Cakes and Ale: Or the Skeleton in the Cupboard Study Guide

Cakes and Ale: Or the Skeleton in the Cupboard by W. Somerset Maugham

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

Cakes and Ale by W. Somerset Maugham tells the story of author William Ashenden's series of contracts over decades with a greatly renowned novelist, and the need of his would-be biographer for details that William alone can provide. The novel deals with the craft of writing and the foibles of those who do it.

The narrator of Cakes and Ale, William Ashenden, a writer not currently in vogue, is approached by a colleague with whom he has had little recent contact. William rightly suspects an ulterior motive in Alroy Kear, a man who has done well on moderate talent. Roy has been asked by the widow of a truly famous novelist, one year departed, to write a biography of her husband. Amy has collected a great deal of information that fits her view of how Edward (Ted) Driffield should be portrayed, and Roy agrees to omit or downplay less than savory elements. He wants, however, to see the whole picture in order to make the creative decisions himself.

William as a teenager is befriended by Ted before he becomes famous and while he is married to a former barmaid, Rosie. He himself has lived a less than genteel life. William's acquaintance with the Driffields ends when they skip town, leaving a host of creditors unpaid. Years later, as a medical student in London, William runs into Rosie on the street and returns to their literary orbit. Ted is beginning to make a name for himself, championed by Isabel (Mrs. Barton) Trafford, a socialite who promotes and manages promising talent. William and Rosie become lovers, and he suspects that she is having affairs with other male friends. This second period ends when Rosie runs off with "Lord George" Kemp, a former lover from before Ted.

While recovering from pneumonia, Ted marries his nurse, Amy, who rearranges his life and molds him into a famous and cherished author. William is reunited with Ted once in this period and briefly meets Amy. Roy, however, becomes close to them and is asked to write his life. Amy and Roy both denigrate Rosie, whom William still cherishes as a good person, and see the only good thing about her is abandoning Ted so his genius could flourish. They believe Rosie dead for some ten years. William, however, knows that she is alive in Yonkers, New York, a wealthy widow, for he has visited her there. Rosie reveals that a harrowing passage in one of Ted's novels is based on them losing a child and she having a one-night stand to help survive it. William will not share this with Roy and Amy.

Chapters 1-3

Chapters 1-3 Summary

Author William Ashenden ignores telephone messages from colleague Alroy (Roy) Kear, delivered through his landlady, Miss Fellows, but wonders what his acquaintance for twenty years could suddenly want. Before bed, William contemplates Roy's achievement, parlaying little talent into a successful writing and speaking career. He writes with a knowing ear about the aristocracy in his early, tasteful novels, benefits from advice from other authors and critics, and in turn is generous in giving new writers a leg up. He is never successful enough to worry competitors and knows that he is not a great novelist. He charms even the toughest reviewers over lunch and is himself a friendly but severe critic. Roy has no qualms about abandoning those whose usefulness he has exhausted, remaining cordial if they meet again—and if the other party is not bitter. Roy is free of hypocrisy and sincerely believes whatever everyone else believes at a given moment. Sincerity is the key to his stable popularity as a writer and lecturer. Roy never marries, believing it will hinder his art and be unfair to the woman.

William and Roy are lunching together. They talk breezily, with William wondering what Roy wants of him. Over brandy and cigars, Roy eases into the subject of the late author Edward (Ted) Driffield and his lonely widow, with whom Roy has just spent a weekend. When Roy wonders whether William intends to write up his youthful recollections of the great man in middle age, William rejects the idea and declares Ted's novels boring. He adds that his taste has often gone counter to popular opinion and has in all cases been borne out in time. They debate, with Roy pointing out that at a gala eightieth birthday celebration, Ted is given the Order of Merit. William denies that the first Mrs. Driffield is an awful woman. Walking home, William hopes that he has not been too harsh.

William reminisces about life forty years earlier, worthier and more virtuous, perhaps, but less amusing. Where he grows up in the countryside, people are irritable and suspicious and lives are dull. He is raised in Kent, in a small seaside town, Blackstable, where his uncle is the parish Vicar. His aunt is German, from an impoverished noble family, and cannot abide tradesmen. Blackstable consists of one long, winding street with more recent side streets. William is fifteen and home for summer holidays when he first meets Ted, who is talking with the Curate,Galloway. William judges the small, bearded stranger a "cad," and behaves haughtily. He grows interested, however, when Galloway comes to tea and mentions that he is an author. The Vicar disapproves of the man entirely.

Chapters 1-3 Analysis

Chapter 1 consists primarily of the narrator's contemplation, while smoking his traditional before-bed pipe, of the author, Alroy (Roy) Kear, who is suddenly trying to resume contact after a lengthy break. The contemplation serves to introduce a major

character and to establish the normal competition among professional authors. It requires diligent reading and only rarely exhibits Maugham's normal charm. Particularly difficult but crucial to the plot is the description of how a typical man of stature, a hypothetical Mr. Smith, suffers through distancing himself from an outgrown acquaintance. The purpose is to show that Roy is blunt but afterwards affable, if Smith so desires. The narrator declares that hypocrisy requires full-time effort, which Roy will not make.

The narrator, William Ashenden, at this point still anonymous, also establishes that he himself is an author, not at the moment in vogue, and describes how Roy moves from modest beginnings, accurately portraying the aristocracy among whom he has mingled, to less convincing description of the middle class, as literary tastes evolve. He always delivers what is in demand, including villainous villains, heroic heroes, and chaste maidens. Roy never marries because marriage interferes with art and "people do not want to be bothered with the wives of authors and painters." This becomes a recurring motif in the novel. William too is a life-long bachelor, but does not weigh in on his colleague's thesis.

Chapter 2 continues the depiction of Roy, as he hosts William for lunch at his club. William notes that Roy can talk to anyone at his or her level, unlike most authors, who are preoccupied with words. Ashenden muses about several samples of British and American slang ca. 1930. As Roy begins hinting why he may have invited William to lunch, they quickly differ over the quality of writing of the late Edward (Ted) Driffield. Roy holds him to be the last great Victorian novelist, while William has always found him boring.

William is proud that the reading public at large has caught up with his opinions of Carlyle's unreadable The French Revolution and Startor Resartus; George Meredith's verbosity, affectation, and insincerity; and Walter Pater. William admits to being wrong a few times. His favorites are fairly pedestrian: Tristram Shandy, Amelie, Vanity Fair, Madame Bovary, La Chartreuse de Parme, Anna Karenina, and Wordsworth, Keats, and Verlaine. Roy points out that for his eightieth birthday, Ted is awarded the Order of Merit, an award limited to twenty-four recipients at any given time.

Roy talks about Ted's lonely widow and asks if William intends to write anything about the great man whom he knows in his adolescence, when Ted is middle-aged and as yet undiscovered. William does not. When Roy asks if he remembers Ted's horrible, unfaithful first wife, William assures him that Rosie had been sweet. The two writers part before Roy's true intentions are made clear but it is evident that Ted is destine to be a line of contention between them.

In Chapter 3, William finds his quaint apartment spurring memories of life forty years earlier, and he carefully delineates what makes modern life superior, not only materially but emotionally. In particular, people have grown more tolerant of differences. He begins describing growing up in Blackstable in a strict clerical family and his first encounter with Ted. William's uncle is the parish priest, with the title of "Vicar." He is assisted by a younger cleric, called the "Curate." William's first impression of Ted from his

knickerbocker suit is that he is a cad—a cold-hearted seducer of young women. The Curate comes for tea, describes Ted's background and career as a writer, and the Vicar disapproves of contact with him. This sets up a major conflict in the book, as young William is intrigued by the idea of writing. In present time, he paints his young self as an opinionated snob.

Chapters 4-6

Chapters 4-6 Summary

Days later, Amy Driffield, the widow, writes William, inviting him to spend two or three days and provide copies of her husband's letters. Roy phones, asking to visit, and in the free hour, William recalls his one meeting with Amy,which occurred during a luncheon arranged by Lady Hodmarsh. Ted is shrunken and thin and appears not to recognize William, but gives curious, furtive winks. Amy is anxious that William not stir up painful old memories in the frail old man. Ted cannot get William alone but, answering Hodmarsh's parting question, characterizes William as shy when they knew one another, adding that he taught him to ride a bicycle. On the ride back, Hodmarsh defends Amy as a sacrificial caregiver. They marry after she nurses him in a hospital during a long illness twenty years earlier.

IWilliam recalls Ted teaching him to ride his bicycle after self-instruction fails. Cycling up to him, a lady falls nearly atop him and her companion recalls him as the Vicar's nephew. During their next excursion, Ted suggests making rubbings of brasses, but William's uncle forbids associating with such disreputable people. Gossipy maid Mary-Ann fills young William in on the Driffields' history: he was trouble from birth and she was working as a barmaid in one inn until she is fired for carrying on, particularly with the married Lord George. She moves on to another before becoming Mrs. Driffield. William knows "Lord George" Kemp well, a coal merchant given the title ironically for his grand manner. William goes to school with Kemp's children and, like the adults, resents his uppity ways. Hearing Mary-Ann's story, William interprets the affair in terms of the novels he has read but is puzzled that Rosie never has a baby. Mary-Ann finishes by declaring that Ted marries Rosie because no proper girl would have him, and asks William to observe Rosie's reaction to her name.

Young William is determined to make the rubbings without asking his uncle's permission as Ted insists, but Ted runs into them together on the street, introduces himself, and asks to take him to make rubbings at the Ferne Church, promising to keep him out of mischief and offering to provide the paper and wax. The Vicar is put off track and insists that the boy can pay his own way. At that point, forbidding him is pointless.

Chapters 4-6 Analysis

Chapter 4 sets up and then portrays William's last visit to Ted and the only encounter with the second Mrs. Driffield, Amy, who now wants him to pay her a visit. The reminiscence comes as William waits for Amy's apparent agent, Roy, to arrive. William describes Amy coolly, and Ted with surprise at how badly he has aged. The narrative gives a very full view of want a luncheon in "the acme of good taste," resembles at the turn of the twentieth century as well as Ted's study, where William is disappointed to find none of his titles but Roy's collected works. He observes, perhaps cattily, that it is less a

writer's workshop than a museum piece. As the company drives away, it comes out that Amy had been Ted's nurse during a long hospitalization twenty years earlier and had then married him. She has reformed him from being a Bohemian.

William continues his recollections about first meeting the Driffields. Mentioning his new "safety bicycle" helps place their meeting no earlier than the late 1880s. People in Blackstable are afraid of them, as most walk everywhere they go ("shank's pony"). Wheeled vehicles are a sign of prosperity if not ostentation.

Forbidden to associate with the Driffields, William asks the gossipy maid who has raised him, Mary-Ann, about the couple. She too warns him against them and tells their story, concentrating on Rosie, with whom she had attended Sunday school. Rosie has attained a reputation for promiscuity working as a barmaid, and indeed is fired from one inn for getting too involved with "Lord George" Kemp, an uppity coal merchant with whom the Vicar has tangled but made up.

Roy had wanted to become the parish churchwarden, a lay office in the Anglican Church, named by the Vicar to deal with secular matters; the sidesman is his assistant. William's memories reinforce his youthful snobbishness. He interprets Rosie's story through the novels he has read, which make him wonder how Rosie has not had a baby, as fallen women always do in literature. Mary-Ann says dryly, "more by good luck than by good management." Like her clerical employers, she speaks in aphorisms.

Mary-Ann's conclusion is that Ted eventually marries Rosie because no proper girl will have him, but that is years ago and Mary-Ann has lost contact. Her request that William ask if Rosie remembers her portents a meeting between the two women.

Ted maneuvers the Vicar into being unable to forbid his nephew from going to the rubbings. It reveals that the uncle is timid when confronted and incapable of consecutive thinking.

Chapters 7-10

Chapters 7-10 Summary

William wonders why the adult Driffields bother with a dull, quiet, pretentious adolescent, but they take him sailing and picnicking and William becomes passionate about rubbing brasses and occasionally spends time in the church yard talking with Rosie, who treats him like a grown-up. She is able to do nothing for long periods without growing bored, and William then cannot imagine this frank, open woman could do the filthy things that Mary-Ann claims, particularly with someone as gross as Kemp. When he mentions Mary-Ann, Rosie asks her to tea,but passing this along is awkward for the young snob, who is floored by how Ted and Rosie recall their working-class past fondly. The Vicar refuses to discuss them because they do not attend church, and when they attend, only to be gawked at, William drops the subject. He is astonished to find Rosie one evening at tea with Mary-Ann. Only Rosie is at ease and William flees outdoors as soon as possible. There in the dark he recognizes Kemp, whom Rosie hugs and kisses when she emerges, and they wander into the fields to be alone.

Fifteen-year-old William wonders what evil Kemp could hold over Rosie to make her do something so loathsome, and cold weather makes it easier to avoid the Driffields. At their one chance meeting in town, William blushes with embarrassment, but Rosie smiles as innocently as ever. The Driffields come to the train station to see him off for the fall term and hope to see him at Christmas. Ted presses five shillings in his palm as the trail leaves. As a gentleman, William is insulted to be given a tip, considers sending it back, but spends it and fails to write a thank-you. At Christmas, William is eager to see the Driffields, for Blackstable is boring and the weather dreadful. He visits their house unannounced, it brought inside, and warmed. The Curate and Kemp are already there, urging Ted to sing, and join in the chorus. Before the Curate leaves, he borrows a pile of books from Ted, who receives copies for review. He just sells them second-hand, untouched. William accompanies him and agrees that the visit is best not mentioned to the Vicar.

Mrs. Greencourt holds a tea party attended by Mrs. Encombe, Blackstable's first "New Woman." She leads the discussion of novels that the Vicar advocates burning but some of the ladies admit enjoying. Finally Galloway mentions Ted as a local writer who has overcome disadvantages to write rather well. When the Vicar mentions that he has befriended William, the boy downplays it, having at school read a bit of Ted's first novel and recommended it be removed from the library. Others object to the coarse description of their neighborhood in the books. Literature, the company agrees, ought not to deal with the vicious aspects of society. For some of them, even Dickens is too coarse. Galloway and William look down their noses at the company.

William grows to like Kemp and his grandiose schemes. William never misses tea at the vicarage, but then sneaks out to the Driffields' for songs and whist, a game that Rosie helps him master. William does not think Rosie and Kemp behave like lovers on the sly,

although occasional looks embarrass him. Going back to school, he is sorry to miss the card games and they all look forward to Easter break.

