as being like the one at the Intercontinental. Second, the figure is described as being dressed in elegant silk clothes as she had been during that meeting. Finally, Dao-Ming is described as silently understanding Doyle, just as she had done in the past.

Discussion Question 1

Who do you believe comforted Doyle at the end of the novel?



Discussion Question 2

Describe what foreshadowing that Dao-Ming would kill herself occurred in the novel. Support your answer with examples from the book.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the author's use of simile (comparing one thing to another, e.g. "He was sly as a fox") throughout the novel. How does the use of this literary form enliven the novel?

Vocabulary

milieu, demure, squalor, torpor, banal, boudoir, poultice



Characters

Lord Doyle

Lord Doyle was the man who served as the narrator and main character of this novel. He is important more because of what he represented in the novel than who he was. In fact, it is not ever really fully explained who Doyle was. He was not a lord, and it was never confirmed if his name was really Doyle or not. Because he grew up in a poor family, Doyle was tormented by his fellow schoolmates who were affluent. He spent his time mimicking their accents and behaviors until he could talk and act like the affluent. He became a lawyer and earned the trust of an elderly, rich client from whom he began to steal.

When he'd stolen enough that his boss began to notice, Doyle ran to China where he spent his time living in hotels and gambling in the casinos. He quickly became addicted to gambling. One night while gambling, he met two strange women. The first, Grandma, was cocky when he lost money to her. After he went for a break, a prostitute named Dao-Ming had replaced Grandma. Doyle won against Dao-Ming and later took her to a hotel. After he paid her for her services, the two talk, seeming to make a connection. Dao-Ming suggested maybe he would take care of her. However, he never called her back.

Later, Doyle lost all of his money in a gambling spree against Grandma. He considered suicide, but finally wound up eating in a restaurant where he did not have the money to pay for what he had eaten. Just as he was about to be pressed for the bill, Dao-Ming appeared and paid up for him. She took him to her house and took care of him for several days before he decided to steal her money and gamble again. He wins, but even as he became richer, his health worsened. Although he seemed to be on a winning streak he could not break, Doyle lost all of the millions of dollars he had won using Dao-Ming's money in a single bet just after he decided to reconnect with Dao-Ming. He went to Dao-Ming's home and learned that she had killed herself weeks prior. He was shocked and wandered the city until he wound up in a Hong Kong park. It is assumed it was the ghost of Dao-Ming who comforts Doyle as he awoke.

Doyle represented in the novel the rich English lord who traveled to China to win big in the gambling casinos there. Although the people in China assumed that he was indeed a lord, Doyle was nothing of the sort. He never seemed to feel particularly guilty for the money he'd stolen. The only time he showed any real grief was when he lost all of his money at the casino. It is after his first loss of everything that he considered suicide but manages to talk himself out of the act. It is after his second loss that he seemed to have lost his affinity for gambling. He had been wealthy and had realized it did not bring him the pleasure he'd hoped for. He hoped to reconnect with one woman who seemed to love him even though she saw through the fake façade he showed to others, but learned that it was too late for that as well as she'd killed herself. His ending in the park, being comforted by the ghost of Dao-Ming showed even after his treatment of her,



hinted that she forgave him and still loved him. For that reason he was more lucky than he'd been when he was winning at the gambling tables.

Dao-Ming Tang

Dao-Ming Tang is another major character in the novel who is important not necessarily for who she is, but rather what she represents. She was a prostitute trying her hand at gambling when Doyle met her. He believed from the clothes she wore and accessories she carried, she was not well off, but he took her to a hotel anyway. Dao-Ming confessed to him that she sent money back to her home village to help the monks at the monastery there put gold on the deer that grace the top of the temple. Dao-Ming also told him she was not a whore, but he doesn't seem to believe her. She seemed almost too good a person to be a prostitute. It was almost as if she hoped that Lord Doyle, who she really believed was rich and was the affluent lord he pretended to be even though he was addicted to gambling, would take her under his wing and take care of her.

