

# **Dogeaters Study Guide**

**Dogeaters by Jessica Hagedorn**

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# Contents

<a href="#">Dogeaters Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Act I, Scenes 1-8 Synopsis.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Act I: Scenes 9-11.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Act I: Scenes 12-15.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Act I: Scenes 16-17.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Act II: Scenes 1-7.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Act II: Scenes 8-11.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Act II: Scenes 12-16.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">32</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">34</a>

# Plot Summary

Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* is a play in two acts that deals with the brutal suppression of political opposition to Ferdinand Marcos's government in the Philippines, as framed against the first Manila International Film Festival. Hagedorn playfully rearranges historical events and presents the harrowing and tragic narrative as a radio soap opera.

The play is narrated throughout by the radio soap opera personalities Nestor Norales and Barbara Villanueva. They introduce the central characters of the play. There is Joey Sands, a male prostitute; Senator Avila, leader of the opposition; Romeo and Trini, young lovers who dream of movie stardom; and Daisy Avila, beauty queen, daughter of Senator Avila and lover to Santos Tirador, the communist leader of the New People's Army, the NPA. Observing all of this is Filipino expat Rio Gonzaga, who is back in Manila for her grandmother's funeral.

As the Film Festival approaches, Imelda Marcos is fending off accusations that she hastily buried one hundred killed workers laying the foundation for her new film center. Meanwhile, Senator Avila continues to stir up worker unrest, supposedly safe from harm by his relationship with the head of the military, General Ledesma. Rumors abound that his daughter Daisy is pregnant with Santos' child. As B-List celebrities arrive in Manila for the festival, Joey is picked up by the German director Rainer Fassbinder, whom he takes to a sex show.

As the festival ends, Joey and Fassbinder part ways when Joey steals his camera. By sheer coincidence, Joey steals out of Fassbinder's hotel just in time to see Senator Avila gunned down in the lobby by General Ledesma's protégé, Carreon. He is the sole witness.

Panic spreads through Manila as the General and the Marcos family consolidate power. Romeo is gunned down on the street and framed as the Senator's killer. Daisy, meanwhile, goes to confession to figure out whether she should join the NPA. There, she is arrested by the General and Carreon. In custody she is beaten, tortured, and repeatedly raped until she miscarries. Then, she is released and flees to the mountains. Imelda Marcos blithely denies any involvement.

Joey, meanwhile, flees to his pimp Uncle, who immediately betrays him to Carreon. Joey murders Uncle and flees to his friend Perlita, a drag queen and owner of the nightclub where Joey DJ's. Perlita arranges for the NPA to spirit Joey to a safe house. He is valuable as the only living witness to the Senator's murder. Weeks later, Joey and Daisy meet in an NPA camp and discuss the Senator and their sad love for the Philippines.

The play ends with a collective prayer for hope in Manila. The sprawling events of *Dogeaters* have been witnessed by Rio, who finds she returns to her home nation more

often than she thought she would. Time has passed, and the country has just elected a vapid action star its President. The soap opera continues.



# Act I, Scenes 1-8 Synopsis

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*Dogeaters* begins in Scene 1 with a series of radio snippets that act as a primer for the audience. The snippets announce that Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos have visited with the new American President, Ronald Reagan. One hears that Daisy, the daughter of the opposition leader Senator Domingo Avila, has won the Miss Philippines Pageant. The First Annual Manila International Film Festival is approaching, and for it Imelda Marcos has built a new Film Center in the capital. The guerrillas of the insurgent NPA continue to fight in the provincial towns.

In Scene 2, Hagedorn introduces the characters of Nestor Noralez and Barbara Villanueva, two radio stars who serve as chorus for the play. They welcome the audience to the show and introduce some of the principals: Joey Sands, Daisy Avila, Rio Gonzaga, and Leonor Ledesma, wife of General Ledesma. Nestor and Barbara tell the audience that what follows will be full of passion and intrigue, and someone will die. Using the frame of the radio variety show, the pair discuss the history of the Philippines. They mention that President William McKinley colonized the island nation at the end of the nineteenth century. They interview the French Jesuit Jean Mallat, who came to the island soon thereafter and wrote an influential book on the island. He was fascinated by the native population, measuring their skulls and body parts.

In Scene 3, Freddie Gonzaga, a middle-aged businessman, comes to the airport with his niece Pucha to meet his daughter Rio. Rio has been living in California, and she is returning to attend her grandmother Lola Narcisa's funeral. Rio is brassy and occasionally outright rude.

In Scene 4, Nestor and Barbara play all the roles in a radio melodrama, *Love Letters*. As they play out the drama, the scene shifts to a shack in the slums of Manila, where a hustler called Joey Sands is berated by his pimp Uncle for listening to the radio. Uncle insults Joey until the boy lunges at him, at which point Uncle pulls a knife on him. Joey backs down.

In Scene 5, Nestor and Barbara introduce Daisy Avila in greater detail. She is the first dark-skinned (i.e., ethnically Philippine) girl ever to win Miss Philippines, a cause for great national pride. Her father is the opposition leader Senator Domingo Avila, and her lover, according to local gossip, is Santos Triador. Santos is the revolutionary leader of the NPA. He is in hiding in the jungle, but he is always watching her.



In Scene 6, Hagedorn introduces the characters of Romeo Rosales, a movie lover, and Trini Gamboa, a ticket-taker at Manila's Odeon Theater. Romeo has just watched *The Agony of Love*, starring Nestor and Lolita Luna, a Philippine starlet of soft-porn. Trini strikes up a conversation, and asks Romeo to join her for a drink. Romeo explains that he is broke, despite the fact that he is personal waiter to Severo Alacran, a powerful tycoon, at his country club. Romeo plans to enter the movie business with the help of his friend, action star Tito Alvarez. Trini says she will buy the drinks; she is a modern feminist.

In Scene 7, Senator Avila speaks to a group of ragged and dissolute worker. He says that the time has come for the oppressed people of the Philippines to stand up and demand better conditions. In Scene 8, the revolutionary Santos comes to the balcony of Daisy Avila's home. He professes his love to her, and though she tries to resist her love for him, the two embrace.

## **Act I, Scenes 1-8 Synopsis Analysis**

Over the course of the first eight scenes, Jessica Hagedorn establishes the ensemble and the narrative framing device of *Dogeaters*. The story will be narrated by two radio stars as though it were a soap opera. This device allows Hagedorn to temper the soon-to-be tragic circumstances of the play with a sort of camp levity. It also provides a simple and compelling way for the writer to present the sweeping ensemble of the play. Nestor and Barbara, the chorus, are also presented as otherworldly and capable, for example, of interviewing a nineteenth century Jesuit priest.

Though some roles are larger than others, there is no single protagonist of *Dogeaters*. In the first scenes, Hagedorn introduces some of the major players of the play, in particular Domingo and Daisy Avila, Santos Triador, and Freddie Gonzaga. The audience is also introduced, through the conversations of the characters, to some of the powerbrokers of 1980s Manila: Imelda Marcos, Severo Alacran, Tito Alvarex and Lolita Luna.

Of the above-mentioned power players, only Imelda Marcos is real. The others are fictionalized versions of historical figures. For example, Senator Avila is a stand-in for Ninoy Aquino, a progressive politician from Manila who was exiled and later murdered under orders from the Marcos regime. Tito Alvarez, the action star, is intended to be Joseph Estrada, a Philippine movie star who, in 1999, was elected president. Hagedorn, incidentally, provides a timeline of historical events in the Philippines as a resource in determining what historical liberties she has taken in writing the play.