William is now home on break, in high spirits and grown-up clothes, and trying grow a mustache. He notices new construction. Over dinner, the Vicar announces that the Driffields have bolted to London, abandoning their debts. Mary-Ann finds it funny and suspects Kemp and Rosie have continued their affair. William, who has never seen them stint themselves, is stung by the deceit, and he worries that Kemp may talk about how much time he has spent with them at Christmas. When they run into one another on the street, Kemp is amiable, denies helping them "shoot the moon," and claims they owe for coal. William can find nothing "final and crushing" and simply walks away.

Chapters 7-10 Analysis

Chapter 7 shows the Driffields taking pretentious young William on outings during the summer and focuses on Rosie's quiet charm. She sits for hours while her husband and William make rubbings, not bothered by idleness. She treats William as an adult and he is unable to believe the stories about her. He continues believing that he is sophisticated and finds the very idea of sex disgusting. Surely Rosie could not do that. Soon afterwards, when Rosie comes to tea with Mary-Ann, William sees her leave with Kemp in a fashion that could suggest nothing but an affair. Earlier in the chapter, when the Vicar uses their not coming to church as an excuse for not discussing them, the come to church, and Rosie's bold flowered hat is held against her. Christianity is not a shining force in this novel. Mary-Ann gets the last word: Rosie is no worse than others who have been tempted less than she and many would do worse if they had the opportunity.

Chapter 8 shows William wanting not to believe what he has seen and heard about Rosie, but is happy that the new school term takes him away. His sense of honor is again tested when Ted gives him some spending money, which William interprets as a tip for having entertained them, but eventually spends. During his Christmas break, he drops in on the Driffields and is shocked to find boisterous Kemp there, fairly leading the tea party. An excuse is built in on how in the 1880s girls often bring their music and arrange for someone to ask them to sing. Generally the choice is not the kind that Ted, a strong baritone, chooses to sing. The chorus of "First We Mopped the Floor with Him" pops into William's head several times during the novel in appropriate circumstances.

A second tea party of the literary set follows, given by Mrs. Greencourt and featuring Mrs. Encombe, the first "New Woman" to be seen locally. She talks about people she knows, including three proto-feminist authors and their works. The Vicar believes that Mrs. Humphrey Ward's novel Robert Elsmere ought to be banned by the government or burned. It portrays a clergyman's spiritual crisis. Mrs. Encombe objects to some passages but assures the company that it is written from the "highest motives." The ladies debate Rhoda Broughton's Red as a Rose is She, and decide it is acceptable for their daughters once they are married. As they discuss the romantic novelist Ouida, Galloway mentions their local author, Ted, whom the Vicar says has befriended William. William distances himself, saying how he protests one of Ted's books to the school

librarian and would himself have burnt it. This sets the company to discussing whether literature ought to deal with coarse characters and subjects. Dickens is both defended and condemned. At least during Christmas break it is too cold for William to associate with such people. William and Galloway are now fast allies.

Exceedingly brief, Chapter 9 shows William sneaking out for "second tea" at the Driffields and looking forward to perfecting his game of whist over Easter vacation. Chapter 10 shows those plans dashed as the Driffields "shoot the moon" — skip town — leaving unpaid bills everywhere. The Vicar cruelly buries this item at the bottom of a list of uninteresting bits of news, to sting his nephew cruelly. He moralizes, Mary-Ann laughs at all the suckers, and William feels cheated of his friends. Rumor is that Kemp, who may have continued his affair with Rosie, is involved, but he claims to have been defrauded like everyone. This story concludes William's reminiscences of his earliest acquaintance with Ted Driffield.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

William chuckles, thinking about this blot on Ted's image and wonders how Ted ever gains such critical acclaim. Early on, Ted is held to write very poor English with unnatural dialogs, while at the end, when he dictates, his work flows better. It had been fashionable to admire Ted's books when William is a young man. Passages appear in all anthologies, but William cannot read them without discomfort. Ted is best depicting what he knows best: the working classes. Passages about the high-born are laughable. The aspects for which he is compared to Shakespeare are Shakespeare's worst aspect.

William concedes that Ted has lasted too long to be a fad and that his enigmatic personality fills his books. The Literary Supplement of the Times at his death calls his work "a hymn to beauty," reminiscent of Jeremy Taylor. Recalling Roy's earlier remark about beauty, William is exasperated. God had, thirty years earlier, been in fashion in literature, but then Pan and now Beauty have taken his place. Beauty is talked about everywhere, but is no more than the sentimentality of a generation that accepts reality rather than escapes from it. William runs through a few examples of its overuse before declaring beauty a bore and judging Ted's outstanding merit simply his longevity.

The English reverence old age in general, and laud authors twenty years after they have ceased to write anything useful. No longer potential rivals, they are exalted by younger writers and, since intelligent people cease to read after age thirty, they prefer the books of their youth and their authors, though they knock out inconsequential works. Longevity becomes genius—and Ted has lasted long. In the 1860s, his talent receives moderate praise; by his seventieth birthday he is seen as an overlooked treasure and a rush for his books begins. Appreciative essays and studies are penned. By his seventy-fifth birthday, Ted is proclaimed a genius; at eighty he is the "Grand Old Man of English Letters," a position he holds until his death. There is no one to take Ted's place.

As Roy arrives, blustering, William suggest that he may be Ted's successor, and the compliment is returned. Barring an unseen genius emerging, in fifteen to twenty years the top will be clear. Roy admits that he is going to write Ted's life. Amy Driffield is enthusiastic, handing over materials she has collected over the years. If he does a good job, it will enhance Roy's career. Ted is over sixty when Roy meets him and Roy knows nothing of the earlier years beyond a few notes and obviously autobiographical passages in novels. Roy wants to write an intimate, detailed, sympathetic work.

William begins to see how he fits in: since he is not going to write about Ted, would he hand over his material? William claims that he has no material, had been only a boy at Blackstable, and wonders whether Ted's personality would seem extraordinary without his present reputation. William recalls Ted's interest in architecture and farming, but that he rarely speaks during their long rides. Growing peevish, Roy asks about literature. William recalls Ted saying little about his writing, but had once commented on

Shakespeare in retirement. Roy is uninterested. William recalls that at lunch a few years back, he hears Ted had criticized Henry James, another anecdote that Roy cannot use. Nor can he use memories of Ted's singing, because of the music-hall material he chooses. If he had only sung Schumann.

When William mentions Ted's "shooting the moon," Roy minimizes its importance and wonders why Ted would settle in Blackstable years after the scandal. Ted seems to have taken it as a joke, but Amy finds it embarrassing. Roy promotes Amy as a remarkable woman, responsible for creating Ted's image of dignity for the last twenty-five years. It had not been easy, as Ted had been obstinate and ill-mannered. Often she has to fetch him from the Bear and Key and force him to bathe and change clothes. Such things will be left out of the book, for Roy has promised discretion and does not want to gain a reputation for cynicism like Lytton Strachey. Roy wants the book to have the atmosphere of a Van Dyke portrait.

Roy's ecstasy in visualizing the handsomely-bound volume snaps back to reality and wonders how to portray Rosie. Amy wants her shown as a pernicious influence, ruining Ted morally, physically, and financially, but Roy sees no point in washing dirty laundry in public and admits that Ted's greatest books are written while living with Rosie. Roy must treat this period delicately but with "manly frankness," suggesting what the reader should realize. He will include only what facts support.

Roy has been lecturing in fine style, but grows genial to explain William's part in the project: provide background on the Blackstable years in a way no one can subvert. William also sees quite a bit of Ted in London, at age twenty. Roy asks him to jot down anything he remembers, taking no account of style. He can work at Amy's quiet country house. They can all chat and she will jot down notes as things come to mind. Hating to stay with people, William agrees to go to Blackstable, stay at the Bear and Key, and visit Amy while Roy is there. In the meantime, he will try to jot down some reminiscences.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Long Chapter 11 finds William contemplating Ted as a writer, while he waits for Roy to arrive, and then shifts to Roy's project to write Ted's biography and their debating how candid the book should be—and how William's input is essential.

Ted's writing career begins with the "purple patch" is in style. God is phased out in favor of Pan (lust personified), and Pan gives way to an idealization of Beauty, which is supposedly Ted's forte. Maugham, through narrator William, gives a tour de force on aesthetics, first mentioning Bishop Jeremy Taylor, a renowned seventeenth-century English preacher, whom followers liken to Shakespeare, while critics writing Ted's obituaries talk of his Shakespeare-like treatment of women and clown figures. William observes that Ted had tended to be a humorist, but this fact is unseemly in eulogies.

Beauty, William believes, has become the "Little Nell of this shamefaced day," a reference to the main character in Charles Dickens' The Old Curiosity Shop (Dickens

having been considered at an earlier tea party as sometimes acceptable and sometimes too coarse). Nell is a character good in every way, who trying to save her grandfather and herself from misery progressively weakens and finally dies. Beauty is talked about everywhere, but is mere sentimentality, a generation accepting reality rather than escaping from it.

William disagrees with Keats' opening words in Endymion: "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever." He declares rather that it is momentary. He cites Titian's Entombment of Christ as pure as a thing of purest beauty, to which criticism adds nothing. He ends with an anecdote about a mathematician finding no "proof" in Jean Racine's Phèdre and wonders why Racine is more accessible and popular than Shakespeare in his day. Racine's maxims return later in the novel.

Finally, Roy arrives and explains his project of writing an authorized biography of Ted Driffield, complete with the all of the evasions such a work require to fit the sponsor's conceptions. Amy's resentment of her predecessor and determination to paint her as a destructive force on her late husband does not square with the fact that Ted's finest works date from that early period. William agrees to try to remember details from his Blackstable days and from a later acquaintance in London, never before mentioned. Artistic references continue during their conversation, including references to Shakespeare, the established expatriate American writer Henry James, the late Romantic composer Robert Schumann, and the cynical young author, Lytton Strachey. Roy appreciates the economic potential in exposing all of Ted's "warts," but shuns the peril. Clearly, Roy has much material to leave out of his "Van Dyke" style portrait in words. He vainly imagines the beautifully bound end product. The project is more about advancing his own career than treating Ted's place in literature.

Chapters 12-14

Chapters 12-14 Summary

William thinks back to his first years in London as a medical student at St. Luke's Hospital. He strolls over to his first apartment on Vincent Square to see his first landlady, Mrs. Hudson, a bustling, lively storyteller now widowed, slowing down, but unwilling to retire as her son George and maid Hester urge. William is allowed to see his old room, done up in a sports motif quite unlike his artistic decor. William thinks about the variety of occupants since he reads literature in this armchair. Hudson laughs at all the things that she has seen and heard.

While living at Vincent Square, William's set schedule includes working all day at the hospital and reading seriously to improve his mind. Before bedtime, he writes novels and plays. One day, he takes a walk on the bustling Vauxhall Bridge Road and is surprised to meet Rosie. He is still mortified for her sneaking out of Blackstable in debt, but she laughs it off. For the first time, William notices that she is pretty. They laugh about living so near one another without knowing before Rosie takes him to their place on Limpus Road to see Ted, whose full beard has been replaced by a mustache and "imperial" (soul patch), and who looks short, shabby, and not distinguished.. The neighborhood had once been respectable but has declined. The Driffields occupy the basement and ground floor of a dull-red house, and their furniture is heavy and outdated, but Rosie adores it. They invite William to their regular Saturday afternoon gatherings.

William gets into the habit of attending the Driffields' parties, begins meeting creative people, all while keeping secret his own writing. No one that he meets there is important or lasting, and only the occasional disgraced aristocrat. William sometimes thinks about abolishing the House of Lords but compensating the peers with the exclusive right to write literature. Genres would be assigned by rank, with poetry, "the crown of literature." Duchesses can handle popular forms of verse and song. At the parties William, to his surprise, discovers that Ted is a distinguished person, the author of twenty books, and on the brink of discovery.

Isabel Trafford signals this by her frequent attendance at the parties. She is responsible for having "made" many a creative person, including a deceased writer whose letters she publishes praising her and whose biography her husband, Barton, writes to show how Isabel molds the man's career. Isabel manages the renowned poet Jasper Gibbons until his career begins to fail, then gracefully dropping him, bounces back by championing Ted. With Rosie, Isabel is proper, but Rosie cannot stand her.

The regulars at the Driffield parties are the affluent Quentin Forde, who is interested only in Rosie's beauty; Harry Retford, and the flamboyant painter, Lionel Hillier. When Hillier shows William his portrait of Rosie in white silk, unsophisticated Williams asks when it will be finished. Only afterward does he learn to react properly to modern art.

Seeing Rosie assume the pose beside the canvas, William feels weak in the knees. Hillier says she is hard to paint, for she is all gold but gives a silvery effect. She glows palely like the moon or the sun through a heavy white mist. Isabel says that Rosie looks like "a sacrificial heifer."

Chapters 12-14 Analysis

Chapter twelve takes William back to his first apartment in London, while attending medical school. He describes his colorful landlady, Mrs. Hudson, whose mastery of Cockney idiom he wishes now, as a writer, he had recorded. They reminisce and William ponders all the occupants since he had lived there. He lists all of his favorite authors at the time and wonders who is using his old books. The chapter serves primarily as a transition to recalling the Driffields during William's early adult years.

Chapter thirteen describes William running into Rosie on the street and for the first time noticing her beauty. This grows into an obsession for the rest of the novel. She laughs off fleeing their debts in Blackstable and leads William to their nearby flat on a once-fashionable street. Ted has changed but has a decent place in which to work and looks the writer's part. Rosie mentions that she has heard from Kemp that William is also in London for two years, but had not known how to contact him. The continuing relationship is thus suggested in passing.

Chapter fourteen introduces Mrs. Barton Trafford as a volunteer literary agent. Her rise is sketched along with the near-disaster of promoting poet Jasper Gibbons. After letting him down gently, she turns to Ted. The tension between Trafford and Rosie is depicted, for Trafford is one of the few people Rosie dislikes. The chapter then introduces the regulars at the Driffields' Saturday afternoon parties. Affluent Quentin Forde is interested only in Rosie's beauty. Harry Retford is left as little more than a name until chapter fifteen. The flamboyant painter, Lionel Hillier, is most developed.