One has to work from the end of the novel back to understand the change in Dao-Ming. At the end of the novel, Doyle called Dao-Ming using a phone number she'd written on his palm. He set up an appointment to see her, but when he goes to the house he believed was hers, Doyle learned that several weeks prior to his attempt to contact Dao-Ming, she had killed herself.

After he had lost all of his money gambling, it was Dao-Ming who rescued Doyle at a restaurant where he had eaten but didn't have the money to pay. Because of the time variations in the novel, it is difficult to tell how much time had passed from one point to another, so it was uncertain if Dao-Ming was a ghost at this point or if she was still alive. She interacts with the waitress but the waitress seemed shocked at her presence. Dao-Ming then takes Doyle back to what she claimed was her house and cared for him until it became obvious he couldn't keep himself from gambling again. During their time together, Doyle twice noticed a swelling around Dao-Ming's neck. It appeared this swelling would be a result of her suicide by hanging but Doyle doesn't mention it or seem to notice it when he first saw her in the restaurant.

After Doyle was feeling better from his stay with Dao-Ming, he woke one day to find himself alone. He went to eat at a restaurant where he believed he'd eaten with Dao-Ming but is disturbed to learn the owners saw only him even though he appeared to be talking to himself. At the conclusion of the novel, it can be assumed by the reader that it was Dao-Ming's ghost who comforted Doyle after he learned of her suicide.

Mr. Cheng

Mr. Cheng is the man who claimed to be the husband of Patsy "Grandma" Cheng. It was against this man who earned his money as a slumlord that Doyle won the final hand of baccarat he was allowed at the Lisboa casino. It was only after Doyle had played Mr. Cheng that he learned that Grandma was his wife. Cheng claimed to be only an infrequent gambler but said his wife was addicted. She was in the habit of losing all



of her money, then putting her losses on his tab when she gambled. Although Cheng saw his wife's habit of gambling as a terrible failing, he saw his own habit of having a mistress as a more accepted fault. Before they parted, Cheng asked Doyle not to play with or against Grandma.

Chang Souza

Mr. Chang Souza was the official at the Lisboa hotel who was charged with telling Doyle that he was no longer welcome at their gambling tables. Souza didn't seem to think that Doyle had been cheating, but that he had some sort of ghost or spirit that had attached itself to him. He tried to rationalize with Doyle that one of the more superstitious employees believed she had seen the figure of a ghost standing behind Doyle at the gambling tables. When Doyle asked to see the footage, Souza refused to show it to him. He told Doyle there was nothing there, but that he too believed Doyle was being assisted in his winnings by some sort of spiritual being.

Patsy "Grandma" Cheng

Patsy "Grandma" Cheng is the older woman with whom Doyle gambled in the first night discussed in the book. Doyle was losing to Grandma so he left the casino for some air. When he returned, Dao-Ming had taken Grandma's place. Later at another casino Doyle played against Grandma again. This time he lost all of his money to her. During the game, Grandma treated him in an abusive manner, making fun of him for not having a line of credit, and for having so little money with him.

Adrian Lipett

Adrian Lipett was one of Doyle's gambling friends. Lipett borrowed \$5,000 from Doyle and then disappeared. Doyle met up with Lipett, who he described as a born loser, at the Venetian. Believing that having Doyle play a hand for him will bring him luck, Lipett gave Doyle money with which to gamble. Unfortunately, Doyle's good luck did not carry to Lipett, and all of the money is lost. Doyle believed it was Lipett's bad luck that caused him to lose and not a change in his own luck that caused him to lose.

Solomon McClaskey

Solomon McClaskey is one of Doyle's gambling friends. McClaskey owed Doyle money and Doyle tracked him down for a repayment after he lost all his money to Grandma. McClaskey seemed concerned with figuring out how to pay back Doyle as little money as possible. After Doyle did get some money from McClaskey, McClaskey asked Doyle to take him out to eat with that money. McClaskey wasted the money by ordering multiple expensive drinks on Doyle's tab.