# Act I: Scenes 9-11

## Act I: Scenes 9-11 Summary

In Scene 9, Rio and her cousin Pucha are in hotel café made up to look like a jeepney, a cheap form of transportation in Manila. Pucha is excited, because she just saw Brooke Shields, in town for the film festival. Pucha proceeds, in her haughty revelry, to berate the meek waiter for his slow service. When the waiter begins flirting with Rio, Pucha is scandalized. In her opinion, lowborn ethnic Filipinos have grown too forward. She asks Rio why she is so down, and Rio discussed how much she loved her recently-deceased grandmother. They remember the Doris Day movie they snuck into at the Odeon, and Pucha talks about the new multiplex theaters in Manila. Rio, meanwhile, is disgusted by her father's new wife, a runner-up in the Miss Philippine's competition. They discuss the gossip surrounding Daisy Avila and plan to go to Studio 54 (a Manila club named after the American hotspot) that night.

Scene 10 takes place in Studio 54, where the owner Andres "Perlita" Alacran, an aging drag-queen, passes the time with the hairdresser to Imelda Marcos, Chiquiting. Chiquiting cracks jokes about the rumored affair between Lolita Luna and General Ledesma, chief of the military. Perlita chastises Chiquiting that such talk could get him killed. They gossip about the possibility that Daisy is pregnant with Santos' child. Joey enters, strung out and miserable. Perlita fixes him some food and tells him that Uncle is killing him with drugs. He asks to borrow some money. Perlita talks about the upcoming film festival. Apparently, Imelda ordered the bodies of several dead workers to be hastily buried over with the foundation of the new Film Center.

The German New Cinema director Rainer Fassbinder enters Studio 54 and begins flirting with Joey. Joey talks about the event he is DJ'ing that night, which Imelda may attend. He also explains the meaning of the term "dogeater," which the American imperialists of the early twentieth century used to describe the native population of the Philippines. As the scene ends, Fassbinder pulls out a large wad of cash, ready to strike a deal with Joey.

In Scene 11, Barbara and Nestor interview Imelda about her new Film Center. She denies Senator Avila's accusations that one hundred workers are buried beneath its foundation. She also denies banning the Senator's books. She promises the Manila International Film Festival will be bigger than Cannes and congratulates Daisy Avila on her win in the Miss Philippines completion. Imelda herself is a former Miss Manila. The scene ends with a skin-whitening crème ad.

## Act I: Scenes 9-11 Analysis

Racial disharmony is the recurring theme of this section, which begins with Pucha berating a dark-skinned waiter and ends with an ad for a skin-whitening crème. The



specter of American and European imperialism has permeated all of Philippine society. Americans introduced the term *dogeater* as a way of implying that native, dark-skinned Filipinos are no more than savages. Clearly, the success of a *dogeater* like Daisy Avila in winning the Miss Philippines pageant is distressing to someone like Imelda Marcos, whose power is contingent upon dividing the populace, keeping them from organizing.

Scene 10 typifies the unique point-of-view of the play, which exists in the tatty, prurient streets of Manila. Certainly, Hagedorn dramatizes interaction of the elite, but the heart of *Dogeaters* is found in dialogue in which Chiquiting and Perlita theorize that Lolita Luna has syphilis and Daisy Avila is pregnant with a revolutionary's child. These tiny treasons are at the heart of the play. In a society where the ruling class can quickly bury the bodies of one hundred workers in the concrete of a new film society and deny it ever happened, this tacky gossip is seemingly the only form of revolution open to most.

This section also includes the introduction of the only other real-life figure besides Imelda Marcos: Rainer Fassbinder. Fassbinder is considered the preeminent voice of the German New Cinema of the sixties, seventies, and eighties. His works, including the sprawling Weimar epic *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, are classics of German cinema, and his death marks the end of the New Cinema movement. Hagedorn uses him as a stand-in for the western world's prurient interest in and ineffectuality towards the Philippines.





# Act I: Scenes 12-15

## Act I: Scenes 12-15 Summary

Scene 12 takes place at the Monte Vista Golf and Country Club. It is the first day of the Film Festival. Nestor and Barbara introduce the ruling class of Philippine society. In attendance are Senator Avila, General Ledesma, his combustible Lieutenant Carreon, and the richest man in the Philippines, Severo Alacran, who owns the soda manufacturer TruCola. Everyone seems in good humor as they golf, with the marked exception of Carreon, who is constantly enraged by Avila's rhetoric. Avila, for his part, speaks open with his counterparts in the Marcos camp, who in turn seem open to listening to his opinions. Avila is pressing for clean elections, but Alacran wants to know about Daisy's revolutionary boyfriend. In the midst of this conversation, the Senator proclaims that the playfulness of Philippines culture needs to be tempered so the world will take them seriously. The conversation then shifts to the Second World War, the trauma of which still haunts the country. Alacran's entire family, he says, was wiped out by the Japanese occupiers. As Carreon prepares to tee off, he notices a cobra in the grass, prompting him to sulk off. He says he does not even want to play. Alacran calls on his snake hunter and insists the men go in for a drink. As the snake hunter beheads the cobra, Carreon carps that he should not have been forced to take part in the charade of golfing with his ideological opponent. As the scene ends, Senator Avila makes a comment that he is safe despite his opposition to the Marcos regime; he is friends with General Ledesma.

In Scene 13, Barbara announces the many arts luminaries attending the First Annual Manila International Film Festival. Not only Brooke Shields is in attendance, but also George Hamilton and Linda Blaire.

In Scene 14, the first night of the Festival is drawing to a close, as the party has moved from the Film Center to Studio 54. Joey Sands is spinning discs and making irreverent jokes at the DJ Booth as the scene opens. Perlita enters in full drag and sings a Donna Summers number. Chiquiting enters with Fassbinder and begins meaningfully introducing him around. She is annoyed to discover that both Perlita and Joey have already met him. Evidently, Fassbinder's most recent film was shown at the festival and Imelda was enamored of both it and him. They danced together the entire ball.

Lolita Luna and Tito Alvaez enter the club. She is high and on Quaaludes; he is disgusted by the gay activity around him. No sooner have they entered but Tito is about to punch Joey and Lolita is being dragged from the club by General Ledesma. Fassbinder buys everyone drinks, and Joey offers to take him to a real Philippine sex show.

Scene 15 is a montage sequence of Philippine night life. At the center of this montage is Leonor Ledesma, the General's penitent wife. She prays intently and whips herself while all around her, the other characters have sex and enter the dark seamy corners of



Manila. In an abandoned nightclub, Joey arranges for Fassbinder to watch young boy and girl, barely pubescent, have sex. Rio is also present, brought by Alcaran's son Boomboom. She is repulsed by the show, but Boomboom refuses to let her go.

As this is happening, Romeo and Trini go to a seedy motel together and have sex. Romeo accidentally calls her Lolita. General Ledesma takes Lolita to her penthouse and forces her to perform oral sex on him. The scene ends as everyone orgasms.

## Act I: Scenes 12-15 Analysis

This section offers the audience a view of two unseen worlds: the world of power and the world of flesh.