Hillier is highly opinionated, loving Claude Monet, Alfred Sisley, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, with none of whom William is familiar and hating Sir Frederick Leighton, Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, and G. F. Watts, artists whom William appreciates. William suggests after his faux pas about the finished canvas that he could write a primer for amateurs in art appreciation about how to deal with uncomfortable situations. He then takes half a page to summarize his conclusions. The art criticism section of chapter fourteen ends with Hillier declaring he might send the canvas to the Grosvenor, certainly not the Academy. The two museums are at opposite poles on the modern art movement.

Finally, the portrait further awakens William to Rosie's beauty. He realizes she is not the prim bike rider he had known as a teen, but a guileless silvery figure destined by Nature to be loved. William and Hillier each try in words to capture Rosie's silvery radiance. This haunts and intrigues William for the rest of the novel. One night at her doorstep, Rosie kisses William on the lips and ducks inside, laughing affectionately.

Chapters 15-21

Chapters 15-21 Summary

While Ted writes at night, Rosie goes out to dinner with her friends. She rarely dines with William, but they often go to music halls or theaters, particularly the Canterbury. William discovers that Rosie is a great reader, particularly of the histories of queens and mistresses of royal personages. She enjoys gossiping about Blackstable, about which she keeps in touch through biweekly visits to her mother in Haversham. Rosie is not a great talker, but includes her companions in "persuasive well-being." Hillier once claims to William that he makes her beautiful by bringing out her silveriness. Rosie blushes at this, is amused, surprised, and pleased. William watches her behavior with Hillier, Forde, and Retford, but finds it merely comradely. Her smile remains mysterious.

William and Rosie go to dinner at the Café Monico and a show at the Haymarket Theater after she spends time with her mother and other engagements. Afterward, they walk through St. James's Park and William initiates a long kiss. They head then for fish and chips on Horseferry Row, a "down-at-heel" place popular with culture people. Continuing their walk, William invites Rosie into his house. As Rosie strokes William's face he begins to weep. Comforting him, she begins undressing. They make love in the dark and she awakens him at dawn with kisses, preparing to leave before the landlady discovers her. William admires her body "made for the act of love," and accompanies her as far as Limpus Road.

For more than a year, William and Rosie stop in his rooms whenever they go out together, for an hour or overnight, and often run into a policeman looking suspicious or understanding. Before they become lovers, William often wonders it she is Forde's, Retford's, or Hillier's lover. When he asks her, she denies it playfully. He wants to know about Kemp but worries about angering her. At the Saturday afternoon parties, they exchange secret looks and Hillier shows suspicion, which Rosie dismisses as just his nasty mind. Dull Forde, never intimate with William, grows more frigid. Rosie encourages William to go to dinner and a play with Retford, who turns his sarcasm on Forde and makes William wonder if everyone knows that he and Rosie are lovers. A Dutch Jew from Amsterdam, Jack Kuyper, appears in London and keeps Rosie occupied for two weeks. William instantly dislikes him and is bitter when she shows such glee at receiving a costly sable cape as a going-away present. William cannot imagine that sex has not been involved and shudders at the mental picture of them together. This resurrects his suspicions about the other men and William is mortified. He forces himself to remain silent. Rosie asks why he is sulky and does not want her to come to his rooms. She declares that she has always wanted a cape; neither Ted nor William can afford to give her one, while Kuyper can easily. When William suggests she might be having sex with all of her male friends, Rosie asks why that would matter to him as long as she shows him a good time. In a hundred years they will all be dead and none of this will matter. He must take her as she is. He does.

Ted is preoccupied by editing and writing. He attends the Saturday afternoon parties but spends the lion's share of the time with older and more important guests than William. William sense that Ted is growing aloof, no longer jolly and vulgar. He speaks at public dinners, joins a literary club, and broadens his horizons. Although invited, Rosie rarely attends luncheons and teas, knowing that she is not truly wanted. Ted publishes The Cup of Life, a ruthlessly unsentimental tale dealing with a child's death and curious aftermath that is unforgettable by any reader. As with his other novels, reaction is mixed until moralists begin violently condemning it, libraries and book sellers withdraw it, and there are calls for criminal prosecution. Ted maintains the story is true. His friends rally around him and The Cup of Life becomes a dividing line between aesthetes and philistines. Decades later, its material is commonplace.

Six months later, past the furor, Ted is writing By Their Fruits. William is in his fourth year of medical studies. He finds a note from Isabel Trafford asking him urgently to come to her at 5 PM. By the time hospital rounds are over, William is late. Already at tea is the famous literary critic, Allgood Newton, who bluntly and maliciously announces that Rosie has run away from Ted. William is flabbergasted. Newton explains: needing to see Ted about some article, Newton drops in after dinner, knowing that Ted never goes out at night. He finds the door open and Ted walking headlong and distraught toward the mailbox. Newton catches up with him and they walk together through emptier streets before Ted blurts out the news. Newton supposes that Ted wants condolence rather than felicitation.

Ted continues: Rosie has run off with Kemp. Isabel looks oddly at William when he gasps at this detail. Newton continues, telling how he had frankly told Ted of her scandalous behavior, but Ted had broken away and fled, crying. Having found the story luscious to this point, Isabel criticizes Newton for letting Ted go in such a mental state; he might have thrown himself in the Thames. Newton says that Ted runs the opposite direction and no author has killed himself while writing a book.

William is astounded and dismayed and cannot figure out why Isabel had sent for him. She declares that this is a "blessing in disguise" for Ted before asking what William can tell them about Kemp, who cannot be found in Who's Who or Debrett. Repressing laughter, William explains the facetious "Lord" title. Isabel asks him to go to Blackstable to learn the truth and he accepts, despite his dislike of interfering in others' affairs. The Traffords take Ted into their home. Seeing William out, Newton likens Isabel to Catherine of Aragon and quotes Racine, leaving William confused but assuming that it must be maliciously amusing. William takes the bus to be rid of Newton.

When William returns to London on Monday, he finds a letter from Isabel, asking to meet her in the first-class waiting room at Victoria Station at 6 PM. She wants Ted not to hear William's report. Blackstable buzzes with excitement and indignation about this exciting event. Kemp announces he has business in London and two days later is sued for bankruptcy and an arrest warrant is issued. His plans to turn the town into a resort have failed. His family is left penniless and it is assumed that he has fled to Australia or Canada. Finally, it is learned that he has been seeing Rosie nearly every weekend in Haversham. Mary-Ann confirms that they have run away. William holds back for his

account how he feels betrayed by Rosie. Isabel is gad that Rosie will not longer interfere with Ted's writing. William says he is too shy and too busy to keep in touch with Ted. He reads about Ted and Rosie's divorce in the papers and hears that when Mrs. Grann dies, money ceases to come to her from New York.

Chapters 15-21 Analysis

Chapter fifteen develops the social life enjoyed by these new friends, describing Rosie as a quiet person living inside her own thoughts. When Hillier claims credit for Rosie's beauty, by having brought out her mysterious silveriness, William watches for signs of improper intimacy, but sees none. The fashionable restaurants and theaters of London are lightly sketched, as the men entertain Rosie while Ted is busy writing. The chapter ends with Rosie kissing William on the lips, a sign of fondness, he believes.

Chapter sixteen describes William and Rosie's first kisses and the beginnings of an affair. He includes an extended consideration of why authors write in the first person, which can be heroic, humorous, or charming unless one is describing the actions of a "plain damned fool." He quotes Evelyn Waugh's unexplained dictum that writing in the first person is "contemptible," and says that Roy has given him additional books on fiction writing to consider (including Percy Lubbock, E. M. Forster, and Edwin Muir, none of which enlighten William) and he wonders why such successful novelists as Defoe, Sterne, Thackeray, Dickens, Emily Brontë, and Proust write in this form. William decides it is a function of age: one begins to write only about what one has experienced, and the first person is useful for this.

The chapter continues with William taking Rosie to his place and breaking into tears. Rosie comforts him, pressing his face between her breasts, and then undressing. Their lovemaking in the dark is skipped over, but the description of the morning after is by the standards of the 1930s risqué. William walks her to her corner, feeling renewed. Rosie kisses him goodbye and walks home uprightly. The way she leaves him there, because "One never knows," suggests that this is not her first-time fling.

Chapter seventeen shows William worrying if the other men in Rosie's circle suspect their affair, which becomes a regular occurrence. It is interrupted with the brief visit of a Dutch diamond merchant, who monopolizes Rosie's time and before leaving gives her a £260 sable cape. William provides context: he lives decently on £14 a month (£180 a year) and cannot see how this is a token of friendship without sex attached. William sulks through the evening and Rosie calls him on it. When he verbalizes his suspicion that she is having sex not only with Kuyper but also with her other dinner and theater dates, Rosie tells him it is none of his business. If he is happy with their time together (he is), he must be satisfied with that, without judgments or jealousies. In a hundred years, she declares, they will all be dead and none of this will matter. William runs the gamut of emotions before accepting her kiss.

Chapter eighteen returns the focus to Ted and particularly his publishing of the controversial The Cup of Life. It describes the usual way in which his novels are

received: generally favorable but bland reviews and modest sales, and then shows what happens when moralists hit upon something to launch an hysterical crusade. Typically, the few voices that call for an objective evaluation of the book's over-all quality (it is Ted's only title that William wishes to have written himself) are shouted down. Such tactics by the turn of the twenty-first century are commonplace in politics and religion. William notes that within decades the shocking scenes in the novel are found throughout literature and raise not an eyebrow. The scenes, which Ted claims are factual, are finally described and explained in the final chapters of this novel.

Chapter nineteen describes the panic that arises when Rosie suddenly runs away with Kemp. The tale is told by a new character, a stuffy literary critic, Allgood Newton, who pauses in the telling for effect and drags it out until William worries that he will be scolded for being late for dinner. Newton brings into the narration the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, said to have been so punctual about his daily walk that the townspeople of Königsberg set their watches by him—until the day he learns that the Bastille has fallen and races away. Newton likens Ted's running about the street in a fog to "Hector flying, the noblest of the Greeks." He quotes the "rakish purlieus of Pimlico," and says that Ted walks so briskly that the great English author, Dr. Johnson, could not have kept up and responded.

When William explains why Kemp cannot be found in either Who's Who or John Debrett's guide to the English peerage—because it is a mocking title— Newton declares, "The quiddity of bucolic humour is often a trifle obscure to the uninitiated." Before William can shake loose of the man, Newton likens Isabel to Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife (recall that Rosie is a great reader about royal wives and paramours) and obscurely quotes a famous (and untranslatable) phase from Racine's Phèdre: "Venus toute entière à sa proie attachée." William figures that this must be somehow malicious and recalls sniggering. The upshot of the confusing meeting is that Isabel and her husband will move Ted into their home and William will go to Blackstable to sort things out.

Chapter twenty shows William reporting to Isabel what he learns in Blackstable: Kemp has gone bankrupt and probably fled England with Rosie, whom he has been spending nights with in Haversham for years. The Vicar is predictably judgmental and vindictive and Mary-Ann blasé. William hides his own feelings of betrayal and cannot understand why Isabel is pleased that this will prevent Ted's writing from being disturbed. Chapter twenty-one wraps up William's London contacts with the Driffields, who divorce and Rosie seems to settle in New York.

Chapters 22-24

Chapters 22-24 Summary

Roy and William meet at Victoria Station. Roy had grown close to the Traffords, traveling with them and sharing their artistic tastes. When Isabel's health had declined, Roy visits regularly, and writes an emotional obituary. Isabel tells him much about taking Ted into her house for a year after Rosie's flight, as he finishes By Their Fruit, which he dedicates to her. The Traffords take Ted to Italy and she works tirelessly to increase Ted's reputation. She sees editors, organizes readings, makes sure his picture appears in the weeklies, and revises his interviews as his press agent. She has a grand time, accompanying him to ever party. When anything bothers Isabel, Ted expresses it. She convinces Ted that he is the greatest writer of his day.

When Ted catches pneumonia, Isabel is already frail, well over sixty, and unable to nurse him without help. He is put up in Penzance with a full-time nurse. Within three weeks, Ted marries her. Stricken, Isabel holds in her feelings and congratulates the couple. Although the new Mrs. Driffield is not exactly pretty or a lady, Isabel claims that she is just what Ted needs.

William and Roy arrive in Blackstable. William takes a room in the unchanged Bear and Key rather than the new Marine Hotel. The desk attendant is churlish, the first room he is shown is grubby, and the double he ends up in stuffy. There is no meal service but they send out for him while he takes a stroll and sees a few superficial changes in town. The landlady makes him eat in the cold, as she has a strict policy of no fires after April—even if he pays for it. The owner, son of the owner whom William had known, remembers Ted as an old man often coming in for a beer and talking to anyone there. His wife dislikes his visits and fetches him in the car. The London obituaries seem to talk about a completely different person from the man who always sits at the bar to view life.

On a cold, raw morning, William walks down High Street, seeing no one he recognizes and feeling like a ghost. A shabby car passes and stops, and the unkempt driver emerges to greet him by name. They had been classmates and now he is a country doctor. The old rectory is now a preparatory school, and he is visiting a grandson. William contemplates how the old man's life is over while he looks forward to writing books and plays. When they part, William continues walking here and there. The harbor is deserted. The owner of the Bear and Key rents him a dilapidated old Daimler for the drive to Amy's. Its smell reminds him of Sunday morning rides with his aunt and uncle and lectures on how to behave in church. At Ferne Court, Amy and Roy are walking in the garden. After an obligatory tour, they go in for lunch. Ted's study is kept exactly as he leaves it; people often come to look at it. William notes the mustiness of a museum and copies of his books, which had been absent during his last visit. There is no dust anywhere.

Lunch is a hearty British meal, during which they discuss Roy's project. Amy has been diligently gathering material, including photographs, which she shows William. Amy also forgoes fires until October. William surmises that as a widow, Amy has been dropped by eminent friends. Amy and Roy work to dislodge memories in William, who is careful not to let slip anything he has decided not to share. Two Americans visit, asking for a tour: Henry Beard MacDougal and Jean-Paul Underhill. They claim to have been great fans of Ted and are en route to play golf in Rye. Roy has lectured often at the University of Virginia, where MacDougal teaches English literature. They discuss mutual friends, Roy's books, and the project of writing Ted's life.