Mrs. Butterworth

Mrs. Butterworth is the elderly, rich lady from whom Lord Doyle stole money the first time. She was a client of the law firm for which Doyle worked while still living in England.



Symbols and Symbolism

I Ching

I Ching is a Chinese book intended to help readers determine their luck. In this book, the phrase appears to indicate luck. For instance at one point Doyle indicated the I Ching was with a particular player. It can be inferred that he meant that luck was on her side. Belief in the I Ching represents the superstitious nature of the Chinese as compared to Westerners.

Yellow Kid Gloves

The yellow gloves that Doyle preferred to wear while gambling represent his fake identity as an English gentleman. The gloves leave those who meet him with the idea that he was a rich Lord. Among those fooled by the gloves include Dao-Ming, who believed the gloves proved Doyle was a gentleman. Later, Doyle used the gloves to cover the number Dao-Ming had written on his hand, just as he used the idea of the gloves to cover his real identity.

Baccarat

Baccarat is the type of game that Doyle preferred to play. He, as well as the Chinese, liked the game because it does not require any skill, only luck.

A Box of Money

As an ultimate test of the power gambling had over him, Dao-Ming left Doyle alone with a box of money in her home after she'd spent days feeding him and nursing him back to health. Doyle does what was probably expected of him and stole the money to continue gambling.

Dao-Ming's Phone Number

After Doyle stayed a few days with Dao-Ming at what he believed was her house, he discovered she had written a phone number on his hand. The numbers will not wash off his hand or fade despite numerous attempts to remove them. This phone number serves Doyle as a constant reminder that he stole money from a girl who took care of him and tried to be kind to him.



A Letter

Doyle received a letter in his hotel room at the Lisboa requesting he meet with hotel officials. It was in this meeting that he was told he would only be allowed one more opportunity to play in the casino there as hotel officials believed he had a ghost attached to him. This letter is a physical sign to Doyle that others are noticing, and wary of, his sudden string of good fortune.

Gwai Lo

Gwai Lo is a term that Doyle used often to refer to himself. It literally translates “ghost person” but appeared to be a slang term in the book used to refer to a foreign person or outsider. Because Doyle uses this derogatory term to refer to himself, it reflects his true opinion of himself.

Inexhaustible Fund

It is ironic that Lord Doyle refers to the money he has stolen from his former client as an inexhaustible fund as he very quickly finds himself penniless. The label that Doyle gives to his fund represents his idea that while other players make bankrupt themselves by gambling, he will never do so.

A Spit Bowl

Even though doing so will cause her to be fined, Grandma requests she be allowed to have a spit bowl during his gambling session with Doyle. The call for the bowl even though it will cost her money symbolizes the extravagance to which Grandma is accustomed. Money is not an issue for her.

Dao-Ming's Neck

When Doyle stays with Dao-Ming and depends on her to take care of him, he notices a strange swelling around her neck. Dao-Ming pushes his hand away from the swelling when he tries to examine it. It is apparent later in the novel that this swelling was caused by a ligature when Dao-Ming hung herself. The swelling, like the other changes that Doyle notices in Dao-Ming but doesn't put together, indicates that she is no longer a living human but has returned as a hungry ghost.



Settings

Greek Mythology in Taipa

The Greek Mythology casino in Taipa was the casino in which Doyle played on Monday nights. It was here he first encountered Grandma, then later met Dao-Ming.

Hotel Lisboa

The Hotel Lisboa was the hotel where Lord Doyle rented a room most of his time during the novel. The officials in this hotel finally told Doyle he was not allowed to gamble there any more because a ghost had been spotted standing behind him in video footage.

Haywards Heath

Haywards Heath was the place in England where Lord Doyle lived before he escaped to China.