In Scene 12, Hagedorn presents the precarious world of the ruling class through the prism of a single game of golf. In the charade, as Lieutenant Carreon calls it, General Ledesma, Senator Avila, and the wealthy Severo Alacran. Alacran and Ledesma clearly would prefer Senator Avila were not stirring dissent in the Philippines, but they play nice. They question him about his writing, his organizing of the workers, and his daughter's involvement with the NPA's leader. Only Carreon refuses to play the game, constantly threatening the opposition leader. At the end of the scene, Avila states, not so coyly, that he is only safe because the General is his friend.

In Scene 15, Hagedorn presents a scene in which every couple has sex simultaneously. In her stage direction, the author states that "the city of Manila comes alive at night" (p. 56). Human sexuality is always for sale in this city, as Rainer purchases Joey and Joey purchases a sex show. The Philippines is clearly an island that the western world has giddily raided for all its resources, whether they be coconuts or people. Over the first fifteen scenes of the play, Hagedorn has delineated all of the outside powers that have raped the Philippines: America, France, Spain, Japan, etc. Avila mourns that as a result, Filipinos infantilize themselves, speaking to each other in childish nicknames.

This history of imperialism and the domestic complicity with it is central to the play's themes. The island nation has bowed down to power after power; now it is willing to kill hundreds of worker in order to secure visits from Brooke Shields and George Hamilton.



# Act I: Scenes 16-17

## Act I: Scenes 16-17 Summary

In Scene 16, Daisy Avila is in bed, pregnant, ill, and miserable. Her father the Senator attends to her, attempting to feed her, but she wants none of it. All she wants is Santos, now far away from the city of Manila, in the mountains with NPA. Nestor and Barbara sing a lullaby to her as she reels in agony. The Senator has a soliloquy in which he begs his daughter to get better and regain her senses. He explains that he sent her mother away to keep her safe. He knows that Daisy is like him; she wants to help the people of the Philippines.

Scene 17 takes place in the Jeepney Coffee Shop at the hotel. Fassbinder and Joey sit at breakfast. While Joey ravenously eats, Fassbinder morosely takes pictures of him. He says he has fallen in love with the young hustler. Still, he refuses to take him to Germany. Joey, meanwhile, enjoys berating the put-upon waiter from earlier in the play. Jacobs, a New York Times critic, approaches Fassbinder and asks him why a renegade director would accept the invitation of a dictator. As Fassbinder dresses Jacobs down, Joey silently steals the director's bag along with his camera and slips away, saying that he is going to pick up cigarettes.

Senator Avila arrives at the lobby of the hotel for a meeting. As soon as he enters, a disguised Carreon shoots and kills him. Joey is in the lobby at the moment, the only witness to the murder. Fassbinder runs out to see what has happened. Meanwhile, Daisy awakes in bed and cries out for her father. This is the end of the first act.

## Act I: Scenes 16-17 Analysis

The final two scenes of Act I involve the catalyzing event that will draw together the different characters introduced in the scenes that preceded. Clearly, Senator Avila was not as well protected as he believed, for General Ledesma's protégé is the gunman who actually murders the Senator. This murder will precipitate major nationwide tumult in the second act and will force Joey to leave the life of drugs and prostitution that currently traps him.

Also central to the themes of imperialism in *Dogeaters* is the pathetic resolution of Fassbinder's association with Joey. He grows maudlin the day he leaves Manila, not wanting to leave Joey. He loves Joey but not enough to improve his life by taking him to Europe. Fassbinder is the western relationship with the Philippines personified. Like the Jesuit Mallat, he professes a heartfelt love of the island nation but leaves as soon as he has what he needs from it.



# Act II: Scenes 1-7

## Act II: Scenes 1-7 Summary

Act II opens in Rio's grandmother's garden. Nestor and Barbara announce that their show is to become "disco, chismis, coup d'etats ... a dark fiesta" (p. 69). It is the same day as Senator Avila's assassination, and Rio is getting high in her grandmother's garden. A specter of her grandmother, Lola Narcisa, appears to her. Lola goes about tending her flowers while Rio comments that she cannot ever really forget Manila, as long as she's been away. Freddie enters and immediately knows that his daughter is high. Annoyed, he tells her the news: the Senator has been assassinated. Rio involuntarily laughs, infuriating Freddie. He tries to warn her that the worst is likely to occur. Rio blames Freddie for destroying the family and rails against the class warfare in the Philippines.

Scene 2 is an action movie scene, narrated as always by Nestor and Barbara, starring Tito Alvarez as a dying commando and Lolita Luna as his loving wife.

In Scene 3, a paranoid Joey arrives back at Uncle's shack, having run all the way from the scene of Senator Avila's murder. He tells Uncle he witnessed the murder, and Uncle begins to appraise how best to handle the situation. As he does this, he looks at the camera Joey stole from Fassbinder. Joey is freaking out. To quiet him down, Uncle injects him with heroin and leaves him passed out in the shack.

Scene 4 is a split scene. Part of it takes place in a confessional at the Baclaran Church, where Daisy confesses that her careless action helped lead to her father's death. As she completes her reconciliation and exits the confessional, she debates whether she should stay in Manila or go to the mountains to meet with the NPA. As she debates, General Ledesma emerges from the confessional and tells her to come with him. She resists, but he forcibly removes her. Concurrently, Uncle approaches Carreon and makes a deal with him for information about the only surviving witness to the murder. He reveals Joey's identity to him. As all this happens, Joey reels in a heroin fever. He wakes to hear Uncle making his deal. Enraged and panicked, Joey stabs and kills Uncle.

Scene 4 ends with Chiquiting, Pucha, Lolita Luna, Barbara, Romeo and Bob Stone, an American newsman, all speaking on phones. They are trying to make sense of the events of the day. Since the assassination, helicopters have begun circling Manila, and the media has been all but shut down. The coup is beginning.

Scene 5 takes place in Studio 54. Perlita enters the club and is startled to discover Joey hiding there. He is terrified and says he could not think of any other place to go. He tells Perlita that he witnessed Senator Avila's murder. Perlita orders Pedro to watch Joey while she makes a call. She returns to tell him he is being taken to a safe place, one



where he will have no access to drugs. As the scene ends, Joey tells Perlita he killed Uncle.

Alacran and Lolita sit in the former's private screening room in Scene 6, watching one of her soft-porn movies. As Alacran gets progressively more aroused, Lolita openly worries that the General will discover their trysts together. She is scared for her life, hearing that Daisy has been imprisoned and is being systematically tortured and raped. She begs Alacran to get her papers so she and her son can flee the Philippines. Alacran refuses, saying he would miss her if she left.

In Scene 7, Trini approaches Romeo on the street and asks why she has not heard from him in weeks. He is evasive, but he tells her he has a screen test and should not see her anymore. She begs him to take her back, saying that she wants to be his wife. He walks away, and immediately a man shouts that he is resisting arrest. The man shoots and kills Romeo in front of Trini.

## Act II: Scenes 1-7 Analysis

The first third of Act II centers on the consolidation of power in the hours and days following Senator Avila's murder. Within days, Romeo is framed for the killed and gunned down in the street. General Ledesma and Severo Alacran are now the two most powerful brokers of power under the Marcos family.

As a result of these machinations, two progressive individuals are placed resolutely in harm's way. The first is Joey, who murders Uncle when the pimp reveals his identity to the military. Joey has become the military's worst fear: someone who saw the identity of Avila's killer. He is the principal threat to the official story that a crazed loner was at fault. In reality, it would take one year from the death of Ninoy Aquino for a widespread government conspiracy to be uncovered.

