

# **Master Georgie Study Guide**

## **Master Georgie by Beryl Bainbridge**

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# Plot Summary

*Master Georgie* is the story of George Hardy, an English surgeon and amateur photographer, who leaves his affluent lifestyle in Victorian England to face the perils of war and the battleground at Inkerman in the Crimea. Three people who are close to him tell his story. They are Myrtle, a love struck foundling, Dr. Potter, a geologist and intellectual, and Pompey Jones, a savvy and cynical one-time street performer. This is an historical novel. However, the war-torn Crimea is merely a backdrop for these four main characters, whose lives are forever linked by a single, fateful event that takes place in Liverpool, in 1846. Due to this one, shared experience, their lives are inextricably and permanently woven together.

The book is organized into six chapters, which are referred to as "plates," in reference to the photography conceit running throughout the story. In each chapter, a picture is taken which has thematic implications. Each picture is taken either by the amateur photographer Master Georgie himself, Pompey Jones, or the war photographer. Myrtle, Potter and Jones take turns telling the story in the first person, revealing their relationships with one another, and with the conflicted and enigmatic Master Georgie.

The twelve-year-old orphan, Myrtle, begins the story. As a baby, she is found in a poor neighborhood lying next to a dead woman. By a stroke of luck, she lands in the respectable Hardy household as an adopted daughter. She idolizes and adores her older brother, Master Georgie, and follows him everywhere. He seems to pay little attention to her, though he tolerates her attentions. Her whole life seems to be lived for the purpose of being with him, watching him and pleasing him. One day, she follows him to the Washington Hotel in Liverpool, where he is meeting William Rimmer, a fellow medical student. While waiting in the park, she observes a boy return a stolen duck to a poor woman.

After Master Georgie emerges from the hotel, he walks to a seedy neighborhood with Myrtle following him. Entering a brothel, he discovers the body of his father lying in a whore's bed. The boy in the park, whom Myrtle refers to as the duck-boy, comes into the room just as the body is discovered. It is there that the three begin their remarkable journey together. They manage to get the body back to the Hardy house and up to a bedroom, where the body is "discovered" by a maid later on that evening. Master Georgie instructs Myrtle to pose next to the body, and he takes a picture. He declares at that point that from then on, things will be different between them.

Pompey Jones, the duck-boy, takes over the narration in the next chapter, which begins four years after the death of Mr. Hardy. Myrtle has been sent off to boarding school, where she is becoming a lady. Jones has now become a Hardy family intimate, and a photography assistant to Master Georgie. By this time, George has also become a full-fledged surgeon.

Jones is contacted by George one day and told to come to the house, as he has a job for him to do. The next morning while everyone is still asleep, Jones appears at the



house and engages in some shenanigans by moving a tiger skin rug into the diningroom and placing it on a chair facing the door. He and Master Georgie then leave for Blundell Hall, the home of William Rimmer's uncle. They are planning on meeting Rimmer, and the two surgeons will perform cataract surgery on an ape. The surgery is successful, and a picture is taken. Jones eats dinner with the servants at Blundell Hall and reveals to them that Master Georgie is now married to the former Miss Annie Prescott, who is presently four months' pregnant. A drunken George gets into the carriage, and the two head back to the Hardy home. Jones is resentful that Master Georgie still does not treat him as an equal, as evidenced by meeting a poor man on the road, whom George treats at least as well as he does Jones.

Upon arrival at the house, Dr. Potter, who has by now married Master Georgie's sister, Beatrice, tells George that his wife has had a miscarriage while they were away. He explains that she entered the diningroom looking for her knitting, and was nearly frightened out of her wits after seeing the tiger skin rug propped up on the chair. She fell down, broke her wrist, and had a miscarriage. Pompey Jones is informed at this point that he is banned from the Hardy household. He does not believe that that will be the end of it however, as he is having a homosexual affair with Master Georgie.

Dr. Potter, the objective intellectual and devoted husband of Beatrice, picks up the thread of the story four years later, when he and other members of Hardy household depart the country for the Crimea, which is on the brink of war. By now, he has guessed as to the truth of Mr. Hardy's death. His brother-in-law, George, has decided that he wants to do something morally decent and good with his life, and therefore he will search for a surgeon's post in the Crimea. Potter believes the trip, which includes Myrtle, Beatrice, Annie, and George and Annie's two children, is a terrible idea. An officer on board the ship, a Mr. Naughton, becomes infatuated with Myrtle, at which point George makes up a story about a fictional fiance, in order to put him off. The story spins out of the control to the point where the jealous Naughton attacks an officer and nearly kills him after mistakenly believing he is Myrtle's intended.