Roy wants to accompany them on the house tour, but Amy insists that he and William talk. Roy tells him about Ted buying the house two to three years before he and Amy marry from Miss Wolfe. It is a boyhood obsession, although why he would want to live where everyone knows his origins and scandals is beyond Roy. Although Ted fights her item-by-item, Amy refurnishes it top to bottom as a gentleman's house should be. William notices that Amy is good at getting her own way.

Chapters 22-24 Analysis

Chapter twenty-two shows how Isabel becomes Ted's press agent for ten years and her reaction to his marriage to Amy, his hospital nurse when he is recovering from pneumonia. The source of this information is Roy, who inevitably becomes close to Isabel as his career advances. The long description of Isabel's reaction begins with a denial of all the natural reactions of shock and betrayal, pivots on her writing to hope that they will all be loving friends, and concludes with a summary: while Isabel may show the "milk of loving kindness" (another reference to Shakespeare: Macbeth), it is mixed with vitriol.

Chapter twenty-three describes Blackstable, where William takes a room at his favorite old public house rather than the new hotel and rather rues it. A visit to the inn brings a description of Ted in old age, refusing to sit in a comfortable chair during his sneak-aways from Amy's watchful eye, preferring to sit at the bar where he can observe life. As mentioned earlier, Ted continues to enjoy talking to anyone he meets. The current inn owner, son of the one from William's day, never knows Rosie but has heard the rumors and seems rather to dislike pushy Amy. He hopes some day to read one of Ted's books, which he hears is full of local color.

Chapter twenty-four takes William to Ferne Court, the Driffield's estate. Before leaving, he walks around Blackstable and recognizes only one old schoolmate, now a retired doctor and grandfather, whose life is behind him. William notes that he has plans to write books and plays and wonders if he also appears over-the-hill to youngsters. At Ferne Court, William sees Ted's museum-like study and notices that Amy has politically placed copies of his books on the shelves and claims that Ted had enjoyed reading and re-reading them. There is no dust anywhere, so suspicious William cannot confirm the opposite.

The discussion of old photographs is interrupted by a visit from two young Americans, who drop in on their way to a round or two of golf. Tourists apparently do this often, which is one reason that Amy keeps everything has it had been in Ted's day. The chit-chat develops Roy's character a bit, he having guest lectured in Virginia often, and liking how Americans "prefer a live mouse to a dead lion." It also allows him to describe Amy's dedication in refurnishing the house, outmaneuvering reluctant Ted. That she usually gets her way is evident.

Chapters 25-26

Chapters 25-26 Summary

Amy returns with a portfolio of old photographs. William does not recognize Ted in the earliest ones, before his marriage to Rosie. Her wedding picture is grotesque; only William knows how lovely she must have looked. Roy and Amy deplore how common Rosie had been. Looking through the pages, Ted's face grows thinner and more lined. He always looks aloof, as though he and the person who writes his books are separate puppets. William is glad to leave resolving Ted's personality to Roy. There are photographs of Retford and of Hillier's portrait of Rosie, which gives William a pang, for that is how he best remembers her—alive and passionate.

Amy and Roy both snipe at that picture, Amy calling Rosie "a white nigger," Isabel's hateful old phrase. Once William has described Rosie as virginal and enchanting, Amy assures him that she knows from Isabel that Rosie had not been a nice person. William again objects: Rosie had had a heart of gold. He admits that Rosie had not cared about housekeeping or personal appearance, but denies that she had been any less beautiful because of that. Amy calls Rosie a nymphomaniac and claims that Ted never would have been great had she not left him. William explains that Rosie had enjoyed giving and receiving pleasure naturally, without vice, and always remained unspoiled and artless.

Amy is sure that Ted had not known about Rosie's affairs, but William declares that Rosie had inspired affection, not love, and jealousy would be absurd. Both laugh at William's lyricism. When Amy asks if Ted might ever have taken Rosie back, William believes not, for his strong feelings had passed and he was capable of "extreme callousness." Amy has heard through Kemp's son Harold that both die about ten years earlier. Amy had kept the news from Ted.

Chapter twenty-six has William chuckling over the bombshell he could throw at Amy and Roy if he chose: Rosie is alive. William had gone to New York to produce a play and press coverage generates a letter in handwriting he knows but cannot place. It is from "Rose Iggulden (formerly Driffield)." She lives in Yonkers and hopes to see him again. A shiver passes through William and he ties in a visit with an appointment in Dobbs Ferry. The Albemarle is a huge bloc of apartments with door service and elevator. Rosie's apartment is furnished in Grand Rapids Jacobean and Louis XV style, with plenty of gilt and Sevres. She has a grand gramophone. Rosie is smartly dressed, a bit stout and red-faced, but looks "healthy and full of beans." Her hair is white and permanently waved. The one thing unchanged his her childlike, mischievous smile. Quickly William and Rosie are chatting as thought it had been just weeks since last seeing one another.

Rosie and George take the surname Iggulden when they come to America, to avoid unpleasantness in a new country. George dies ten years ago, well past seventy. He had been a wonderful husband and leaves her well provided for. He had done well in the

building trades, getting in well with Tammany Hall. They had talked about a vacation to England but never gone, and Rosie suspects that London would seem dull after New York. She moves to Yonkers after George's death because it seems a bit like England. She has kept secret that she is Ted's first wife because his books are quite popular in America and she does not want the press. She is surprised how big a fuss the newspapers make over Ted's death. Rosie had thought Ted likely to marry Isabel, so his marrying a nurse had been a surprise. Offhandedly, Rosie lets slip that she and Ted had had a child and its loss had been a great blow.

Ted marries Rosie because she is pregnant. The delivery is difficult and she is told not to have any more. The girl is six when she dies horribly of meningitis in a hospital. William asks if this is the basis for the controversial scene in The Cup of Life. Rosie says that Ted could not bear to talk about his loss but had included it in the book without sentiment but harrowing prose. He writes with anger at a God who would allow a child's suffering. After the husband and wife lose their child, she casually goes out to Piccadilly to have an affair. She returns in the morning in time for breakfast and preparations for the child's funeral.

William asks if this is precisely what happens in reality. Rosie says that Ted does a good job of guessing, without her ever having said what she had done. She feels dead inside coming home from the hospital. Ted tries to comfort her, but it is annoying. The landlady had asked how the little girl is. "She's dead," says Ted. It is the twenty-eighth of June, a long evening, and Rosie cannot stand Ted's silence. Seeing people on the street, she heads out in a new dress. She goes to the Strand, not the park, and looks up Retford, who in in a play at the Adelphi. He had always been able to make her laugh. (He has since been killed in the Boer War.) They have dinner with champagne at Romano's; she lies to Retford that her daughter is better, so as not to ruin the night. They go to his flat in Charing Cross Road and she spends the night and gets home in time for breakfast. She has made up her mind to leave Ted if he asks questions, but he merely serves her sausage and she pours him tea. Ted is terribly kind but cannot make the loss easier for her. Reading about this in The Cup of Life gives Rosie a turn. Writers are "queer fish."

As Rosie takes a phone call, flirting with Mr. Vanuzzi, William contemplates the writer's life of tribulation, poverty, and the world's indifference. Success brings its own hazards: journalists, photographers, tax collectors, fans, would-be lovers, actors, advice-seekers, agents, publishers, managers, critics—and one's own conscience over everything he has put down in black and white. The writer is the world's only free man. Hanging up, Rosie explains about this beau and says that she is too happy to remarry. She had always like Kemp, long before she had met Ted, but there had been no chance of marriage because of his family and position. One day all of that crumbles, there is a warrant out for his arrest, and he asks Rosie to flee with him to America. Rosie has a large gold-framed picture of Lord George taken soon after their arrival in New York. He looks rakish. Rosie declares that he is always a perfect gentleman.

Chapters 25-26 Analysis

Chapter twenty-five brings Amy, Roy, and William back to examining photographs. When they come to one of Hillier's portrait of Rosie, Amy and Roy snipe at her. They embrace Isabel's view of Rosie as a "white nigger," slob, and nymphomaniac. William calmly refutes all charges and talks about Rosie's capacity to love. Sex with anyone for whom she cared had been a natural part of that. This is quite an advance over the jealousy he had felt at the time and his sense of abandonment when she and Kemp flee. Other than the passage of time and the nostalgia of that photograph, William offers no explanation of how, when, or why he has so matured emotionally. The chapter ends with rumors that Rosie and "Lord George" are both dead for a decade.

Chapter thirty-six rapidly concludes the novel. The fact that William has been determined to withhold from Amy and Roy is that Rosie is alive and well in Yonkers, New York. William describes their meeting, concentrating on how the controversial passages in one of Ted's novels is based on fact: their losing a daughter to meningitis and Rosie's subsequent one-night stand with Harry Retford. Rosie had been ready to leave the marriage had Ted asked about her overnight whereabouts, but he had been silent. She is surprised to see such intimate feelings in print. Ted had gotten it substantially right, knowing nothing, but had put the heroine with a stranger and in a different part of London.

The close has William still unable to see what Rosie ever sees in "Lord George." He studies an arrogant portrait, but is assured that he is always a perfect gentleman.

Characters

William Ashenden

The novel's narrator, Ashenden is a London-based novelist, raised strictly in Blackstable, England, by his uncle, the local Anglican Vicar and his German wife Emily, and later trained as a physician. He appears never to have practiced medicine and as an author is not "in the public eye" as the novel opens. He is puzzled why established author Alroy (Roy) Kear, many of whose novels William has begun to read but few of which he has ever finished, would seek him out after a long absence from his life. After determining that William has no intention of writing about Edward (Ted) Driffield, the "Grand Old Man of English Letters," who has been dead a year, Roy asks if he will turn over any letters from and share reminiscences about the man, as Roy has been commissioned by Ted's widow to write a biography.

William is in a unique position to shed light on Ted's obscure, early years. William is an adolescent trying to teach himself to ride a bicycle when he happens upon Ted and Rosie Driffield riding bikes on a country road. Rosie is the first adult ever to address him as Mr. Ashenden rather than the hated "Master Willie." If he had his way, William would be known as "Roderic Ravensworth" or "Ludovic Montgomery." For a summer and a Christmas holiday, William enjoys Ted and Rosie's company, biking, picnicking, making rubbings from brasses in country churches, and learning to play whist, before the Driffields "shoot the moon"—disappear from Blackstable, fleeing a mountain of debt. This confirms the opinion of William's uncle, the local Anglican Vicar, that the writer had been unfit company.

William attends medical school at St. Luke's Hospital, London, lodging at Mrs. Hudson's house on Vincent Square. He works all day at the hospital and reads seriously to improve his mind each evening. Before bedtime, he writes novels and plays. In his second year, William runs into Rosie on the street and is incorporated into their Saturday afternoon parties for literary types. William keeps his budding writing career under wraps. Rosie initiates a sexual affair, which continues until she again absconds, this time to America with her old Blackstable lover, "Lord George" Kemp. Years later, William goes to New York to produce a play and is contacted by Rosie, by then a wealthy widow, and learns from her secrets that he chooses not to share with Roy and Amy. William doubts that he can contribute much from the two extended periods he spent in contact with the Driffields and is not overly impressed by Ted's writings. He dislikes Roy and Amy's intention to sanitize the story and is glad that it is not his task to untangle the various personae in the author.

Rosie Driffield/Iggulden (née Gann)

The first wife of the renowned late-Victorian author, Edward (Ted) Driffield, Rosie later leaves him and emigrates to America with her second husband, George Kemp. They

changed their surname to Iggulden to escape the scandal and lawsuits. She lives as a wealthy widow in Yonkers, NY, when narrator William Ashenden last sees her. William never forgets his first view of Rosie, as she is dumped nearly on top of him from the bicycle that she is learning to ride, with her full blue serge skirt, starched pink shirt, boater-style straw hat, and a mound of golden hair. She bubbles over with the zest of life. She is too innocent to be sly, but she is mischievous, and it shows in her smile. Edward most remembers, however, an oil painting that captures her silvery beauty at the time that they are lovers in London.

The daughter of a a wild soldier, Josiah Gann, who returns from war with a wooden leg, and works occasionally as a painter, Rosie works as a barmaid at the seedy Railway Arms in Blackstable, England, until "Lord George" Kemp drops in for a drink and begins pursuing her. Kemp has a wife and three children, so there is no hope for a permanent arrangement, but they become regular lovers for years. The inn's owner, Mrs. Reeves, fires Rosie, who then goes to work at the Prince of Wales's Feathers at Haversham, and Kemp moves his drinking business there. At the Feathers, Ted first sees Rosie and marries her (people say) because no respectable girl would have him. Rosie is pregnant at the time. Their daughter dies in London at age six of meningitis, a harrowing experience that he includes in his most controversial novel, The Cup of Life.

Rosie and Ted include young William in their summer activities and again at Christmas when he comes home on vacation. He is looking forward to seeing them at Easter—particularly so Rosie can teach him the tricks of whist—when it is learned the couple has fled Blackstable, leaving a mountain of debt. They settle in London. Two years later, Rosie runs into William, by then a medical student living a few blocks away, and draws him into their regular Saturday afternoon parties for literary types. Rosie considers Isabel Trafford, her husband's new manager, a "damned old cat," and with great difficulty is civil with her. Rosie has a quartet of male friends who entertain her while Ted is busy writing every evening.

At the time Rosie's portrait is painted by Lionel Hillier. She is around thirty-five years old, with a face still unlined. She has a short, thick nose, small eyes, large mouth, and cornflower-blue eyes. Her lips are very red and sensual. The painter describes her as all gold but giving off a silvery effect. Rosie initiates an affair with William and he wonders if she is doing the same with her other male friends. William grows jealous with a diamond merchant, Kuyper, takes Rosie out to smart restaurants and plays every night for two weeks and as a parting gift gives her a fur cape costing £260. Rosie tells William to be happy with what he gets from her; in a hundred years they will all be dead and none of it will have mattered.

As suddenly as she had left Blackstable for London, so does Rosie disappear with Kemp for America. They change their surname to Iggulden to escape the scandal and lawsuits. Widowed but well-off, Rosie moves to Yonkers, which she finds resembles an English town. Ted's second wife, Amy, who never misses an opportunity to run her predecessor's reputation down, believes that Rosie is dead. Author Alroy Kear intends to downplay Rosie's importance in the biography he is writing, although he has to admit that Ted's best works all date from the time of their marriage. William keeps secret her

survival and does not share the fact that the controversial scene in an early novel is based on their losing a daughter and her taking solace in a one-night stand.