The other individual who remains a threat to the military-industrial alliance is Daisy Avila. She is the heir-apparent to her father's mantle, and she has the blessing (or curse) of already being popular as the first Talagang to become Miss Philippines. She is pregnant with the child of a communist revolutionary. First on the military's agenda after her father's death is taking her into custody.

The assassination of Senator Avila has wide-reaching effects for everyone in the play. Lolita Luna fears for her life and the life of her son; Freddie and his family are in danger for their support of the fallen senator, and Perlita must arrange Joey's delivery into the care of the NPA. This, in many respects, is a central theme of *Dogeaters*: the political affects everything. Hagedorn implies that the people of the Philippines, having been so often colonized and conquered, long for a life of ease, and this desire make the nation easily corruptible. The wealthy will gun down anyone who strives to make the poor aware of their subjugation and organize them.



## Act II: Scenes 8-11

### Act II: Scenes 8-11 Summary

Scene 8 opens with Daisy bound in an interrogation at Camp Meditation. As she sits there, a radio plays, featuring another episode of Love Letters as performed by Nestor and Barbara. After a time, General Ledesma turns down the radio and begins to question Daisy about the NPA. She lashes out at him for killing her father, and Lieutenant Carreon, in turn, threatens her, only to be rebuked by the General. Ledesma explains that the NPA is murdering his men, that he knows she is pregnant with Santos Triador's child. He has her gang-raped by his men, but first he shows her a picture of Santos, murdered and dismembered. He promises before he lets her go, he will rape her as well.

Scene 9 takes place that night in Daisy's cell. She is beaten and bruised. A specter of Senator Avila enters and asks her to make some dinner for him. She is terrified and begs him to comfort her, but all he can say is that she must have faith. She must forgive even the General. She curses him and God. At the end of the scene, Daisy begins to hemorrhage. She is having a miscarriage.

In Scene 10, Bob Stone is waiting to interview Imelda Marcos. She enters briskly and informs him that he will be allowed only fifteen minutes worth of questions. He asks her about the assassination of Senator Avila and the arrest of his daughter Daisy. Imelda blithely answers that the assassin, Romeo, was killed resisting arrest and that, to the best of her knowledge, Daisy has been released from custody. She proceeds to ask Bob Stone his sign and show a pair of her famous shoes, a pair she is proud to say is made in the Philippines. As the scene ends, Imelda claims that she is ever the people's servant and idol. She is from meek origins, and now that she is the first lady of the nation, she is an ideal to be adored. Those who do not adore her are merely jealous. She longs for beauty and wonder. Imelda cuts off the interview and leaves. On her way out, she apologizes that her husband is not available. He is golfing.

In Scene 11, Joey is at an NPA camp in the mountains of Manila. He is being attended by three guerillas, Ka Lydia, Ka Edgar, and Ka Pablo ("ka" means comrade). Joey is desperately ill, coming off heroin. He is not even aware that he is no longer in Manila. Most of the guerillas are disgusted by him, but Lydia states definitely that he must be protected as the sole witness to Senator Avila's murder. A news report says that Daisy, having been released, is fleeing to the NPA. The guerillas tell Joey he will be taken to the next safe house soon.

### Act II: Scenes 8-11 Analysis

This section contains the second of Imelda's two appearances in the play. The first is a brief interview with a fawning Barbara about the upcoming film festival in Act I. This



interview with the American Bob Stone offers a more pointedly amusing and genuinely disturbing portrait. Certainly, Hagedorn offers the expected quip about her shoes, as well as ruminations on astrology and dreams. These would be little more than goofy potshots at a privileged women unaware that her privilege is contingent upon suffering, were they not frames for explicit denials of her complicity in this suffering. Imelda knows what is happening in Manila; she is couching her realpolitik in the coos of aloofness.

Hagedorn juxtaposes this interview with the scenes that precede it, as Daisy is gang-raped and tortured until she miscarries. After Imelda's soliloquy on dreams, the setting shifts to the NPA camp, where Filipinos risk their lives to overthrow the Marcos regime. One can see that not every person in the nation is willing to accept the cult of personality that enables dictators like Ferdinand and Imelda to loot the country. Still, Hagedorn in her timeline after the play notes that "the Marcos family is back and holding political office ... elections are coming up ... many of the people running for office are movie stars and crooners, and will probably win" (p. 122).



## Act II: Scenes 12-16

### Act II: Scenes 12-16 Summary

Scene 12 is a letter that Trini writes to her mother, who lives in the provincial areas of the Philippines. In the letter she informs her mother that she is now working in the TruCola plant that is owned by Severo Alacran. She is in a forewoman position, and she is enclosing money to help support her extended family. As she closes the letter, she tells her mother, lying, that she and Romeo are engaged, that God is looking over her.

Scene 13 takes place in the empty Studio 54. It is empty, and Perlita is rehearsing one of her Donna Summers numbers. Chiquiting enters and turns the music off. They begin to bicker, but Rio interrupts. Rio's mother used to be friends with Perlita and Chiquiting, and after a moment Perlita recognizes her friend's daughter. She tracked them down with Pucha's help. Rio tells them that her grandmother died, and the three of them share a bit of rum. They want to spend more time together, but Rio is leaving to go back to California. They remember the big plans Rio had as a child; now she is a creative writing teacher for autistic children. Before Rio leaves, she wonders aloud if she belongs in Manila. After Rio leaves, Chiquiting insisted that he and Perlita dance to beat back the gloom.

In Scene 14, Joey is miserably passing the time at a jungle camp of the NPA. Daisy, made up in guerrilla fatigues and carrying an M16, approaches and inquires as to his health. He is feeling better lately. Daisy asks him to describe her father's death, and he initially refuses. He wants to go back to Manila, which Daisy assures him will never happen. He vows he will, that he will slip covertly back into the city somehow. Daisy begs him to describe her father's death, and he attempts to give her some details. Daisy asks him if he loves the Philippines. He says his love for his country burns, it is so intense.

In Scene 15, General Ledesma finally lets himself into his wife's room, which is shaped like a coffin. She chastised him for interrupting her prayer, and he protests that she does nothing but pray. Leonor says it is the only way she can bear being his wife. She begins a perverse prayer of hopelessness. This infuriates Ledesma, who puts his pistol to her head, but she does not stop praying. He eventually backs out of her room.

In Scene 16, Rio imagines that she is at the Magsaysay Pavilion where Daisy Avila won her Miss Philippines title in 1982. She can picture the new beauty queen blowing a kiss to her father. Though Rio still lives in the United States, she visits her home nation often. She can picture the most recent Miss Philippines walking her victory walk in the pavilion. The General Ledesma would be there. So would Lolita Luna, Perlita and Chiquiting. And finally, Rio mentions, the new president would be there: the action star Tito Alvarez. As the play ends, Rio says a prayer of sorts for hope in the Philippines. The soap opera continues.





## Act II: Scenes 12-16 Analysis

Dogeaters ends with a series of pleas for the future of the Philippines: Joey says he loves the nation with a passion that burns, Leonor prays to the point of madness, and Rio cannot ever truly leave. The final image is that of a beauty competition, and once again Hagedorn seems to sardonically accept that the Philippines will forever fall for the strong personality that wants nothing more than to use the public trust to line his pockets (the real-life Tito Alvarez, Joseph Estrada, was imprisoned after being forced from office).