After arriving in Constantinople, the news comes that war has been declared on the Russians. George achieves his goal of gaining a post at Scutari. It is decided that Beatrice, Annie and the children will return to England as conditions are deteriorating. A trip to a popular Turkish resort is planned, however, before the women and children leave. There, a photograph is taken of the group. Later that night, at an opera house in Pera, is when Naughton almost commits murder on behalf of Myrtle. Potter seems to be losing his grip on reality as evidenced by his intellectual ravings and fantasies of home and his wife. George, Potter and Myrtle settle in Scutari where George begins regular work at the hospital. The dead and the dying are a commonplace sight, with George constantly attending to gruesomely wounded men. Potter observes Myrtle and George becoming inured to it, as Myrtle seems to be physically blooming, he notes, and George has stopped his drinking. When it seems as though it can't get much worse, cholera strikes and many more die. Potter seems to be losing his grip on reality, admitting that he is losing his bearings and his mind is out of kilter.



The fourth chapter is now told from Myrtle's viewpoint. She and a Mrs. Yardley, who is in the company of a Guardsman, are two of the few women left on the scene as the party departs for Varna. Out riding one day, the two women come across the distressing sight of a young dead soldier, whom they had just seen a short while ago, innocently eating some cherries. Potter, meanwhile, is accosted in his tent by some French soldiers who think his tent is a brothel, further upsetting his tenuous hold on reality, and his preconceived notions about the civility of the French versus that of the English. Myrtle and Georgie's past sexual relationship is revealed. George asks Myrtle to forgive him, telling her he will come to her that night, though he never does. It is because Pompey Jones has entered the story again at a critical moment. He has arrived with an entertainment troupe as a fire-eater and as an assistant to a war photographer. After the show that evening, a picture with the concert troupe is taken. Jones loses no time in insinuating himself into the group, and that night ousts Myrtle for the sexual attentions of Master Georgie.

In a conversation with Jones the next morning, Myrtle learns that the duck incident was a crafty street trick to gain a few coins. Her naivety regarding his intentions, however, still does cause her to reject him outright, as she learns that he keeps the picture of her with the dead Mr. Hardy on his person. It takes the objective Mr. Potter to warn her of his double-minded character. It is also revealed that the real mother of Master Georgie's children is Myrtle, and not Annie, and that both Jones and Potter know this to be true.

Potter narrates the fifth chapter, in which his grip on reality is slipping even further. It is now October, 1854, and the party has been in the Crimea since early March. Conditions continue to worsen. As Potter continues on a downward cycle, both George and Myrtle make references to his poor judgment and mental lapses. Leaving Varna, the group heads toward Inkerman, where a great battle between the Russians on one side, and the English and French on the other, is about to commence. From the ship, bodies are flung overboard, and people are regularly dying of horrific wounds and unchecked cholera. It is learned that Master Georgie's old friend William Rimmer has died of a head wound somewhere on a battlefield. Jones shows up again in the old Punch and Judy van, this time not as a performer but strictly as the war photographer's assistant. He takes a picture of the group during a funeral ceremony, with Potter seeing a vision of Beatrice in the middle of the it. The party trudges on toward Inkerman.

Finally, the survivor Pompey Jones narrates the last chapter, in which he and Potter talk about what it will take to survive the situation they are in. The group is now less than two miles from Inkerman, where the battle is raging. Jones vows that once he gets out of this, he will marry, have children, and that none of his children will ever have to beg, as he did. A wounded twelve-year-old drummer boy arrives at George's hospital tent, and Jones holds a cloth of ether over his face until he dies. He is reminded of the ape back at Blundell Hall. Another soldier with a blown-off ear arrives. His death is unsettling, and it rattles Potter and Myrtle. Jones seems to be inured to what is going on around him. As they descend upon Inkerman, they come face-to-face with the enemy, and Jones is forced to kill, describing the fact that once he's done it a few times, he has become used to it.



Jones makes a sexual overture toward Myrtle, telling her that all he ever wanted, was for her to admit that they were of a kind, and that it was chance and fate that threw them together in Master Georgie's path. Potter is spared a bullet at one point, as if he has a guardian angel. As George is tending to a wounded man, a wounded Russian soldier lifts his musket and fires, killing him. As far as the three reactions to this, Jones is matter-of-fact, Potter is uncomprehending, and Myrtle becomes unhinged.



# Chapter 1, Plate 1 1846 "Girl in the Presence of Death"

## Chapter 1, Plate 1 1846 "Girl in the Presence of Death" Summary

The story begins in the year 1846, when the orphan, Myrtle, is twelve years old and living with the upper middle-class Hardy family of Liverpool. When Mr. Hardy brought her into his home as a young girl, she was only to remain with the family temporarily, just until the smallpox epidemic was brought under control. However, the Hardy daughter, Beatrice, takes a liking to her, so she becomes a permanent member of the household. She does not know her exact age or name, but is named Myrtle after the street where the orphanage stands, where she would have been placed, had not the vagaries of chance and fate played a significant role in her life.