Alroy Kear (Roy)

Narrator William Ashenden's twenty-year acquaintance, Roy is a writer and after-dinner speaker, tall, athletically built, confident in bearing, not handsome but pleasant, honest, clean, and healthy-looking, but beginning to age. Roy is a cordial man with who, William has had little contact recently, and is thus suspicious when Roy begins leaving phone messages about getting together. It develops that Roy, author of some thirty books, needs from William details about the early life of the late-Victorian author Edward (Ted) Driffield, whose posthumous biography Roy he has been commissioned to write. Roy is dedicated to doing a thorough job, but is unwilling to allow anything unsavory to spoil the great man's reputation.

The son of a high-placed civil servant, Roy is respectably educated at Winchester and New College, Oxford, and placed, thanks to his father's connections, as a private secretary in the Foreign Office. There he makes many useful acquaintances and learns the impeccable manners that show in his early novels. Roy writes less convincingly later, as his subjects turn from the aristocracy to the middle class. Roy lectures about young writers in Britain and the US in such detail that hearers feel no need to read the actual books. He participates in organizations that provide old-age benefits for authors and that foster international cooperation. He does not get impatient with prying journalists. Roy is a life-long bachelor because he believes that marriage interferes with artistry, and his writings at mid-career reflect anguish.

Edward Driffield (Ted)

A renowned late-Victorian author, Ted and his first wife, Rosie (née Gann), befriends the narrator, William Ashenden, in Blackstable, England, while he is still an adolescent, under the close watch of his staid guardians. Twice William is Ted's close associate and, after Ted dies at age eighty-four with all of his faculties intact, is asked by fellow writer, Alroy (Roy) Kear, to provide information on Ted's unknown years for a biography commissioned by his second wife, Amy. Contrary to the general opinion, William finds Ted's novels boring, while Roy believes that his work will stand the test of time.

Ted grows up in Blackstable, graduates the Haversham School and receives a scholarship at Wadham, but runs away to sea instead. When he returns, he is a jack-of-all-trades—waiter, cab driver, and clerk—before settling on writing. He marries Rosie, a barmaid with a reputation for promiscuity, because (people say) no respectable girl would have him. Rosie is pregnant at the time. Their daughter dies in London at age six of meningitis, a harrowing experience that he includes in his most controversial novel, The Cup of Life.

In Blackstable, Ted writes, paints watercolors, takes rubbings from bronzes, and bicycles with Rosie. He teaches William to bicycle and the couple includes the youth in

their summer activities, despite his uncle, the town Vicar's, disapproval. One night, Ted and Rosie clear out of Blackstable, leaving a mountain of debt. They settle in London and Ted's fame begins to grow. They give Saturday afternoon parties for artists. William, now a medical student living nearby, becomes a regular. He notices that Ted is growing more distant, but does not believe it is because he knows about Rosie and William's love affair—or that she is having sex with their other male friends.

When Rosie abandons Ted and flees with an old lover to America, Ted is overwhelmed, but his agent, socialite Isabel Trafford and her husband, Barton, take him into their home, encourage his writing, and tour Europe with him. Ted's reputation grows. Fulfilling a lifelong obsession, Ted purchases Ferne Court, the estate in Blackstable where his father once serves as Miss Wolfe's bailiff (steward). When he is hospitalized for pneumonia, Isabel hires a full-time nurse, Amy, whom Ted marries, to the surprise of all. Amy refurnishes Ferne Court top-to-bottom over Ted's objections, and takes charge of his career and life, and with every milestone his fame and fortune improve. In the 1860s, his talent receives moderate praise; by his seventieth birthday he is seen as an overlooked treasure and a rush for his books begins. Appreciative essays and studies are penned. By his seventy-fifth birthday, Ted is proclaimed a genius; at eighty he is the "Grand Old Man of English Letters," a position he holds until his death. There is no one to take Ted's place.

Ted's collected works run to thirty-seven volumes and Sotheby's sells a set for £78; his sales increase steadily through the year of his death. For his eightieth birthday he is presented an oil portrait and is given the Order of Merit, limited to twenty-four recipients at any given time. When controversy arises over whether to bury Ted with fellow literary greats in Westminster Abbey, Amy has him interred in Blackstable "among the simple people he knew and loved so well."

Amy Driffield

Amy enters the novel as the nurse of the renowned late-Victorian author, Edward (Ted) Driffield, during his touch-and-go recovering from pneumonia, and to everyone's surprise, becomes his second wife. She reorders his life, organizes his time, and for twenty-five years keeps him going, so that when he dies at age eighty-four, his faculties intact. Amy's widowhood is lonely. She encourages author Alroy (Roy) Kear to write a sanitized biography of the great man of letters. When controversy arises over where to bury her husband, Amy has him interred in Blackstable "among the simple people he knew and loved so well."

Narrator William Ashenden meets her only once while her husband is alive. She is forty-five, sallow-faced with sharp features, neither short nor tall, but "trim, competent, and alert." Like the wives of many writers, Amy is a bright conversationalist. She keeps abreast of events in London while caring for her husband in the country.

The Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Ashenden

Narrator William Ashenden's conservative uncle and aunt, who raise him in Blackstable, the Ashendens forbid him to associate with a bohemian couple in town, Ted and Amy Driffield. The uncle is the local Anglican Vicar, proud that he reads nothing but the Times and the Guardian. Despite his Oxford education, he considers all novels "trashy." When confronted, he is very timid. Aunt Emily is descended from German nobility and retains, for all her Christian meekness, a strong prejudice against the lower classes. Both are highly judgmental of others.

Mrs. Encombe

A little, wrinkled woman, Encombe is Blackstable's first liberated "New Woman." She wears her hair short and her skirt barely covers the top of her boots. People are intimidated by her intellect and joke nervously about her.

Miss Fellows

Narrator William Ashenden's London landlady of Half Moon Street at the time he tells his story, Fellows loves to read novels. She admires Alroy Kear's writings, with whom Ashenden is in no hurry to meet as the novel opens. She had cooked in some very good places but does not fit the stereotype; instead, she is spare, upright, fashionable, middle-aged, businesslike, cynical, and very expensive. Ashenden occupies the ground floor, which is decorated rather like the 1880s.

Quentin Forde

One of the regulars at the Driffields' Saturday afternoon parties in London, Forde is a stocky man with the features of a "villain of melodrama." He has white hair, a long, sallow face, and black eyebrows. He is dull, but "well connected" and well-to-do. He attends the parties because Rosie is beautiful and often fetches her in a cab to take her to dinner. Never intimate with narrator William Ashenden, Forde grows more frigid towards him after William and Rosie begin their affair.

The Rev. Mr. Galloway

The Blackstable parish curate during William Ashenden's youth, Galloway is a tall, thin, ungainly man with a sallow face and untidy dark hair. He talks quickly, using his hands. Ashenden's strict uncle, the Vicar, his superior, is a lazy man, happy to have someone energetic to take care of the parish day-to-day. Galloway becomes a regular at the Driffields' house, but keeps it secret from the Vicar. He finds that Ted write rather well, which is amazing considering his background.

Lionel Hillier

One of the regulars at the Driffields' Saturday afternoon parties in London, Hillier is a thirty-five-year-old, flamboyant painter, who paints a portrait of Rosie Driffield after a black-and-white photograph in the same dress turns out "rotten." He does not allow anyone to see the unfinished canvas. He admires Monet, Sisley, and Renoir and holds Sir Frederick Leighton, Alma-Tadema, and G. F. Watts in contempt. After he fails to make a name for himself in London, he drifts off to Florence, Italy, and disappears, as does his portrait of Rosie. Hillier once claims to William that he makes her beautiful by bringing out her silveriness.

Lady Hodmarsh

The "clever and handsome American wife of a sporting baron," Hodmarsh relieves her boredom living in Tercanbury, England, by giving parties where the nobility and gentry mingle with people from the arts. She arranges a reunion of narrator William Ashenden with Edward Driffield after thirty-five years separation. A detective novelist, Lord Scallion also attends. Hodmarsh proves to be a woman of intelligence and tact.

Mrs Hudson

Narrator William Ashenden's first landlady when he comes to London for medical school, Hudson is a small, active woman with a sallow face, large nose, bright eyes, bad teeth, and much dark hair done up in a bun. She has a heart of gold, which William does not see at the time, and is an excellent cook. She makes sure that her lodgers are not cold, take their baths, and get off to work on time. She sings as she works all day. Her husband, a former butler, is much older, but helps out around the house. She is "a mistress of Cockney humour," which William later wishes he had recorded to use in his own books. She has "a racy style and an apt and varied vocabulary," and talks a great deal with her borders because he husband is so serious. She is a widow when William comes to see her, nostalgic as he is encouraged by Alroy Kear to provide material for Kear's biography of Edward Driffield. She is slowing but not ready to retire.

George Kemp/Iggulden

Dubbed "Lord George" in jest because of his grand manner, Kemp is a coal merchant in Blackstable, England, who also dabbles in real estate. Stout, florid, with a pointed beard and bold blue eyes, Kemp dresses flashily, lives with his wife and three children in a brick house, and drives his own trap (carriage). Everyone knows that he wants to be made churchwarden, but the Vicar refuses and he for a time attends chapel instead. When they reconcile, Kemp is named a sidesman (assistant). The gentry find Kemp vain, strident, pushy, and ill-mannered, and his generosity in public affairs gets him nowhere socially.

Drinking in the Railway Arms pub is below Kemp's dignity, but he happens in once during a rainstorm and falls instantly in love with barmaid Rosie Gann. He hangs around so obviously that Rosie is fired, and then he migrates his drinking to the inn that employs her next. Narrator William Ashenden suspects that Kemp is having an affair with Amy Driffield long before they run off to America and change their surname to Iggulden to evade the consequences of his absconding and start anew in New York. When William visits her in Yonkers, New York, the widow tells him how George prospers in business in New York City and leaves her well off financially. She declares that he is always a perfect gentleman.

Jack Kuyper

A tall, stout, bald Dutch Jew, Kuyper is an Amsterdam diamond merchant who shows up at Edward and Rosie Driffields' place in London one winter. He is around fifty, jovial, sensual, and determined, and admires Rosie enough to send her roses ever day. Narrator William Ashenden, who is having an affair with Rosie, considers Kuyper a vulgar "bounder" and cannot stand his accent, extravagance, and hardiness. Knowing no one in London, Kuyper takes Rosie out to smart restaurants and plays every night for two weeks and as a parting gift gives her a fur cape costing £260. Rosie's excitement about wearing it makes William bitter.

Henry Beard MacDougal and Jean-Paul Underhill

American tourists who claim to have been great fans of Edward Driffield, MacDougal and Underhill drop in on his museum-like home, Ferne Court, while en route to play golf in Rye.

Mary-Ann

The Ashendens' maid in Blackstable, England, Mary Ann (no surname given) is native-born, has never been ill, never takes a holiday, is paid £20 a year, one evening a week visits her mother, and every Sunday evening goes to church. She is assisted by housemaid Emily, a flighty young thing. Mary-Ann is snub-nosed and fresh-colored, with decaying teeth. While he is an infant and child, Mary-Ann cares for narrator William Ashenden, and as a teenager, he comes to Mary-Ann for gossip. Freely dropping her aitches, Mary-Ann fills in the Driffields' background. Long ago she attends Sunday school with Rosie Gann, who marries Edward (Ted) Driffield, of whom William's uncle disapproves. Mary-Ann is not surprised when the Driffields run off to London, leaving local merchants in the lurch, nor much later when Rosie runs off with "Lord George" Kemp to America.

Allgood Newton

England's best-known literary critic in his day, fat, blond, blue-eyed Newton sometimes attends the Driffields' Saturday afternoon parties, speaks amiably with the authors he meets and then speaks amusingly and maliciously at their expense. Narrator William Ashenden meets Newton for the first time at Isabel Trafford's house and hears his account of how Rosie Driffield runs away from Ted. To Newton it is an anecdote, told for high effect. Learning that "Lord George" Kemp's title is a joke, Newton remarks, "The quiddity of bucolic humour is often a trifle obscure to the uninitiated," which in a line captures his repulsive personality.

Harry Retford

One of the regulars at the Driffields' Saturday parties, Retford is a clever but often out-of-work actor who "never has a bob" but escorts Rosie Driffield to dinner around London in style. Retford has a "pleasantly ugly face," clipped way of speaking, and devil-may-care attitude. He is "gay, charming, vain, boastful, and unscrupulous." Taking narrator William Ashenden to dinner and a show, Retford turns his sarcasm on Quentin Forde, whom he dislikes, and says nothing about Rosie, with whom William is by then having an affair. Years later, when they meet in Yonkers, NY, Rosie tells William that on the night her and Ted's daughter dies of meningitis, she has a one-night-stand with Retford. Ted includes a fictionalized version in his most controversial novel. Retford is killed in the Boer War.

Isabel (Mrs. Barton) Trafford

A socialite who looks for promising artists to promote and manage, Isabel finds the late-Victorian novelist Edward (Ted) Driffield late in his career and begins attending the Saturday parties he and wife Rosie throw weekly. About fifty years old, small, slight, boneless, with large features, and white hair worn in a Venus of Milo style, Isabel dresses discreetly in black silk with jangling chains. She has a soft voice, smile, laugh, eyes, and manner. She is married to Barton Trafford, a clerk in the Home Office, who is also an authority on prehistoric man. Isabel's fame comes after publishing letters from an unnamed and deceased great novelist praising her many virtues. Barton then writes a life of the deceased to prove his genius rests on Isabel's shoulders.

Isabel takes over the flourishing career of the poet Jasper Gibbons as he puts out a new volume that the critics pan. When he comes to dinner drunk, Isabel drops him gracefully and bounces back by championing Ted. With Rosie, Isabel is affable but not condescending; Rosie cannot stand her. Literary critic Allgood Newton likens Isabel to Catherine of Aragon, claiming that she has a heart of gold. After Rosie runs off with her old lover, "Lord George" Kemp, Isabel and Barton take Ted into their home and on vacations, where she promotes him to fame. Isabel creates the myth of Rosie as a bad influence on Ted, which she passes on to Ted's second wife, Amy, and Ted's biographer, Alroy Kear.