The Intercontinental

The Intercontinental was the hotel to which Lord Doyle went after he had lost all of his money gambling. He ate breakfast there even though he knew he couldn't pay for it. It was at this hotel that Dao-Ming rescued him by paying his bill just as he was about to be forced to tell hotel management he couldn't pay for the food he'd just eaten.

The New Wing

The New Wing was the place where Lord Doyle tended to lose at gambling. It was here that he lost his money to Grandma.



Themes and Motifs

Relationship Between Dao-Ming and Lord Doyle

The relationship between Dao-Ming and Lord Doyle is one of the few relationships discussed in the novel and by far the most significant. Dao-Ming and Doyle seem to be similar in their intent to better themselves. They have each found immoral paths that they hoped would lead to fulfilling futures. They met each other on these paths, but Doyle did not realize until it was too late that Dao-Ming could have been his chance at real happiness.

When Dao-Ming and Lord Doyle met for the first time, they were both hiding their real selves from the world. Lord Doyle pretended to be a rich lord in China to blow his money. Dao-Ming put forth the appearance that she was a willing prostitute. Later, when they are alone, Dao-Ming tried to get Doyle to admit he was neither the gentleman nor the lord he pretended to be. He refused to give into her prodding. Meanwhile, Dao-Ming quickly told Lord Doyle she wasn't really a prostitute. Doyle, however, didn't seem to hear Dao-Ming as he is obsessed with his own age and how he must appear to her. Dao-Ming suggested to Doyle that he could take care of her, but her hinting didn't seem to make an impression on him either.

Dao-Ming later told Doyle that during her childhood in her small village, she had been considered haughty but intelligent. Though she could have gone to school and studied for a career she left her village and became a hostess, then a prostitute, wanting to hurry her fortune along. She admitted to Doyle she still sent money back to the monks in her town for them to add gold to the deer that graced the top of the temple. Although Doyle never told Dao-Ming from where his money came, the reader knew he stole it from an elderly client in England.

Although Dao-Ming had hoped to speed her fortune along with the lifestyle she chose for herself, she must have been unsatisfied as she killed herself. Similarly, even after Doyle was raking in money every night in his winning spree, he seems more unfulfilled as a rich man than he was when his luck was hit and miss. His health began to fail and made a decision to go back to Dao-Ming. After he'd made his decision he was happier than he'd been in some time, even though he lost his money gambling again. Doyle hit rock bottom when he learned of Dao-Ming's suicide.

Causality Versus Coincidence

One of the differences in thought between the Eastern philosophies and Western philosophies is that of the difference in causality and coincidence. Doyle explains that in the East, the people believe in the significance of coincidence. If several things happen at the same time, the people believe these things are somehow connected. In the West,



people tend to look at what is happening around them and see how one thing caused another.

When Doyle began winning and drew so many naturals in a row it seemed unbelievable, he has to wonder if there really is some such thing as a supernatural force that orders things in the natural world. For him, this force seemed to come from Dao-Ming. At the end of the novel where she sits beside him on the park bench he indicated he had the same feeling as when they were in the Intercontinental and he realized the supernatural really did exist.

He referred to the exact moment that Dao-Ming showed up to pay his bill for breakfast just as the waitress was about to push him for the payment that he did not have. Doyle said at that time he didn't think her appearance was coincidence. This is just one of the strange "coincidences" during which he and Dao-Ming meet.

For instance, Doyle first met Dao-Ming on the night he'd been gambling with Grandma. He'd been losing to the woman so he decided to take a break and get some air. When he returned to the table, Dao-Ming was there instead of Grandma. Again on the night that Doyle lost all of his money to Grandma, Dao-Ming just happened to be in the same casino they were. Finally, Dao-Ming writes a number on the palm of his hand that he can't wash off. He first believed it was a phone number but later realized it matched the sequence of tables at which he'd gambled that night.