Growing up in the family, she is taught to read by Mrs. Hardy, plays with the young son, Master Freddie, is taken into the care of the kindly, but strict housekeeper, Mrs. O'Gorman, and falls in love with the other son, Master Georgie. She is intensely devoted to Master Georgie, and makes it a habit of following him everywhere.

One August morning, Myrtle follows Master Georgie to the Washington Hotel, where he is to meet Mr. William Rimmer, a friend and fellow student at the Medical Institute. She is keeping her usual, short distance behind him. George does not want her to be too close. If he wants to stay out late, it is Myrtle's job to run back home and see if this is alright with his mother, whom he has a strained relationship with, and who is mentally and emotionally unstable. As Master Georgie enters the hotel, Myrtle stays behind in the park. There, she observes a Punch and Judy show, and a boy kindly returning a stolen duck to a poor woman. After a horse rears up and strikes the Punch and Judy van, Myrtle witnesses Mr. Punch falling out of his stall and landing in a heap on the ground, his disguise given away. After an hour in the park waiting for Master Georgie, it begins to rain. Myrtle finally sees William Rimmer leaving the hotel, followed by Master Georgie. They seem to be having an argument, and they part ways.

Myrtle continues to follow Master Georgie down Bold Street. He doesn't take the usual route home, but instead heads up to St. James' Mount, a lower class neighborhood. Myrtle thinks he must not be paying attention to where he is going. The area is dirty and ugly, with Myrtle seeing ragged children and drunken men on the street corners. Master Georgie enters a building where a low-class woman in torn clothing greets him. Myrtle follows him up to a third floor room where there is a dead man lying on a bed, wearing nothing but a shirt, his naked buttocks exposed. Master Georgie cries out. It is his father, Mr. Hardy. The boy from the park, the duck-boy, suddenly appears and pushes Myrtle aside and asks the woman what happened. She replies that it had nothing to do with her.



Master Georgie tells the duck-boy that they must remove the body. The duck-boy tells Master Georgie that there is a van in the alley and a horse in the stables. He asks Master Georgie for money. The two pick up the body and carry it down to the alley and the waiting van, which happens to be the Punch and Judy van from the park. They struggle to lay him flat in the van before rigor mortis sets in. They shut Myrtle up inside the van with the dead body and set off for home.

Once back at the Hardy residence, Myrtle is sent ahead to ascertain the whereabouts of Beatrice, Mrs. Hardy, and Dr. Potter, a geologist, and family friend who is courting Miss Beatrice. While creeping through the house, Myrtle overhears a mysterious conversation between an unknown woman, Miss Beatrice, and Dr. Potter. It has to do with someone being invited to a tea party, though Myrtle does not know at the time that the conversation is referring to the object of her affections, Master Georgie. She takes Master Georgie's fur-lined coat out of the closet, and hurries back to the two waiting in the garden. They wrap the dead body in the cloak and carry it up to the blue room. They lay the body on the bed, and tidy it up. Myrtle is reminded by Master Georgie that the official story about what happened, is that Mr. Hardy died from a heart attack. Master Georgie rides off on his horse.

The dinner gong sounds and Mr. Hardy does not appear for dinner. An hour later, the maidservant finds Mr. Hardy dead in the bed. Dr. Potter, who has only just left, is summoned back to the house. At midnight, Master Georgie appears, home from his nighttime ride, and in the company of a Captain Tuckett, a friend who is staying in the neighborhood.

The next morning, Master Georgie summons Myrtle to the blue room, where the body of Mr. Hardy is still lying on the bed. He tells Myrtle that they share a burdensome secret, and that he is sorry he has done this to her. Master Georgie is fitting plates into his camera as he speaks. Myrtle is asked to pose with the body by putting her hand on Mr. Hardy's shoulder. Master Georgie takes a picture. Myrtle thinks he is hinting that she might be sent away, but he assures her that that is not the case. He says she must keep quiet about what has happened, and that things will be different between them from now on. Myrtle thinks that whatever happens, she will never leave him, and she will remain devoted to him forever.

## **Chapter 1, Plate 1 1846 "Girl in the Presence of Death" Analysis**

If the smallpox epidemic had not been going on at the time, Myrtle might never have become a member of the Hardy household. It is also only due to the whim of the spoiled daughter, Beatrice, that she remains. Chance and fate have played a part in Myrtle's entrance into this privileged existence from the brothel she was born into. Myrtle does not consciously let chance or fate rule herself, however, as it is the force of her tremendous will that propels her through life. She is single-minded in her physical and spiritual pursuit of Master Georgie. She literally never lets him out of her sight, following him every time he leaves the house.