Objects/Places

Blackstable

The boyhood home of narrator William Ashenden, Blackstable is a seaside town in Kent County in southeastern England between the Thames River and the Straits of Dover. During William's childhood, Blackstable flourishes as colliers deliver coal from Newcastle. Breezes off the North Sea make summers there delightful. The town consists of a long, winding road, High Street, sided by two-story buildings—homes and shops—and side streets are beginning to appear. The harbor is surrounded by narrow alleys. The principle pubs in town are the Railway Arms, the Duke of Kent, and the Bear and Key. A station of the London, Chatham & Dover Railway stops in Blackstable.

The local accent is East Anglian. Most natives are blue-eyed, high-cheeked, light-haired, clean, honest, ingenuous, and guileless. Summer vacationers from London are avoided and considered vulgar. Besides the Anglican church, which William's uncle pastors, Blackstable has a Congregational chapel, near which Edward (Ted) and Rosie Driffield live. While home on vacations, young William becomes their friend, before Ted achieves fame as a writer. The locals look down on them for their less-than-genteel backgrounds, and are little surprised when they abscond one night, owing most of the merchants in town money. Rosie, it turns out, continues visiting town under wraps, to see her old lover, "Lord George" Kemp, and eventually runs off with him to America. Ted buys an estate there, Fern Court, where he settles with second wife Amy, and eventually dies at a ripe old age. He is buried in the local parish.

Late in the novel, William returns to Blackstable to investigate Rosie and Kemp's disappearance. He finds that little has changed but everyone is new. The rectory has been turned into a school and its lands sold off and subdivided for housing. Colliers no longer stop in Blackstable and no one walks the esplanade.

Christie's

The famous auction house on King St., London, Christie's is described briefly as narrator William Ashenden kills time before a lunch engagement with fellow writer Alroy Kear.

Fern Court

The estate that renowned author Edward (Ted) Driffield buys after being jilted by first wife Rosie, Fern Court had been his obsession since boyhood, his father having been Miss Wolfe's bailiff (steward) there. It is located three miles from Blackstable. Fern Court is an unpretentious stucco house build around 1840. When he marries his nurse, Amy, Ted resists her refurnishing it entirely, but Amy gradually gets her way. The result is

exactly what one would expect of an author, including chintz and Chippendale. After Ted's death, his study is kept precisely as it had been for the benefit of tourists.

Half Moon Street

The sedate, respectable neighborhood where narrator William Ashenden rents an apartment from Miss Fellows, Half Moon Street is not as tumultuous as intersecting Piccadilly or congested Jermyn Street, where rentals are also available.

Haversham

A town near Blackstable, England, Haversham is home to Rosie Gann Driffield's mother. In her youth, when fired from the Railway Arms Inn, Rosie goes to work at the Prince of Wales's Feathers at Haversham.

Limpus Road

Running parallel to the Vauxhall Bridge Road in London, Limpus Road is where Edward and Rosie Driffield rent rooms after fleeing Blackstable in debt and disgrace. It is a wide street with identical houses of stucco, dingily painted. The area had once been respectable but has declined. The Driffields' house is dull red; they occupy the basement and ground floor, while the landlady lives on the second floor. The furniture is heavy and outdated, but Rosie adores it. They hold Saturday afternoon parties that attract artistic types, including narrator William Ashenden after he and Rosie run into one another on the street.

Piccadilly

A tumultuous major thoroughfare in London, Piccadilly often sees narrator William Ashenden strolling along, past the Ritz Hotel.

St. James's Street Club

Author Alroy Kear's sedate and empty club provides a venue for him and his luncheon guest, narrator William Ashenden, to begin talking after a long break. Its ante-chamber is hung with life-sized portraits of Victorian statesmen. The strangers' dining room is upstairs. It is clean and white, the waiter demure, and the food adequate. Roy speaks politely but authoritatively with the staff, including the long-time wine steward, Armstrong. Members are said to favor hock (German Rhine wines).

Tercanbury

A town near Blackstable, England Tercanbury is mentioned as a stop on the railway line to London. The "clever and handsome American wife of a sporting baron," Lady Hodmarsh relieves her boredom living there by giving parties where the nobility and gentry mingle with people from the arts. She arranges a reunion of narrator William Ashenden with Edward Driffield after thirty-five years separation. A detective novelist, Lord Scallion also attends. Hodmarsh proves to be a woman of intelligence and tact.

Vincent Square

Vincent Square is where narrator William Driffield lives while attending medical school at St. Luke's Hospital. The two-room, ground-floor apartment is owned by Mrs. Hudson. William visits her years later while reminiscing about his early days in London. Viewing his old rooms makes him think about all of the people who have passed through it. Nearby runs the busy Vauxal Bridge Road, which crosses the Thames to Victoria Station. William lives there two years before again meeting the Driffields, who live around the corner.

Yonkers, NY

The final home of Rosie Driffield Iggulden after her second husband "Lord George" Kemp with whom she flees England, dies in New York City. George leaves Rosie well-off financially, and she finds Yonkers has the feel of an English town. Narrator William Ashenden visits her there while in New York to produce one of his plays.

Social Sensitivity

While the main title of this book relates directly to the principal theme, the subtitle indicates a social phenomenon that interested W. Somerset Maugham, represented by the narrator, Willie Ashenden (Maugham's favorite name for his narrators, and the tide character of a later novel), in this very autobiographical novel. In brief, much of the text is devoted to showing that social snobbery is not only unjust but simply misguided and wrong.

The class system has always been stronger in England than in the United States, but the phenomenon persists in most of the world (albeit in various forms). The "skeleton" in the subtitle is Rosie Gann, a character who is derided and almost despised because of her humble origins (a poor family and the post of barmaid at a local tavern, the Railway Arms). Rosie, whose marriage to the writer Edward Driffield helps to set many of the citizens of Blackstable (the name reflects the name of the town where Maugham spent much of his youth, Whitstable) against Driffield, whose repute also suffers from the fact of his various jobs before settling down to writing: the sea and, as the curate says, "all sorts of things since then."

The narrator is quick to admit that he had imbibed the snobbery of his town and of his guardian, his uncle, the vicar of Blackstable (a model of class consciousness), who believes that Willie should never associate with such common folk as the Driffields: "I think it would be most undesirable." This attitude extends to a number of other characters in the town, including the "wild" and brash "Lord" George Kemp and another man who is looked down upon because he is "in trade." After Willie comes to know the Driffields (surreptitiously), and after he has learned more of life and the world (the novel is formed of some nine time frames, with many flashbacks), he achieves the essential truth of his background: I do not know that the people I lived among were pretentious in the sense of making themselves out to be richer or grander than they really were, but looking back it does seem to me that they lived a life of pretenses. They dwelt behind a mask of respectability.

This last word fairly well defines the kind of society that Willie learns to judge accurately and to deal with on his own terms—so that, when Alroy Kear, a writer who wishes to pen a biography of the late Edward Driffield, now viewed as "one of the greatest of the later Victorian novelists," asks Ashenden if he recalls the first Mrs. Driffield (Rosie), whom Kear regards as "dreadfully common," Willie says, "Yes, very distinctly . . . She was sweet."

It is Kear's project that forms the basic framework for the plot of the novel, stimulating Ashenden's memories of the Driffields and his own past. Since Mrs. Driffield (the second one; Rosie had left Edward) is involved in the undertaking, and since Kear (and, later, the narrator) is deep into the London literary scene, Willie finds many opportunities to provide disquisitions on the importance of social prominence in the building and maintenance of a literary career. This involves being at the right parties and being nice

to the right people, the most notable one in the book being Mrs. Barton Trafford, whose influence can and does help to "make or break" authors.

She is, however, something of a genuine critic herself: "She was a great reader.

Little that was noteworthy escaped her attention, and she was quick to establish personal relations with any young writer who showed promise." Mrs. Trafford is equally hasty in dropping any author who has lost favor with the public. So, there is, in the literary London of Ashenden's time, a sort of class system, in which the successful are upper class, and the failures are definitely second-class citizens of this confined world.

As the narrator recalls more and more about such circumstances and about Rosie and Edward, and becomes more acquainted with Alroy Kear and Mrs. Trafford and the second Mrs. Driffield, he turns further away from the social (and, by extension, the artistic) snobbery that so marked the days of his youth, when he, for example, first encountered Edward Driffield (Willie was fifteen at the time): "He was a smallish man with a beard and he was dressed rather loudly in a bright brown knickerbocker suit, . . .

Knickerbockers were uncommon then, at least in Blackstable, and being young and fresh from school I immediately set the fellow down as a cad." The rest of Cakes and Ale is largely the development of a correction of this early attitude. It develops an image of the intelligent, sensitive young artist (writer) who overcomes his own snobbery.

Techniques

The novel falls into a number of time frames. As Willie Ashenden is urged by Kear and Mrs. Driffield to recall incidents relating to Edward Driffield for Kear's "sanitized" biography, the narrator remembers events from various periods when he associated with Rosie and, sometimes, her husband. They are not presented in temporal sequence; however, Maugham introduces each one in such a way that the time posting is clear.

For instance, Willie's early recollections of meeting the Driffields in Blackstable do not appear until Chapter V, some fifty pages into the text. And, the last chapter relates Ashenden's final meeting with Rosie (long after everyone in England believes that she is dead) in New York; this meeting takes place before the events of the preceding several chapters.

As usual, the first person point of view serves Maugham well, partly because, aside from the realistic arrangement of recollections, it provides the author a chance to introduce his own opinions on authors, literature, and life. Perhaps the most intense of these attitudes is that one which appears on the penultimate page of the novel. After reviewing the "tribulation" of authorship (poverty, indifference by readers, and the like), Maugham states that there is one great "compensation" in which writing becomes an act of therapy: Whenever he has anything on his mind, whether it be a harassing reflection, grief at the death of a friend, unrequited love, wounded pride, anger at the treachery of someone to whom he had shown kindness, in short any emotion or any perplexing thought, he has only to put it down in black and white, using it as a theme of a story or the decoration of an essay, to forget all about it. He is the only free man.

Themes

Fame

A central and fairly cynical theme in Cakes and Ale is that the English people revere old age and as a result laud authors twenty years after they have ceased to write anything useful. No longer viewing them as potential rivals, younger writers can afford to praise them and, since intelligent people cease to read after age thirty, they prefer the books of their youth and encourage their authors to continuing knocking out inconsequential works. Longevity becomes genius—and Edward (Ted) Driffield lasts a long time. In the 1860s, his talent receives moderate praise; by his seventieth birthday he is seen as an overlooked treasure and there begins a rush for his books. Appreciative essays and studies are penned, and by his seventy-fifth birthday, Ted is proclaimed a genius. At eighty, he is the "Grand Old Man of English Letters," a position he holds until his death. There is no one to take Ted's place.

Fellow authors William Ashenden, who had known Ted "back when," and Alroy (Roy) Kears, who has been commissioned to write an authorized biography of the late master, realizes that he is not a great novelist, but each suggests that the other might some day rise to the top—barring any unexpected young geniuses being discovered. In his Preface, W. Somerset Maugham describes how this theme had long impressed him: how those who are lauded look back to when they were struggling, and how they embrace fame. Maugham by then is, of course, becoming his generation's Grand Old Man. Ted seems to become more eccentric. While he lives, his second wife controls his life and access by the public, and after his death wants his biography well sanitized. Roy realizes that he might increase sales by telling the story warts and all, but does not want to upset the widow Amy and realizes there is also risk in alienating the public.

The novel is also populated by minor writers and artists who rise and fall into oblivion. The case of one poet is instructional. He gets a top-flight press agent, publishes a volume rather like the first one, which brings him modest fame, and the critics hate it. He turns to alcohol and is dropped by his agent, who moves on to represent Ted. Ted expects a mixed but generally positive response to each new work and steadily rising income. Once he is shocked when a book is condemned by rabid moralists. Ted shrugs, begins writing the next book, and his fame,despite the controversy, continues to rise.

Religion

Religion comes off rather shabbily in Cakes and Ale. Narrator William Ashenden is raised in the Blackstable village rectory by a strict aunt and uncle. He recalls Sunday morning rides to church and being admonished to behave properly in his pew. His aunt, belonging to an impoverished noble family of Germany, cannot abide the working classes—although she is otherwise a devout Christian. The uncle, a Vicar, judges everyone and everything. Scriptural epigrams come from his mouth as proof-text. Face-

to-face, he is timid, and is also lazy, so a less stringent Curate (assistant) does the day-to-day work of visiting the sick and other ministrations. The Vicar withholds lay offices from those of whom he disapproves and in similar ways acts perfectly petty. The Vicar gives no impression of living a Christian life or providing a Christian example. The church seems to mean nothing to William after growing up in its bosom.

Edward (Ted) Driffield's writing career is said to begin when the "purple patch" is in style, when God is being phased out of novels in favor of Pan (lust personified). Pan then gives way to an idealization of Beauty, which is supposedly Ted's forte. In the controversial novel The Cup of Life, against which moralists revolt and shout down those who defend the quality of its writing, Ted describes the loss of a daughter to meningitis and the fictional wife's one-night stand with a stranger to restore her sanity. Years later, William learns from Ted's first wife, Rosie, that the story is true and that Ted had wrestled fiercely with a God who would allow such sufferings to come to a little girl. Ted believes that God will have much to answer for to humankind at the Last Judgment, rather than vice versa.

Sex

Sex runs through Cakes and Ale on two levels. First, there is an ongoing debate among artistic types whether marriage interferes with the muse. In any event, wives are resented at literary occasions but invited out of obligation, and the tension is uncomfortable for all.

The second level focuses on Rosie Gann, a barmaid at the seedy Railway Arms in Blackstable, England. She has already gained a reputation for more than talking with customers when "Lord George" Kemp drops in for a drink and begins pursuing her. Kemp well-known in town and has a wife and three children. The inn's owner, Mrs. Reeves, fires Rosie as a tramp. Kemp moves his drinking to the Prince of Wales's Feathers at Haversham when Rosie is hired there. They begin a clandestine affair that lasts for years. At the Feathers, emerging novelist Edward (Ted) Driffield is also attracted, and marries Rosie when she becomes pregnant. People say that he marries her because no respectable girl would have him.