Gambling Addiction

The addiction to gambling is a disease addressed in this novel. Four of the characters seem to suffer with a gambling addiction while two realize how bad this addiction can be. Dao-Ming seemed to by trying to help Doyle overcome his gambling addiction in an interesting way that ultimately led to his demise.

Of the characters in the novel, Doyle, Grandma, Adrian and Solomon all seem to suffer from a gambling addiction. They spend all of their money in the hope that their next game will be their big win. Even after they have won big, however, none of the four seemed to know when to stop playing. Note in Doyle's case that even after he has lost almost all of his money to Grandma, he still gambled irrationally. He had two chips left, enough to cash in and get food for himself for a day or two but instead of getting food, Doyle instead gambled again.

Mr. Cheng, Grandma's husband, was the only character in the novel who was openly against gambling. He saw his wife losing the money he earned each night at the gambling tables. He knew her gambling was in response to his habit of having a mistress, but does nothing to help her stop. After learning that Doyle had a lucky streak, he asked only that Doyle not play against Grandma, knowing that she would lose her money to him.

In a type of reverse psychology, Doyle finds himself unable to lose when he returned to gambling after having stolen Dao-Ming's money. Even though he was getting quite rich,



he felt unsatisfied with his winning because it had become so commonplace. At one point in the novel Doyle admitted to himself it was the adrenaline rush of not knowing what the next draw might be that made gambling so addicting. Instead of giving up gambling while he was ahead, however, Doyle decided to bet everything on one last game and lost everything.

The Power of Money

The power that money holds over people, particularly Doyle in this novel, is a significant theme in the book. Doyle's desire to be rich came from a poor upbringing where others were always lording their own money and power over him. As an adult, he tried to get the money he so desperately wanted by first stealing it, then trying to win it in the gambling casinos. Finally, after his encounter with Dao-Ming, Doyle was unable to lose at gambling and amassed all the money he could possibly want. Instead of feeling empowered, however, Doyle feels lonelier and less fulfilled than ever.

As a child and young person, Doyle always felt ashamed of his poor family. His father was a vacuum cleaner salesman and never made a significant living. Doyle, however, had high aspirations. Even before he could earn any money himself, he studied those who were rich and learned to mimic their diction and behavior.

After school, he became a lawyer but apparently did not work his way up the ladder quickly enough as he began stealing from an elderly client. When he had stolen enough money he was about to be fingered for the crime, he escaped to Macau. His mannerisms and accent are enough to make the Chinese believe he was a lord. They call him by that title and he didn't bother to tell them it wasn't correct.

At first his gambling only gave him off and on success but after spending a few days with Dao-Ming, Doyle's luck changed. Just before Dao-Ming found him, Doyle had lost every bit of money he had gambling. Dao-Ming had to pay for his breakfast as he had just eaten without having the money to pay for what he ate. After Dao-Ming took care of him several days, Doyle located her stash of money and stole it to return to the gambling scene.

This time, he was not able to lose. He drew perfect nines and earned enough money for his own retirement. Instead of being happy, however, Doyle became more and more paranoid and sick. He has finally reached his goal of being super rich, but he is more unhappy than he had ever been.

Ghosts

Ghosts are apparitions that appear throughout this novel, but particularly so closer to the end of it. Of significance is the slang term "gwai lo" that Doyle used to refer to himself, a foreigner among the Asians. Later, Doyle was told he could no longer gamble in the casino at hotel Lisboa because a staff member believed she saw a ghost standing



behind him in video surveillance footage. Finally, Dao-Ming returned to Doyle as one of the hungry ghosts referred to often in the book.

When talking about himself from the viewpoint of the Asians, Doyle often referred to himself as a gwai lo. Though this was a term that was used to refer to all people who weren't of native birth it literally translates "ghost person." When Doyle and Adrian talked, Adrian complained about his Chinese girlfriend referring to him as a ghost.