This dichotomy between the eternal hope of a people and its constant betrayal by those who rule it is at the heart of this play. The Philippines, like countless post-colonial nations, has suffered the plague of nationalist leaders who are unworthy of the support they are given and who rule the nation with an iron hand and a dazzling façade. Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos modeled themselves on the Kennedys, and their Camelot was built, like the ostentatious film center of this play, on the bodies of the poor. Hagedorn's play stands as a snarky and entertaining remainder of the tacky glitz that blinded the people of Manila from the bloody cost.



# Characters

## Joey Sands

Joey Sands is a hustler, deejay, and junkie living in Manila. He works for a brutal and conniving pimp called Uncle who uses heroin as a means of pacifying him. Joey also regularly DJ's the events at Studio 54, Manila's hottest club.

As the play begins, Joey is strung out and angry, having been threatened with a knife by Uncle. Getting a drink at Studio 54 from the maternal Perlita, he meets the German director Rainer Fassbinder. The two hit it off, and after the first night of the Manila International Film Festival, Joey takes Fassbinder to a sex show. After the festival is over, and Fassbinder is preparing to leave the Philippines, Joey steals his camera, but as he is leaving the hotel he witnesses the assassination of Senator Avila.

After seeing Avila's killing - realizing his life is now in Jeopardy - Joey goes to Uncle for help. Uncle injects him with heroin and immediately betrays him to the Philippine military. Joey senses this and kills Uncle. Joey goes then to Perlita, who understands the gravity of the situation. Perlita arranges for Joey to be taken into the care of the NPA, a Communist revolutionary group in the mountains.

Under the care of the NPA, Joey goes through heroin withdrawal and loudly curses his protectors. He is generally disliked, but his importance as the sole witness to a government-sanctioned murder makes him valuable. At the end of the play, Joey meets Daisy Avila, the Senator's daughter. She asks him how her father died and tells him he will never be able to return to Manila. Joey vows that he will return. He loves Manila and he loves the Philippines.

## Daisy Avila

Daisy Avila is the 1982 Miss Philippines and the daughter of the progressive Senator Avila. She is involved romantically with the NPA leader Santos Tirador; early in the play she becomes pregnant with his child. Daisy, the first dark-skinned Filipino to win the beauty title, is beloved by the populace and the subject of gossip through the play. Daisy falls ill after becoming pregnant, and she is at home in a fever when her father is assassinated.

After the assassination, Daisy goes to confession and debates whether to remain in Manila or join the NPA. She is arrested by General Ledesma. In state custody, she is tortured, beaten, and gang-raped by the General's troops. She is informed that her beloved Santos has been killed. Finally, she miscarries her child. Upon being released from custody, Daisy flees to the mountains and joins the NPA. At the end of the play, she is in the jungle in military fatigues and carrying an M16, questioning Joey Sands about her father's death.



## Rio Gonzaga

Rio Gonzaga is a young Filipino woman who works as a creative writing teacher for autistic children in San Francisco. She returns to Manila for her grandmother's funeral around the same time as the inaugural Manila International Film Festival. Rio is vulgar and perpetually stoned; she stands as a surrogate for the author, Jessica Hagedorn.

When Rio arrives in Manila, she and her cousin Pucha go around the city, and Pucha talks about how the country has developed in recent years. The night of the film festival's premiere, Rio is taken to a live sex show by Boomboom Alacran, the son of the richest man in the Philippines. She is disgusted by it. Days later, Rio is high and confrontational when her father informs her that Senator Avila has been murdered. She accuses her father of destroying their family.

At the end of the play, Rio visits Studio 54 and meets Chiquiting and Perlita, two gay men who were friends with her mother. They drink together before Rio leaves to return to California. She regularly returns to Manila from then on.

## Senator Domingo Avila

Senator Domingo Avila is a progressive politician, opposed publicly to the fiscal mismanagement and fascistic repression of the Marcos regime. He is also the father of Daisy Avila, the reigning Miss Philippines. When the play begins, the Senator is a popular but controversial figure. He makes speeches to workers about standing up against oppression, and his books have been banned.

At one point, Senator Avila goes golfing with General Ledesma, head of the military, and Severo Alacran, the richest man in the Philippines. Though Ledesma and Alacran are clearly disgusted by Avila's populist rhetoric, Avila assumed he is safe because of his personal friendship with the General. Soon thereafter, the Senator's daughter falls ill. While tending to her, Avila is called away to a meeting at a fancy hotel lobby. When he goes there, he is immediately gunned down by Lieutenant Carreon, the General's protégé. After Avila's assassination, a political purge begins in Manila.

## Perlita

Perlita is a drag queen and owner of the popular Studio 54 club in Manila. Her act primarily consists of Donna Summers numbers, and her days are largely spent gossiping with her friend Chiquiting and berating her assistant Pedro. Perlita is a distinctly maternal figure who looks after those who need her, no matter how messed up they are.

At the beginning of the play, Perlita is chastising Joey Sands for continuing to do heroin, even when it keeps him under the thumb of the vicious pimp Uncle. Perlita is preparing for a big night for the club, the premier night of the Manila International Film Festival.



That night, many Philippine luminaries like General Ledesma and actors Lolita Luna and Tito Alvarez come to the club.

After the assassination of Senator Avila, Perlita organizes Joey Sands' flight out of Manila by arranging an NPA safe house for him in the mountains. Later in the play, Perlita and Chiquiting meet Rio Gonzaga, a daughter of their old friend. The last time the audience sees Perlita, she is dancing with Chiquiting.

## General Ledesma

General Ledesma is the chief of the Philippine military and the most powerful person in Manila after the Marcos family. He is married to the religious ascetic Leonor and having an affair with the soft-porn starlet Lolita Luna.

At the beginning of the play, General Ledesma, related by marriage to the opposition leader Senator Avila, seems reasonable and even empathetic to the progressive goals. Within days, however, the General arranges the Senator's assassination and the coup that follows. The General frames Romeo Rosales as the assassin and arrests Daisy Avila. Though she is his niece, Ledesma personally takes part in the gang-rape and torture. At the end of the play, the General confronts his wife about her constant praying. He threatens her to stop, but Ledesma is impotent in his threats this one time.

## Trini Gamboa

Trini Gamboa is a starry-eyed dreamer from the rural areas of the Philippines. She has moved to Manila to make money for her family. At the beginning of the play, Trini is taking tickets at the Odeon Movie Theater, where she meets the aspiring actor Romeo Rosales. She asks him on a date, and the two make love once. After, Trini tries to find Romeo, but he is avoiding her. She eventually professes her love to him, only to be rejected and then immediately sees Romeo gunned down by the military in the street. Trini goes to work at Severo Alacran's TruCola factory. She sends a letter home, lying that she and Romeo are getting married.

## Romeo Rosales

Romeo Rosales is an aspiring actor in Manila. He claims to be friends with the action star Tito Alvarez, who will get him a screen test for a studio. Romeo is also personal waiter to the richest man in the Philippines, Severo Alacran, at his country club. Romeo has a brief affair with the innocent Trini Gamboa, but he immediately begins to avoid her. The day she finds him, and he expressly rejects her, Romeo is gunned down by the military, who frame him as Senator Avila's assassin.