Early in the novel, as an adolescent, narrator William Ashenden sees Rosie and Kemp kissing in the dark and hurrying off to a field for their tryst. Maintaining that he knows all about sex (primarily from reading novels), he asks naïve questions of Mary-Ann, the house maid who had cared for him as a child. She tells him that avoiding pregnancy is more a factor of luck than planning, leaving him puzzled. Years later in London, with two years of medical school under his belt, William knows what is happening when Rosie seduces him. He weeps like a child. What happens in bed is glossed over, but William's appreciation of Rosie's naked body is enthusiastic. They become regular lovers. William is not sure whether her other male friends also enjoy her charms and she tells him to take her or leave her as she is.

Rosie is still seeing Kemp on weekends (pretending to visit her mother) and they run away to America together. Moralists and artists both condemn her for different reasons, and a new Mrs. Driffield helps Ted's writing career reach the top of the profession before he dies. There is no suggestion of a sexual aspect to that marriage, although there may have been. William meets Rosie again in Yonkers, NY, and learns from her about the one-night stand she has on the night that her daughter dies horribly of meningitis. Ted includes a fictionalized version in his controversial novel The Cup of Life.

Significant Topics

This novel was Maugham's favorite, partly because of the person upon whom he fashioned Rosie, but also because of the opportunity to set forth his belief that honest emotions and good will are more important than good manners and "playing by the rules" of society. As Maugham once wrote, "I prefer a loose woman to a selfish one and a wanton to a fool." Rosie is certainly loose and wanton, but she is unselfish and no fool. Indeed, her sexual generosity causes much of the criticism that is leveled at her by "society" people.

As the second Mrs. Driffield says of her, "I don't wish to seem spiteful, but I'm afraid I don't think that she can have been a very nice person." This statement elicits from the narrator a clear thematic comment: That's where you make a mistake . . .

She was a very nice woman. I never saw her in a bad temper. You only had to say you wanted something for her to give it to you. I never heard her say a disagreeable thing about anyone. She had a heart of gold.

One must admit that some of Ashenden's warm feeling for Rosie stems from his own love affair with her. The scene in which they commence the romance suggests the tenderness of Rosie's nature.

As the inexperienced and sensitive young narrator begins to weep while Rosie is stroking his face, Rosie responds typically: "'Oh, honey, what is it? What's the matter? Don't. Don't!' She put her arms round my neck and began to cry too, and she kissed my lips and eyes and my wet cheeks. She undid her bodice and lowered my head till it rested on her bosom."

The affair plays a large role in Willie's growing up and his learning to appreciate warmth of feeling and honest emotion.

The disappointment that he experiences when he finds that Rosie has also, during their romance, slept with another man moves him deeply. However, Rosie's reaction to his complaints about her actions, including accepting a fur cape from the man and other affairs that the narrator has learned of, typifies her vision of the way she wants to live her life. She smiles and gently says, "Oh, my dear, why d'you bother your head about any others?

What harm does it do you? Don't I give you a good time! Aren't you happy when you're with me?" The key words here are "give" and "happy." Rosie likes to make people happy, and sexual favors are an effective way for her to do so. So, her hedonism emerges when she declares a moment later, "Let's have a good time while we can." As Willie's ire abates, Rosie closes the scene by whispering, "You must take me as I am, you know."

Doing this is primarily what Ashenden recognizes as the sensible way to proceed.

And, the "taking" of Rosie extends to her later behavior, when she leaves Edward Driffield and goes to America with the man from Blackstable with whom she had an early affair: "Lord" George Kemp.

The morality of this action reminds one of her earlier departure with Edward from Blackstable, leaving unpaid debts— only, this time Kemp not only owes money but also is the subject of an arrest warrant. Driffield seems crushed by her defection, but he marries his nurse a while later and seems to survive the "betrayal" well.

Near the close of the story, the narrator attempts to explain why Driffield had put up with Rosie's affairs with other men. In doing so, he partly restates other thematic remarks and also refines his view of Rosie's most important qualities: You see, she wasn't a woman who ever inspired love. Only affection. It was absurd to be jealous over her.

She was like a clear, deep pool in a forest glade, into which it's heavenly to plunge, but it is neither less cool nor less crystalline because a tramp and a gypsy and a gamekeeper have plunged into it before you.

While Alroy Kear accuses Ashenden of being "lyrical," Willie has, in this extended simile, presented his final estimate of the salient aspects of Rosie's nature.

A secondary (and perhaps, to some readers, distracting) theme has to do with the profession of writing and the practice of gaining and maintaining a literary reputation. Maugham had firm opinions about authors and authorship. His review of them, ranging from Keats to Carlyle, reveals his changing literary tastes (perhaps to excess), including his belief that Driffield's books are somewhat tedious and that some writers gain a lofty reputation merely by dint of remaining alive until critics and the public develop a sort of reverence for an icon.

This is what has happened with Driffield, and Ashenden deplores the phenomenon, which is perpetrated largely by biographers like Alroy Kear and lionizers such as Mrs. Barton Trafford. The moral imperfection of the latter can be seen in this comment by the narrator on her reaction to Driffield's marrying a second time without consulting her: "I think it may be not unjustly said that Mrs. Barton Trafford fairly ran over with the milk of human kindness, but all the same I have an inkling that if ever the milk of human kindness was charged with vitriol, here was a case in point." So, it is the hypocrisy and falsity of the whole literary "system" to which Ashenden objects.

A striking example of this literary evil can be seen in the introduction of Allgood Newton: "in those days he was the best-known critic in England." This highly influential person is a grim illustration of the sort of negative vision held by the narrator of such power in the hands of such hypocrisy: "He was very amiable to the authors he met at Driffield's, and said charming and flattering things to them, but when they were gone he was very amusing at their expense." The whole literary scene appalls Ashenden, since it is not peopled by those who would fit into Rosie's explanation of why she left with George Kemp (the last words in the text): "He was always such a perfect gentleman."

Style

Point of View

In Cakes and Ale, W. Somerset Maugham creates a alter ego, William Ashenden to reflect on the nature and course of literary fame. The novel is entirely told in the first person singular past tense. Chapter sixteen is entirely devoted to William contemplating why authors write in the first person, which can be heroic, humorous, or charming—unless one is describing the actions of a "plain damned fool." Going through a number of authorities, he decides it is a function of age: one begins to write only about what one has experienced, and the first person is useful for this.

Maugham denies in the preface to his 1950 edition of his 1930 classic (his favorite work) that he bases Edward (Ted) Driffield on the recently deceased novelist Thomas Hardy, despite some similarities; Maugham had often thought about eminent authors receiving homage and wondered how they might look back on their frustrating beginnings. Rather, he embellishes upon the story of the first author he ever meets, an obscure, forgotten, and now dead man. He bases Rosie on a love from his youth whose smile and engaging manner he had long sought to let live again in the pages of a novel. While author Hugh Walpole claims unhappily to have been portrayed unfavorably as Alroy Kear, Maugham claims that this character is a composite of many writers, including himself.

Maugham thus writes about being a writer. He describes two in considerable detail, neither of whose works he finds attractive but admits that their fame and longevity indicate he might be wrong. He describes himself as a writer no longer in vogue. Most of the novel he devotes to recalling events thirty to forty years in the past and admits there are blanks and probable mistakes. Several characters are used to show how juicy gossip gets around, and the various characters speak their mind on many subjects, but everything is careful screened through William's intellect and point of view.

Setting

Cakes and Ale is set primarily in England within two time frames. In the present time, narrator William Ashenden is a writer, not particularly in vogue, living in London in the twentieth century. Automobiles, buses, and telephones are in common use, and a reference to a 1921 Liebfraumilch being no longer available suggests late in that decade, but Marcel Proust is spoken of as still alive. No effect of the worldwide Great Depression that begins in 1929 are seen. Novelist Edward Driffield has been dead one year.

For much of the book, however, William Ashenden looks back forty years to his adolescence in Blackstable, where he grows up with his aunt and uncle and is befriended by the still unacclaimed author Driffield and his first wife, Rosie. This is the

time of such late Victorian writers as Charles Dickens. Horse-drawn carts and walking ("shank's pony") are the chief modes of transportation. In Blackstable, having a new "safety bicycle" is a sign of prosperity if not ostentation. Invented in the late 1880s, it helps establish to when the early references refer.

William Ashenden then attends medical school in London a few years later, and around his twentieth year again become part of the Driffields' social circle. They live in a worn-down section of London, but Rosie and her male friends, including William, frequent some of the swankier restaurants and theaters. When Rosie absconds a second time, this time to America with an old lover from Blackstable days, the action shifts to the present time and William revisits Blackstable to look meet with Ted's second wife and biographer Alroy Kear, they hope to provide background information on the early periods of Ted's life. The town is little changed but totally unfamiliar.

Finally, William recalls visiting Rosie in Yonkers, NY, where she lives as a wealthy widow. She has an upscale apartment in a town she feels is a bit like England, which she misses but has never seen again. Tea time serves to remind her.

Language and Meaning

Cakes and Ale is written by a great wordsmith about wordsmiths. Predictably, the vocabulary is rich and literary allusions plentiful. Introducing Alroy (Roy) Kear, W. Somerset Maugham's alter ego, William Ashenden, himself an author not currently in vogue, begins talking about writers. Roy caters to popular tastes. While Roy holds Edward (Ted) Driffield to be the last great Victorian novelist, William has always found him boring, despite having known him personally. William is proud that the reading public at large has caught up with his opinions of Carlyle, George Meredith, and Walter Pater. His favorites are pedestrian: Tristram Shandy, Amelie, Vanity Fair, Madame Bovary, La Chartreuse de Parme, Anna Karenina, and Wordsworth, Keats, and Verlaine. William attends a tea party featuring the town's first "New Woman" and discussing three proto-feminist authors whose works his uncle feels should be banned by the government or burned. In his teenage years, William would have burnt the only one of Ted's books. This leads to a long discussion of literature dealing with coarse characters and subjects, including Dickens.

Ted's writing career begins with the "purple patch" is in style. God is phased out in favor of Pan (lust personified), and Pan gives way to an idealization of Beauty, which is supposedly Ted's forte. Maugham through narrator William gives a tour de force on aesthetics, bringing in Jeremy Taylor, Shakespeare, Dickens, Keats, Racine, Henry James, and Lytton Strachey. Maugham shows no mercy to readers unfamiliar with the briefest of citations. Much of the story is given over to how Roy will portray Ted in his authorized biography. Ted's widow wants history to be carefully sanitized and Roy cares more about advancing his own career than treating Ted's place in literature. The painter Hillier allows William to comment on art (Titian and Van Dyke come out earlier, in passing). Monet, Sisley, Renoir, Leighton, Alma-Tadema, and G. F. Watts are evaluated.

Talking about his love affair with Rosie, William offers a long aside about why authors write in the first person, particularly when (as he is about to) portraying themselves as a "plain damned fool." He quotes Evelyn Waugh's dictum on it being "contemptible," and describes his literary search through Percy Lubbock, E. M. Forster, Edwin Muir, Defoe, Sterne, Thackeray, Dickens, Emily Brontë, and Proust. Meanwhile, Ted provokes a fierstorm by publishing The Cup of Life, which includes a passage about a woman who has a one-night affair after her daughter's lingering death. Ted usually gets bland reviews and enjoys modest sales, but when moralists launch an hysterical crusade, shouting down those who call for an objective evaluation of the book's over-all quality. Finally, a stuffy literary critic, Allgood Newton, is introduced who manages to work into the news that Rosie has left her husband obscure references to Immanuel Kant and the fall of the Bastille, "Hector flying," the "rakish purlieus of Pimlico," and Dr. Johnson. Cakes and Ale ought to inspire any reader to ever higher levels of literacy.

Structure

Cakes and Ale consists of twenty-six numbered but untitled chapters, which vary a great deal in length. There is no division into larger parts. The narrator, William Ashenden, is approached by a writer colleague with whom he has had little contact in a long while. He rightly suspects an ulterior motive. Alroy Kear has been asked by the widow of a famous novelist, one year departed, to write a biography of her husband. She has collected a great deal of information that fits her view of how her husband should be portrayed, and Kear agrees to omit or downplay less than savory elements. He wants, however, to see the whole picture in order to make the creative decisions himself.

William as a teenager is befriended by the author, Edward Driffield, before he becomes famous. Ted is then married to a former barmaid, Rosie, and himself has lived a less than genteel life. William's acquaintance with the Driffields ends when they skip town, leaving a host of creditors unpaid. Years later, as a medical student in London, William runs into Rosie Driffield on the street and is again drawn into their orbit. Ted Driffield is beginning to make a name for himself, and is championed by Isabel (Mrs. Barton) Trafford, a socialite who looks for promising artists to promote and manage. William and Rosie become lovers and he suspects that she is having affairs with other male friends. This second period ends when Rosie runs off with "Lord George" Kemp, a former lover from before Ted.

While recovering from pneumonia, Ted marries his nurse, Amy, who rearranges his life completely and molds him into a famous and cherished author. William is reunited with Ted once in this period and briefly meets Amy. Kear, however, becomes close to them and is asked to write his life after his death. Amy and Kear both denigrate Rosie and see the only good thing about her is abandoning Ted so his genius could flourish. They believe her dead for some ten years. William, however, knows that she is alive in Yonkers, NY, a wealthy widow, for he has visited her there. She reveals that a harrowing passage in one of his novels is based on fact: they lose a child and she has a one-night stand to help survive it.

This chronological thread is developed in bits and pieces as William meditates on the writer's craft—his own, Kear's, and Ted's. He often goes on long tangents about characters and places, some of which obscure the story line. He has present-day contact with Kear and Amy, and three points of contact with Ted and Rosie. More recently, he meets Rosie in America and learns the facts he does not intend to turn over to the biographer. The novel leaves open what becomes of the project in which the narrator has little real interest.