After Doyle began winning in such a big way, he was told he could no longer gamble in the casino at the hotel where he stayed. Surprisingly he wasn't told this because the casino staff was afraid he would clean them out of money but because one of the staff members believed she'd seen a ghost standing behind him in video surveillance footage. The Chinese are very superstitious and don't want him around if there is a chance that a ghost has attached itself to him.

Finally, Doyle learned at the end of the novel that the girl he'd spent several days with was probably a ghost during that time. Dao-Ming committed suicide, leaving her to spend afterlife in the realm of the hungry ghosts. These ghosts, like Dao-Ming, eat and drink but are never satisfied. As she told Doyle at the Intercontinental, she could eat what she wanted and not get fat. Similarly, when they drank together in their days at her house, she never got drunk when she drank alcohol. Notice also that during their conversation together at the Intercontinental she told Doyle she was doing as well as she could for being in the realm of the hungry ghosts. Though this comment isn't taken seriously at the time, it was quite possible she was telling Doyle exactly what she was without him taking notice.

Styles

Point of View

With the exception of a very small portion of the novel in Chapter 5, this novel is told from the first person point of view of Lord Doyle. The small section in Chapter 5 describes the mechanical workings of the particular game that Doyle played. It seems this part of the novel is included to give a more distant look at the game of baccarat and describe it from a mechanical point of view.

As this is a novel intended to tell the story of the ruin of one man who becomes addicted to gambling, the first person point of view is ideal. It is through the first hand look into Doyle's thoughts, mindsets and emotions as struggles first with the ups and downs of gambling, then with his burden of constant winning that the reader is able to understand what a mental roller coaster he is on.

Additionally, if the novel were written in any other point of view than the first person point of view, Doyle's descent into poor health both physically and emotionally would not be as dramatic. As it is, the novel gives the reader a front row seat as Doyle tries to decide if he is really a haunted man or just lucky. He struggles to maintain his composure as an English gentlemen even as he realizes he must admit the Chinese may be right in their superstitions.

Language and Meaning

Foreign terms as well as gambling terms are frequently used in this novel. Most of the terms related to gambling are explained in the text so the reader will understand what is happening. However, few of the Chinese words or phrases are given any explanation or translation. The most significant of these phrases is the term "gwai lo." This term literally translates to "ghost person." It appears to be a slang term used to refer to people of English descent, perhaps because they are pale in comparison to Asians. The use of this term is significant especially as it refers to Doyle because he uses the phrase to refer to himself. At the end of the novel, ghosts become significant as it appears the ghost of Dao-Ming has latched itself onto Doyle.

Notice also the author's frequent use of simile. His comparisons enliven his writing. For instance, when Dao-Ming suspected Doyle of cheating, he thought that act "like fleecing a lamb with a pair of nail scissors" (p. 9). The description speaks not only to the impossibility of Doyle's cheating, but also the innocence he sees in Dao-Ming. Later, he describes the casino staff bringing his chips as being "like men stoking an engine fire" (p. 23). This simile gives the image of Doyle's gambling addiction being like a fire in its recklessness and destructive nature.

Structure

This novel is divided into twenty-one chapters with some as short as five pages while some are 20 or more pages in length. The story is mostly told in a linear fashion. One of the only points at which the narrator shares any information about his past is when he describes his act of embezzlement from his elderly client in England. The story is also set in modern China in the gambling area of Macau. Although the story is told in a linear fashion, it is hard to keep a firm grasp on the passage of days in the novel as Doyle is living the life of the gambler. He often sleeps during the day and gambles at night with some days and night blurring together and bleeding into one another. In some points in the novel even Doyle has no idea how much time has passed. For instance, he is not aware how much time he spent with Dao-Ming in her house on the island.

The majority of the story is told through exposition with Doyle describing his emotions and feelings. This is to be expected, as the novel is really more about Doyle's relationship with himself and his addiction to gambling than it is about his relationships with other people. When it is used, dialogue is brief and often cuts right to the point.



Quotes

It's more like winning than winning itself, and everyone knows you are not a real player until you secretly prefer losing.