## Leonor Ledesma

Leonor Ledesma is the wife of General Ledesma. She never leaves his coffin-shaped room in their house, and she is forever praying - sometimes standard Catholic prayers, sometimes hopeless variations on them - and whipping herself. She seems to have taken the whole of the Philippines' pain on her shoulders. At the end of the play, the General orders his wife to stop praying, but she refuses. He puts a gun to her head, but she still holds firm. The General reneges and leaves her room.

## Chiquiting

Chiquiting is an aging gay man in Manila and the personal hairdresser to Imelda Marcos. He spends most of his free time gossiping with drag queen Perlita at her club, Studio 54. Chiquiting loves access and is constantly name-dropping. He brags about having inside information about Daisy Avila and her affair with Santos Tirador. He brings the German filmmaker Rainer Fassbinder to the club the premier night of the Film Festival. At the end of the play, Chiquiting and Perlita meet Rio Gonzaga, an old friend's daughter. They dance together to beat back the moroseness.

## Imelda Marcos

Imelda Marcos is one of two real historical figures in Dogeaters. She is the First Lady of the Philippines, the wife of Ferdinand Marcos. She models herself after Jackie Kennedy, making constant reference to her elegant clothes, humble beginnings, and former career as Miss Manila. She appears twice during the play. In her first appearance, she is being interviewed by Barbara Villanueva, where she denied ordering dying workers to be buried in cement for the foundation of her new film center. In the second scene, she is interviewed by the American journalist Bob Stone. In this interview, she tacitly denies ordering the murder of Senator Avila or the arrest of his daughter Daisy.

## Rainer Fassbinder

Rainer Fassbinder is one of two real-life figures who appear in person in Dogeaters. Fassbinder was the revolutionary filmmaker whose career typified the German New Cinema. In the play, he is portrayed as a flighty and esoteric mope who carries on a torrid affair with the hustler Joey Sands. They spend the whole of the film festival together and even attend a sex show together. Fassbinder claims to fall in love with Joey but does not agree to bring him back to Germany. The last morning they have together, Joey steals Fassbinder's camera. Fassbinder's treatment of Joey reflects Europe and America's historical treatment of the Philippines.



## **Lolita Luna**

Lolita Luna is a popular soft-porn starlet in the Philippines. She is universally desired and frequently high on Quaaludes. Lolita carries on simultaneous affairs with General Ledesma and Severo Alacran, both of whom treat her with callous disdain. After the assassination of Senator Avila, Lolita is terrified her life is in danger, but she survives the purges that follow.

## **Severo Alacran**

Severo Alacran is the wealthiest man in the Philippines, the owner of a soda manufacturer, TruCola. He is having an affair with the Filipino soft-porn starlet Lolita Luna. Alacran is friends with both General Ledesma and Senator Avila, but he is unperturbed by the latter's assassination. His businesses success is contingent on the rule of the Marcos family.

## **Nestor Noralez and Barbara Villanueva**

Nestor Noralez and Barbara Villanueva are Manila radio personalities, the stars of the radio soap opera Love Letters. In the world of the play, these two characters serve as chorus to the action, narrating it as they would the soap opera. This gives them otherworldly qualities, like the ability to interview a nineteenth century Jesuit priest.

## **Freddie Gonzaga**

Freddie Gonzaga is a wealthy Filipino businessman and the father of Rio Gonzaga. His womanizing has led to the all-but-complete dissolution of his family. After Senator Avila is assassinated, Freddie prepares for the worst as a result of his support of the progressive politician. He becomes enraged by his daughter's free American ways.

## **Lieutenant Carreon**

Lieutenant Carreon is General Ledesma's protégé. Completely humorless, he is unable or unwilling to mask his disgust for Senator Avila while two are on the golf course together. In the play, Carreon is the gunman who murders Senator Avila. After the murder, Carreon is central to General Ledesma's consolidation of power. He gleans information from Uncle about the identity of the one witness to the assassination. He also takes part in the interrogation and gang-rape of Daisy Avila.

## **Tito Alvarez**

Tito Alvarez is the top action star in the Philippines. He is homophobic - disgusted by the gay activity in Studio 54 - and dense - dismissive of Rainer Fassbinder's work for not



having enough action. At the end of the play, Rio mentions that Tito is elected president of the Philippines.

## **Santos Tirador**

Santos Tirador is the head of the National People's Army, the NPA. He lives in hiding in the mountains, but he regularly returns to Manila to see his beloved, the beauty queen Daisy Avila. Santos impregnates Daisy early in the play before fleeing back to the hinterland. After Senator Avila is assassinated, Daisy is informed that Santos has been killed and mutilated.

## **Uncle**

Uncle is Joey Sands' vicious and emotionally abusive pimp. He controls his hustler with a combination of threats and heroin. After Joey witnesses Senator Avila's murder, Uncle injects him with heroin and reports his identity to Lieutenant Carreon in exchange for some unspoken favor. Joey catches on and stabs Uncle to death.



# Objects/Places

## Manila

Manila is the capital city of the Philippines and the seat of its government. Dogeaters takes place in and around Manila, which is portrayed by the playwright as a quickly modernizing city. Pucha tells Rio that tacky themed eateries like the one in which they have ice cream are cropping up all over the city, along with shopping malls and multiplex cinemas. Manila is also painted in gaudy colors as a home of loud nightclubs run by aging drag queens and sordid hovels where foreigners can watch sex shows. The wealth of Severo Alacran is juxtaposed with the squalor of Uncle's shack. Imelda Marcos longs to make Manila the Cannes of the Pacific, but the Philippine film industry is dominated by a dumb action star and a soft-porn starlet. In short, Manila is presented as a strange menagerie of glamor and squalor.

## Studio 54

Studio 54 is the most popular dance club in Manila. Named after the New York City hotspot, it is owned and operated by Andres "Perlita" Alacran, an aging drag queen who performs a Donna Summers routine. During the afternoon, Studio 54 is a meeting place for Perlita, her hairdresser friend Chiquiting, and the hustler Joey, who often DJ's there. At night, it becomes the local focus of stars such as Tito Alvarez and occasionally even Imelda Marcos. When Joey is betrayed by Uncle, he hides in Studio 54.

## The Country Club

The Country Club is owned by Severo Alacran, the wealthiest man in the Philippines, and he claims that the golf course is on its way to being the next Pebble Beach. Romeo Rosales is employed there as Alacran's personal waiter. In Act I, Alacran, General Ledesma, Lieutenant Carreon, and Senator Avila share a tense game of golf at the country club.

## The Film Center

The Film Center being built in Act I was commissioned by Imelda Marcos in preparation for the inaugural Manila International Film Festival. It is a massive structure modeled after the Parthenon. During its construction, a structural collapse kills one hundred workers. Imelda Marcos, not wanting the construction delayed, orders cement to be poured over the bodies of the killed workers as part of the foundation.





## Heroin

Heroin is used not only as a recreation but also as a means of enslavement in the play. Uncle, Joey's pimp, uses heroin as a way to keep his hustler passive and coming back. When Joey tells Uncle that he witnessed the murder of Senator Avila, Uncle injects him with heroin to keep him sedated until he can bring the military to arrest him.

## The New People's Army

The New People's Army (NPA) is the military of the Philippine Communist party, which has become illegal since Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in the early 1970's. The NPA camps in the hinterland and attacks government troops. In the play, the NPA is led by Santos Tirador, who is the lover of beauty queen Daisy Avila. After Senator Avila and, later, Santos Tirador are killed, both Daisy and Joey Sands flee to the mountains, into the care of the NPA.