Quotes

"Roy Kear suffered from none of these tribulations. It sounds a little brutal to say that when he had got all he could out of people he dropped them; that it would take so long to put the matter more delicately, and would need so subtle an adjustment of hints, half-tones, and allusions, playful or tender, that such being at bottom the fact, I think it as well to leave it at that. Most of us when we do a caddish thing harbour resentment against the person we have done it to, but Roy's heart, always in the right place, never permitted him such pettiness. He could use a man very shabbily without afterward bearing him the slightest ill-will.
" 'Poor old Smith,' he would say. 'He is a dear; I'm so fond of him. Pity he's growing so bitter. I wish one could do something for him. No, I haven't seen him in years. It's no good trying to keep up old friendships. It's painful for both sides. The fact is, one grows out of people, and the only thing is to face it.," Chap. 1, p. 13

" 'Why, what did she do?' I asked, my eyes popping out of my head.
" 'What didn't she do?' said Mary-Ann. 'What d'you think your uncle would say if he caught me tellin' you things like that? There wasn't a man who come in to 'ave a drink that she didn't carry on with. No matter who they was. She couldn't stick to anybody, it was just one man after another. They tell me it was simply 'orrible. That was when it begun with Lord George. It wasn't the sort of place he was likely to go to, he was too grand for that, but they say he went in accidental like one day when his train was late, and he saw her. And after that he was never out of the place, mixin' with all them common rough people, and of course they all knew what he was there for, and him with a wife and three children. Oh, I was sorry for her! And the talk it made. Well, it got so Mrs. Reeves said she wasn't going to put up with it another day and she gave her her wages and told her to pack her box and go. Good riddance to bad rubbish, that's what I said." Chap. 5, pp. 74-75

"I was much more shocked than Mary-Ann. I was a very respectable youth. The reader cannot have failed to observe that I accepted the conventions of my class as if they were the laws of Nature, and though debts on the grand scale in books had seemed to me romantic, and duns and money lenders were familiar figures to my fancy, I could not but think it mean and paltry not to pay the tradesmen's books. I listened with confusion when people talked in my presence of the Driffields, and when they spoke of them as my friends I said: 'Hang it all, I just knew them'; and when they asked: 'Weren't they fearfully common?' I said: 'Well, after all they didn't exactly suggest the Vere de Veres, you know.' Poor Mrs. Galloway was dreadfully upset." Chap. 10, p. 116

"We know of course that women are habitually constipated, but to represent them in fiction as being altogether devoid of a back passage seems to me really an excess of chivalry. I am surprised that they care to see themselves thus limned." Chap. 11, pp. 120-121

"Of course, all this is between ourselves; I'm merely telling it to show you that in writing his life I shall have to use a good deal of tact. I don't see how one can deny that he was just a wee bit unscrupulous in money matters and he had a kink in him that made him take a strange pleasure in the society of his inferiors and some of his personal habits were rather disagreeable, but I don't think that side of him was the most significant. I don't want to say anything that's untrue, but I do think there's a certain amount that's better left unsaid.'
" 'Don't you think it would be more interesting if you went the whole hog and drew him warts and all?'
" 'Oh, I couldn't. Amy Driffield would never speak to me again. She only asked me to do the life because she felt she could trust my discretion. I must behave like a gentleman.'
" 'It's very hard to be a gentleman and a writer.'
" "I don't see why. And besides, you know what the critics are. If you tell the truth they only say you're cynical and it does an author no good to get a reputation cynicism.'" Chap. 11, pp. 139-140

"I have indeed sometimes thought that now that the House of Lords must inevitably in a short while be abolished, it would be a very good plan if the profession of literature were by law confined to its members and their wives and children. It would be a graceful compensation that the British people might offer the peers in return for the surrender of their hereditary privileges. It would be a means of support for those (too many) whom devotion to the public cause in keeping chorus girls and race horses and playing chemin de fer has impoverished, and a pleasant occupation for the rest who by the process of natural selection have in the course of time become unfit to do anything but govern the British Empire." Chap. 14, p. 162

"When I arrived Rosie still wore the dress in which she had been sitting and they were having a cup of tea. Hillier opened the door for me, and still holding my hand led me up to the large canvas.
" 'There she is,' he said.
"He had painted Rosie full length, just a little less than life-size, in an evening dress of white silk. It was not at all like the academy portraits I was accustomed to. I did not know what to say, so I said the first thing that came into my head.
" 'When will it be finished?'
" 'It is finished,' he answered.
"I blushed furiously. I felt a perfect fool. I had not then acquired the technique that I flatter myself now enables me to deal competently with the works of modern artists. If this were the place I could write a very neat little guide to enable the amateur of pictures to deal to the satisfaction of their painters with the most diverse manifestations of the creative instinct." Chap. 14, pp. 178-179

" 'I must get up,' she said. 'I don't want your landlady to see me.'
" 'There's plenty of time.'

"Her breasts when she leaned over me were heavy on my chest. In a little while she got out of bed. I lit the candle. She turned to the glass and tied up her hair and then she looked for a moment at her naked body. Her waist was naturally small; though so well developed she was very slender; her breasts were straight and firm and they stood out from the chest as though carved in marble. It was a body made for the act of love. In the light of the candle, struggling now with the increasing day, it was all silvery gold; and the only colour was the rosy pink of her hard nipples.
"We dressed in silence. She did not put on her corsets again, but rolled them up and I wrapped them in a piece of newspaper. We tiptoed along the passage and when I opened the door and we stepped out into the street the dawn ran to meet us like a cat leaping up the steps. The square was empty; already the sun was shining on the eastern windows. I felt as young as the day. We walked arm in arm til we came to the corner of Limpus Road.
" 'Leave me here,' said Rosie. 'One never knows.'" Chap. 16, pp. 194-195

"It was this part of the book that caused the sudden storm that burst on the wretched Driffield's head. For a few days after publication it looked as though it would run its course like the rest of his novels, namely that it would have substantial reviews, laudatory on the whole but with reservations, and that the sales would be respectable, but modest. Rosie told me that he expected to make three hundred pounds out of it and was talking of renting a house on the river for the summer. The first two or three notices were noncommittal; then in one of the morning papers appeared a violent attack. There was a column of it. The book was described as gratuitously offensive, obscene, and the publishers were rated for putting it before the public. Harrowing pictures were drawn of the devastating effect in must have on the youth of England. It was described as an insult to womanhood. The reviewer protested against the possibility of such a work falling into the hands of young boys and innocent maidens. Other papers followed suit. The more foolish demanded that the book should be suppressed and some asked themselves gravely if this was not a case where the public prosecutor might with fitness intervene. Condemnation was universal if here and there a courageous writer, accustomed to the more realistic tone of continental fiction, asserted that Edward Driffield had never written anything better, he was ignored. His honest opinion was ascribed to a base desire to play to the gallery. The libraries barred the book and the lessors of the railway bookstalls refused to stock it.
"All this was naturally very unpleasant for Edward Driffield, but he bore it with philosophic calm. He shrugged his shoulders.
" 'They say it isn't true,' he smiled. 'They can go to hell. It is true.'" Chap. 18, pp. 207-208

"I imagine that never did Mrs. Barton Trafford exhibit more preëminently her greatness of soul than in the manner in which she met this situation. Did she cry, Judas, Judas? Did she tear her hair and fall on the floor and kick her heels in an attack of hysterics? Did she turn on the mild and learned Barton and call him a blithering old fool? Did she inveigh against all the faithlessness of men and the wantonness of women or did she relieve her wounded feelings by shouting at the top of her voice a string of those

obscenities with which the alienists tell us the chastest females are surprisingly acquainted? Not at all. She wrote a charming letter of congratulations to Driffield and she wrote to his bride telling her that she was glad to think that now she would have two loving friends instead of one. She begged them both to come and stay with her on their return to London." Chap. 22, p. 229

"Roy burst out laughing and Mrs. Driffield put her hand up to her mouth to hide her smile.
" 'Oh, come, Mr. Ashenden, that's really going too far. After all, let's face it, she was a nymphomaniac.'
" 'I think that's a very silly word,' I said.
" 'Well, then, let me say that she can hardly have been a very good woman to treat poor Edward as she did. Of course it was a blessing in disguise. If she hadn't run away from him he might have had to bear that burden for the rest of his life, and with such a handicap he could never have reached the position he did. But the fact remains that she was notoriously unfaithful to him. From what I hear she was absolutely promiscuous.'
" 'You don't understand,' I said. 'She was a very simple woman. Her instincts were healthy and ingenuous. She loved to make people happy. She loved love.'
" 'Do you call that love?'
" 'Well, then, the act of love. She was naturally affectionate. When she liked anyone it was quite natural for her to go to bed with him. She never thought twice about it. It was not vice; it wasn't lasciviousness; it was her nature. She gave herself as naturally as the sun gives heat or the flowers their perfume. It was a pleasure to her and she liked to give pleasure to others. It had no effect on her character; she remained sincere, unspoiled, and artless.'
"Mrs. Driffield looked as though she had taken a dose of castor oil and had just been trying to get the taste of it out of her mouth by sucking a lemon." Chap. 25, pp. 251-252

"Rosie's voice broke.
" 'Was it that death Driffield described in The Cup of Life?'
" 'Yes, that's it. I always thought it so funny of Ted. He couldn't bear to speak of it, any more than I could, but he wrote it all down; he didn't leave out a thing; even little things I hadn't noticed at the time he put in and then I remembered them. You'd think he was just heartless, but he wasn't, he was upset just as much as I was. When we used to go home at night he'd cry like a child. Funny chap, wasn't he?'" Chap. 26, p. 262

Key Questions

Inasmuch as so much emphasis is placed on Rosie Gann/Driffield/Kemp, some thought might be given to the true moral worth of this leading character. She does, after all, in addition to her sexual liberality, run off with two men (in one case, leaving her husband), both of whom are deep in debt and are escaping their creditors. Could such an action be excused? Is Maugham treating this aspect of Rosie's behavior too lightly? Does the novel suffer because of this authorial generosity?

Also, the whole matter of the literary world (essentially that of London) shown by Maugham might be viewed as both unnecessary and distracting. Can reasons be found to support the view that these passages advance the plot, help to develop an important theme, or the like?

Further, do Maugham's asides on writers, authorship, and other related topics mar the effect of the text? Would the novel be better if it were shorter and focused more on the Rosie theme?

Then, does this point of view, which Maugham favored so frequently, really "work" the most effectively? Would a reader like to know just what is in the mind of another character besides Ashenden? Could providing such information deepen the texture of the book and help to develop a more substantial theme?

1. Are the central "conflicts" in the plot clearly enough developed? For example, the novel is often cited as an example of Art versus Life, a philosophical idea widely discussed during the Victorian era.

The question being, should artists (and writers) mire themselves in the realities of life, or should they confine their sensibilities to beauty? How does Rosie reflect this idea? Does Life prevail in a believable manner?

2. The presentation of "Lord" George Kemp is not an extended one. Should he be developed as a fuller character, especially since Rosie abandons Driffield and her marriage vows for him?

3. Maugham is often praised for the reality of his settings, partly because he used places he knew well (Whitstable and London) as models for locations in the novel. Is this praise valid? Would the novel be more lively and interesting if the settings were less "realistic" and presented with more imaginative flair?

4. The point is often made that Driffield changes, for the worse, in the course of the plot, chiefly because of his growing fame and the adulation of many readers.

Does this change seem genuine? Does the wink that he gives Ashenden late in the story suggest that he has not really changed but is only playing a part?

5. Since Maugham's own marriage failed, many readers believe him to have scorned the marital state. Does that belief appear to be supported by the action in this work? Does the author seem to believe, for example, that marriage often is very harmful to the talents of a gifted author? Can any evidence be adduced for this assertion?

6. Can a useful comparison be made between the second Mrs. Driffield and Mrs. Trafford, especially in their treatment of Driffield and his reputation? Do these women have essentially the same goal in mind, what Ashenden calls, with Mrs. Trafford, a clear view of "the main chance"?

7. In view of the modern attitude toward sexual relations, does Rosie's vision of the man-woman association seem defensible? Does Maugham offer a sufficiently compelling picture to support a positive reaction to her?

8. Apart from the narrator and Rosie, who is the most engaging and admirable character in the book? Does the author appear to want such a judgment to be made by the reader?

9. Does Rosie's reaction to the death of her child, spending the night with a man other than her husband, signify that she is of a lower moral character, or is it another example of Maugham's realistic psychology?

Topics for Discussion

Why is it felt that marriage interferes with artistic creation? Cite cases in the novel that prove or disprove it.

How is Rosie's promiscuity depicted in the novel and how does Edward's attitude towards it change over the years. To what might the change be attributed?

What is Mary-Ann's role in the novel? Beyond background information, what does she add to the story?

What does Edward's return to Blackstable contribute to the novel?

What does Edward's return to his old London rooming house contribute to the novel?

How does having Allgood Newton deliver the news about Rosie's flight from England contribute to the story? What does it say about the company William is then keeping?

How do you think Alroy Kear will depict Rosie in his biography of Ted Driffields? What factors will go into his decision? How would you describe her?

Literary Precedents

Maugham never claimed to have a lively imagination, and he readily admitted that he took characters from people he knew or at least had observed. There is, however, a long tradition of such a practice. In the English novel, both Sterne and Smollett attacked enemies by unflattering fictional portrayals. So did Dickens and Disraeli. In later years, the same was done by H. G. Wells and Aldous Huxley.

In France, after the publication of Madame Bovary (1857), Flaubert was accused of painting a nasty picture of an acquaintance—he replied that Emma Bovary was actually himself. In America, Hemingway formed a character on Sherwood Anderson, and Thomas Wolfe created characters after Sinclair Lewis and a number of other contemporaries. Not all of the portraitures are negative; and the practice, while not invented by Maugham, was brought by him to a high level (many readers believe that he "played fair" more readily with his "models" than did many other authors). And, as several critics have noted, people who have never heard of Hugh Walpole and find Hardy difficult reading, enjoy Cakes and Ale immensely.

To find a precedent for the creation of a flawed but admired "heroine," one need look no further than Fielding's Amelia (1751) and Richardson's Pamela (1740).

Related Titles

Since most of Maugham's fiction, certainly the major novels, is autobiographical, almost any of the principal works could be said to be related in technique, style, point of view, and theme to Cakes and Ale. For instance, he never presents a critical view of an unpretentious female character, especially a lowborn one; he tends to reserve his pejorative views for upper-class, haughty women. His dependence on first person point of view in The Razor's Edge (1944; see separate entry) and The Moon and Sixpence (1919; see separate entry) and the third person limited in Of Human Bondage (1915; see separate entry) gives all these works, as it does Cakes and Ale, a focus and coherence that would be much more difficult to achieve with other points of view. In a sense, one might assert that all of Maugham's central writings are of a piece, formed by the same mind and displaying essentially the same beliefs and methods.

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