-- Lord Doyle (Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: While it might seem gamblers would prefer to win, the quote turns that assumption on its end by indicating that real players prefer to lose.

The doors are of that bright gold that the Chinese love, the carpets that deep red that they also love and that is said to be the color of Luck.

-- Lord Doyle (Chapter 1 paragraph 3)

Importance: This quote captures the superstitious nature of the Chinese, as it describes the colors and ornaments used in the casino were believed to bring luck.

Easy pickings, she is thinking, looking at this plump gwai lo in his gloves and bow tie, with his look of a New England literature professor out on the town without permission from his wife.

-- Lord Doyle (Chapter 1 paragraph 6)

Importance: Doyle believed this was what the woman who he later learned was nicknamed "Grandma" was thinking of him as she sized him up at the gambling table.

That's how I am,' I admitted a bit self-importantly. 'I want to lose it all. It's idiotic, I know. I should be embarrassed.

-- Lord Doyle (Chapter 3 paragraph 54)

Importance: During his first conversation with Dao-Ming, Lord Doyle admitted that he really did enjoy losing money more than he enjoyed winning it.

It was the way she slept against me, trustingly, and never showed her disgust, which must have been so deep that it could not express itself. I was not used to that.

-- Lord Doyle (Chapter 3 paragraph 66)

Importance: Dao-Ming treated Lord Doyle in a way that was affectionate and close, not the behavior he was accustomed to when dealing with a prostitute.

The rain continued as if nothing had happened, and deep within myself I was sure that I would see her again, because although the city is a reef where the confused fish never meet twice unless a goddess intervenes, intervene she sometimes does.

-- Lord Doyle (Chapter 3 paragraph 69)

Importance: Although they'd made no plans to meet, Lord Doyle believed that he would see Dao-Ming again. He believed a goddess would intervene to make their meeting happen.



The lady I had stolen it from was one of those elderly widows one sees everywhere holed up secretively in the suburban houses of Haywards Heath or Wivelsfield, in the timbered Tudor mansions of Hassocks or Cuckfield or Lindfield.

-- Lord Doyle (Chapter 4 paragraph 37)

Importance: Doyle described the woman from whom he stole the money with which he gambled. When he was accused of stealing from the woman, Doyle escaped to China to keep from being punished for his crime.

This was the world into which I was born, having won (as Cecil Rhodes once had it) first draw in the lottery of life: born an Englishman.

-- Lord Doyle (Chapter 4 paragraph 37)

Importance: Doyle believed it was because of luck that he was born an Englishman. He believed this was his first lucky draw in his life.

And so I began to steal from her very gradually, a hundred pounds here, a hundred pounds there, and when I progressed to higher sums I saw that it made no difference.

-- Lord Doyle (Chapter 4 paragraph 43)

Importance: Doyle stole slowly from Mrs. Butterworth, beginning with small amounts them moving up to larger lumps of money until he was caught.

It's hard for the house to cheat at baccarat, and there is a satisfying instant gratification to its simplicity and relative speed. It kills you quickly.

-- Narrator (Chapter 5 paragraph 1)

Importance: In his description of the game of baccarat, the narrator explained the gamblers liked to play because it was almost impossible for the house to cheat at the game, but was also quick, with gamblers not having to wait a long time to learn their fate.

We think of laws as inert principles that we can overcome and manipulate in our favor.

-- Lord Doyle (Chapter 5 paragraph 22)

Importance: In this quote, Lord Doyle explained that Westerners believed that laws could be manipulated to work in their favor while the Chinese believed that one should treat these laws with no arrogance or superiority in order to assure themselves the law would work in their favor.

First I was a lord, then I had a system; it was as if they were inventing me as they went along.

-- Lord Doyle (Chapter 6 paragraph 8)

Importance: Doyle enjoyed observing the way the Chinese people made their assumptions about his heritage and techniques of play even without knowing much about him.