## Love Letters

Love Letters is the radio soap opera hosted and performed by Nestor Norales and Barbara Villanueva. Marked by betrayals, high passions, and death, this soap opera is used as a framing device for what is happening in the world of the play.

## The Jeepney Coffee House

The Jeepney Coffee House is a tacky cafe in an expensive hotel frequented by characters in the play. It is made up to look like a jeepney, a cheap means of public transportation in Manila. Pucha and Rio have ice cream there in Act I and discuss the changes in Manila in recent years. Joey Sands and Rainer Fassbinder have their last breakfast together there, and as Joey leaves the Jeepney Coffee House, he sees Senator Avila murdered.

## The Odeon

The Odeon is an older, rundown movie theater in Manila that has lost business recently to new multiplexes and Imelda Marcos' new film center. Trini Gamboa takes tickets at the Odeon, and this cinema is where she meets Romeo Rosales.

## The Abandoned Nightclub

The Abandoned Nightclub in Manila is used late at night for sex shows featuring underage children. Near the end of Act I, Joey Sands, Rainer Fassbinder, Rio Gonzaga and BoomBoom Alacran attend one of these shows. Rio says that her mother used to come to the functioning club to dance.

## **Balisong**

The Balisong is a butterfly knife. Uncle has it as a way of terrorizing Joey Sands into compliance. When Joey realizes that Uncle is betraying him to the military in Act II, he murders Uncle with the Balisong.



# Themes

## Imperialism Leaves a Mark

The nation - and the national history - of the Philippines is a central focus of Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*. Early in the play, the playwright establishes the history of colonization and conquest that has shaped modern Philippine society. The conquistadors of Spain, French missionaries, American expansionists, the Japanese forces of World War II - all have had a hand in occupying the island nation, and all have left a mark.

This mark comes first in the form of a racial and linguistic divide. In 1982, the native language of Tagalog has been reduced to a secondary tongue, like Gaelic in Ireland or Zulu in South Africa. It is spoken - and an indication of national pride - but no one intent on establishing himself in business or politics uses it as a first language. The West has established the ruling tongue as something in the Germanic or Latin strain. Moreover, racial politics pervade the Manila of 1982. Dark-skinned Filipinos are still viewed as inferior, as illustrated by Pucha's berating and dismissal of the waiter in the Jeepney Coffee Shop. The success of the dark-skinned Daisy Avila in becoming Miss Philippines is a font of pride for native Filipinos, tolerated by the lighter ruling class.

The second mark left by imperialism from without is the emergence of strong, charismatic and ultimately destructive leaders like Ferdinand Marcos. According to Hagedorn, centuries of subjugation have created a Philippine population that is willing to be ruled like children. Like the colonies-turned-nations of Africa and Latin America, this opens the doors for strong-men with a personal agenda. The Marcos family models itself on the Kennedys, dazzles the populace with its glamour, and sinks the nation in to poverty. At the end of the play, the people have elected a new President, a vapid, militant action star.

## The Personal and the Political

Jessica Hagedorn's play is a panorama. It is filled with lovers, artists, industrialists, militants, and children looking for home. Above and below and outside each scene is the specter of the Marcos regime, a ruling family that arrived through force of personality, a ruling family with no inclination to listen to the popular will.

At the beginning of the play, popular understanding of political is illustrated through the roles of Perlita and Chiquiting. This illustration is gossip. They gossip about Imelda's orders that one hundred killed workers be buried in cement for the building of her film center; they discuss General Ledesma's affair with porn actress Lolita Luna, and they gossip about Daisy Avila's pregnancy with Santos Tirador's child. For them, the political is all stagecraft, like a soap opera, and to a certain extent they are right. The Marcos regime wants to give off an aura of glamor in order to pacify the people.



The second act of *Dogeaters*, in particular, pushes home the notion that what happens politically in a nation affects everyone personally. The assassination of Senator Avila leads to a vast official rally to clean house and cover tracks. Among the results of this coup are Joey's exile to the jungle, Daisy's joining the NPA, Romeo's murder, the confrontation between Rio and her father, Uncle's death. The death of a man many of these people never know - had only read about - leads to astonishing transitions for each character. No one's life is the same after this.

## Commoditization of People

In the world of 1982 Manila, human beings are commodities. When people are commoditized, their value always decreases. Hagedorn illustrates this commoditization in macro and micro, showing the devaluation of Philippine lives in general.

In macro, Hagedorn uses two major examples of Philippine lives being objectified and swept easily aside in the past and present. In the past, the playwright presents the figure of Jean Mallat, the French Jesuit who wrote a definitive account of the Philippines from a colonial perspective. Interviewed by Nestor and Barbara, the text mentions his "measuring skulls and buttocks and teeth ... foraging for alien specimens" (p. 19). He proclaims to love the island, but his love, such as it is, is for an object, a subject. He researched its natives like archeological objects and left. In the present, the reader/audience learns of Imelda Marcos's film center, the construction of which has led to one hundred Philippine worker deaths. Her solution: bury them in cement for the foundations.

In a more micro respect, Hagedorn shows the commoditization of Filipinos in the sphere of sex, primarily. Lolita Luna trades on sex in her films and protects herself and her child by sleeping with General Ledesma and Severo Alacran. Boomboom Alacran drags Rio to a sex show where thirteen-year-old children entertain the wealthy and foreign visitors with their bodies. Most pronounced, though, is the relationship between Joey Sands and Rainer Fassbinder. Their relationship mirrors that between Mallat and the Philippines in general. Fassbinder buys Joey, enjoys him for the duration of the Festival, and then leaves him. He professes to love the young hustler, but not enough to take him back to Germany. His love, like Mallat's, is for an object, not a human being.

Hagedorn presents in *Dogeaters* a nation of objects. One can witness that they have feelings, hopes, and fears, but for the ruling classes and foreign visitors, their charm is that they can be disposed of easily. They are not fully human.

# Style

## Point of View

Dogeaters exists in two points of view. Most of the scenes are presented in a third person, naturalistic style in which a "fourth wall" is respected. The narrative voice for these scenes comes in the form of Nestor Norales and Barbara Villabueva, two radio personalities who narrate the proceedings as though they were a soap opera, including advertizements in the midst of the action.

This creates an interesting dichotomy in which scenes are presented straight, with characters never speaking directly to the audience, and a sort of two-person chorus explicating and critiquing these scenes. With this point-of-view, Hagedorn is simultaneously hiding the artifice of theatre and acknowledging it. The events onstage are not real, but only Nestor, Barbara, Hagedorn, and the reader/audience are aware of this. This reader/audience, with the narrator as conduit, is omniscient: the characters do not interact with them until the very end.

This change at the end comes courtesy of Rio Gonzaga, a Filipino expat who returns home for her grandmother's funeral around the time of Senator Avila's murder. Rio is clearly intended to be a stand-in for Jessica Hagedorn. She is intimately connected to the events but not, in the end, affected by them. She leaves Manila and returns several times. She tells us this in the final scene of the play. A first-person, editorial voice emerges in this last soliloquy, spoke by Rio, the playwright.

## Setting

Dogeaters takes place in and around Manila in 1982. This is established from the first scene of the play in which snippets of news radio are played, indicating that the newly inaugurated Ronald Reagan has just met with Ferdinand Marcos, that the Manila International Film Festival is about to begin, and that Daisy Avila has won the Miss Philippines pageant.

The Manila of Dogeaters is a lightly fictionalized version of the one that actually existed. Imelda Marcos does appear in the play, and the inaugural Manila International Film Festival was held in this year following a construction tragedy that killed one hundred workers, whose bodies where unceremoniously buried in cement to complete construction of the Film Center. On the other hand, several characters are fictionalized forms of real-life figures. Senator Avila is the assassinated opposition leader Ninoy Aquino. Tito Alvarez is the future President Joseph Estrada (later jailed for rampant corruption). General Ledesma may be the Philippine kingmaker Fidel Ramos. The fictionalizing of history allows Hagedorn to play more freely with the personalities that guide major events in the nation.



Most importantly, *Dogeaters*, though it deals in major political movements, exists on the ground level. The most prevalent setting is Studio 54, the Manila club named after the American hotspot. Here, hustlers mingle with presidents. Other settings include dirty shacks, sex show halls, and ragged revolutionary camps. The events of the play affect the lives of everyday Filipinos. There is no escaping the ramifications of these events. As such, *Dogeaters* is a play about its setting - a particular time and place - and those whose lives were shaped by this setting.

## Language and Meaning

The use of language in the play is key to the establishment of setting. It is a combination of English and Tagalog, the native language of the Philippines. In fact, Jessica Hagedorn provides a glossary in the back of the play for reference.

The balance of English and Tagalog is indicative of the cultural hodgepodge created by centuries of imperialism. English is the more functional language. It is used for actual conveyance of information, and as such the characters rarely speak in Tagalog for extended periods. Tagalog is largely used for exclamations and occasional references to food, where an English equivalent is not readily available. The use of Tagalog carries a stigma, too, as expressed by Pucha upon Rio's arrival back in Manila. Tagalog implies connection to the nation but also a lack of refinement. It parallels the racial divide of the nation.

Ambiguous within the play's language is the actual meaning of the English. At one point in the play, a character makes reference to using English in the text. Still, Manila - like any major international city - is a polyglot culture, and Rainer Fassbinder, a native German-speaker, also speaks English. As such, English could conceivably be a stand-in language for any western tongue.

Regardless, language in *Dogeaters* is central to the indicating of a nation forever denied by the powers that conquered and colonized it.

## Structure

Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* is presented as a two-act play. The first act consists of 17 scenes, ranging from one to ten pages in length. These scenes are largely concerned with exposition and establishment of Manila culture. The catalyzing event of the play - Senator Avila's assassination - does not occur until the final moment of this act. The second action, more plot-driven, consists of 16 scenes in similar range of length.

These 33 cumulative scenes span multiple locations around Manila over the course of weeks and months. Most scenes are straight-forward dialogues, but several involve simultaneous interchanges juxtaposed. For example, Act I contains a scene in which three couples have sex simultaneously while a sex show is performed at the center of stage. The death of Senator Avila and the arrest of his daughter Daisy are both

performed with other scenes going on concurrently. This illustrates the bustle and contrivances inchoate in Manila society.

The structure of Dogeaters creates a fast-paced and initially confusing narrative. The entire first act is dedicated to acclimating the reader/audience to shifting loyalties and associations amongst the characters. Like an Altman film, Dogeaters is meant as a panorama on a series of themes. Some characters disappear into the ether, others stay with the proceedings until the end.



## Quotes

NESTOR: So many stories! A vaudeville of doomed love, shameless desire, dreams and longing. Someone always laughs, someone always cries, someone always dies.  
Act I, Scene 2, p. 17

MALLAT: ... The Philippines was totally unexpected. God's surprise, if you will. The Spaniards never fully appreciated this melancholy paradise, but I did. Such mystifying, hallucinogenic beauty.  
Act I, Scene 2, p. 19

PUCHA: Naku! Did you hear about our new Miss Philippines? Skandulosa, talaga! You know Daisy? She's Senator Avila's daughter. They say she's having sex with this NPA big shot, daw!  
Act I, Scene 9, p. 33

PERLITA: ... You know where the term "dogeater" came from? The Americans, of course. Oh, they were quite crude and creative with us, weren't they, Joey?  
Act I, Scene 10, pp. 40-41

JOEY: ... You foreigners are all the same. Think I'm stupid because I'm poor ... and pretty. Think you know everything.  
Act I, Scene 14, p. 56

RIO: So. Did the President or the First Lady order the assassination?  
Act II, Scene 1, p. 71

JOEY: ... Everything happened so fast, faster than you can imagine. I waited for him to shoot me next. One gun, maybe a million guns seemed to go off at once - (starts to laugh) I guess he wanted to make sure that Avila was really dead, huh?  
Act II, Scene 3, p. 74

DAISY: Where do I go? What do I choose? Lipstick, rosary or gun? I know that religion and revolution don't mix, but it's never been that simple for me ... My faith and my belief in God are being tested. I don't know what to do.  
Act II, Scene 4, p. 76

LEDESMA: ... You were on your way to meet the father of your baby up in the mountains, weren't you? We know you're pregnant, Daisy. We know everything there is to know about you.  
Act II, Scene 8, p. 87

IMELDA: ... I serve my people and I shine with beauty and love for them. I come from poverty, Bob, I never deny it. Because I happen to look great - they assume ... [I am] stealing food from children's mouths. Absurd, di ba?  
Act II, Scene 10, p. 94





DAISY: ... I mean all of this. Our country. Do you love our country? (Joey is silent. a beat.) I do. More than ever. With a love that burns.  
Act II, Scene 14, p. 105

LEONOR: Ave Maria, mother of revenge. The Lord was never with you. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed are the fruits of thy womb: guavas, mangos, santol, mangosteen, durian. Now and forever, world without end. Now and forever.  
Act II, Scene 15, p. 108



## Topics for Discussion

The Philippines is a nation that is constantly living with the specter of colonization. As a class, discuss what aspects of the society reflected in *Dogeaters* can be traced back to its colonial past. How is Filipinos' national image affected by this past?

Joey is an essentially selfish person, but by the end of the play he has become a valuable force for the common good. How does this role get hoisted upon him? How does he react to the duty? At the end of the play, is he any more accepting of this duty?

Discuss the idea of commoditization in the play. How are individual characters turned into commodities? Do other characters commoditize them, or is it a systemic act? What does this say about the value of human life in Marcos-era Manila?

Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos modeled their public image on that of the Kennedys. How the who political families are similar and different? How does Imelda Marcos understand the notes of Camelot, but not the music? What does the glamorous veneer hide?

Joey Sands and Daisy Avila are both forced to flee Manila because of Senator Avila's assassination. Compare and contrast these characters. How are their lives different before the killing? Why are they endangered by the assassination? What does the dialogue at the end of the play say about their understanding of country?

In the first act, Senator Avila argues that Filipinos need to stop infantilizing themselves with playful nicknames. he says it has a detrimental effect on the nation. Discuss how the playfulness of the play's Manila makes dictatorship possible. What is the danger of accepting a leader that is charismatic?

Discuss the notion of national trauma. Clearly Senator Avila's - and his historic equivalent Senator Ninoy Aquino - murder is a Philippine trauma. What was lost with his killing? What does it reveal about the ruling class in the Philippines? What similar traumas has the United States experienced in recent decades?

Discuss the relationship between the personal and the political in the play. How are individual characters affected by the murder of Senator Avila? What changes in Manila as a result? Why are certain characters killed and others allowed to live?