Myrtle is both mentally and spiritually strong, saying that the beatings she took from Mrs. O'Gorman were only for her own good, and that her other relationships in the family make her aware that she is not a loved member of the household. She does not mind this, however, because it means that her affections do not have to be diluted, and that she can lavish them all on Master Georgie. As for Master Georgie, he seems to tolerate her, letting her run behind him as she likes to do. Whether or not this conscious decision of her heart to love at any cost can save them both, has yet to be determined.

The fact that Mr. Hardy is found dead in a whore's bed reveals that things are very much not as they seem. This revelation comes at the same time as the Punch and Judy man's disguise is revealed, as he falls out of the overturned van, cursing. These are ugly revelations. The duck-boy seemingly returns a stolen duck to a poor woman, but who knows for sure the nature of his motivation? At the same time, other secrets are tied up in tight knots. Master Georgie, the duck-boy and Myrtle now share a very big secret about Mr. Hardy's death. Was it chance or fate that brought them together in the whorehouse, looking at one another over the dead body? Maybe. Regardless, the fact of this secret will profoundly affect the life of each, and the path that each will follow in relation to one another.



## Chapter 2, Plate 2 1850 "A Veil Lifted"

### Chapter 2, Plate 2 1850 "A Veil Lifted" Summary

It is now four years later, and Pompey Jones, also known as the duck-boy, is called upon by Master Georgie to do some work for him. He is to meet George at the Hardy residence early in the morning. He arrives at the house an hour early, letting himself in without anyone's knowledge. He has been a frequent visitor to the Hardy household since the time of Mr. Hardy's death. He has prided himself on his accomplishment of wreaking havoc on the family by surreptitiously moving things in the house from one place to another, such as pictures, rugs and pieces of furniture. Dr. Potter, who has by now become Miss Beatrice's husband, questions the servants about the situation. Miss Beatrice believes it is the ghost of her father lurking about. On this particular day, Pompey Jones decides to switch a Persian runner with a tiger skin rug from one room to another. He drags the tiger skin into the dining room, draping it over a chair with its head pointing in the direction of the door.

Mrs. O'Gorman awakens and makes a fuss over Pompey, warming his toes and preparing something for him to eat. He tells her that he is to accompany Master Georgie to Blundell Hall, the home of William Rimmer's uncle, where they will cut out the eyes of a live ape. She is aghast. They will also take photographs of the operation, as he has now become a photography assistant to Master Georgie.

The two men take some time to load the photographic equipment, and on the ride to Blundell Hall, Pompey ruminates on not being treated as an equal by Master Georgie, though he is grateful that George, who has now become a surgeon, repaired the scar on his lip from his fire-eating days. They talk of Myrtle, with Pompey learning that Myrtle has, after all, been sent away to boarding school, where she is excelling in French and is well on her way to becoming a lady.

Upon arrival at the gloomy Blundell Hall, Pompey learns that the operation will involve removing the ape's cataracts instead of cutting out its eyes, though he is uncertain of what this means. Pompey is instructed by George and William Rimmer to put the ape to sleep using a handkerchief soaked in ether. The two surgeons perform the operation, and it appears to be a success. They then take photographs of the creature. Pompey eats dinner with the servants at Blundell Hall, and in a conversation with one of them, divulges that George is married to one of Mrs. Prescott's daughters, Annie, and that she is in her fourth month of pregnancy. (The Prescott daughters were the subject of the mysterious argument George and Rimmer were having outside the Washington Hotel four years earlier.) He also states that this time, she seems to be 'holding on' to the pregnancy.

George informs Pompey that he will be staying overnight at Blundell Hall, and that he should return to Liverpool without him. He has been drinking. He then suddenly changes his mind, gets into the back of the carriage and goes to sleep amid the clutter



of the photographic equipment. They come to a spot on the road midway between Waterloo and Seaforth, and find a poor old man sitting near a driftwood fire. George gets out and talks to the man, treating him politely, which Pompey resents. George, still drunk, gets back in the carriage, and they continue on their way. Pompey thinks back to the time when they were standing in the blue bedroom with the body of Mr. Hardy between them. George called him a 'good boy', and then leaned over the body of his father to touch his cheek. He ruminates on this homosexual advance, not despising George so much for this, but for the fact that George still refuses to treat him as an equal.

Dr. Potter is waiting for them back at the house. He beckons George into the study where he speaks to him privately, after which George lurches up the staircase, very upset. Dr. Potter ominously motions for Pompey to come in, as he would like to speak with him as well. He gives him a speech about a man taking responsibility for his actions. He then informs Pompey that earlier that day, the young Mrs. Hardy, Annie, went into the darkened diningroom looking for her needlework and was frightened out of her wits by the tiger skin propped up on the chair. She turned, stumbled and broke her wrist, and miscarried the baby. (Mrs. O'Gorman had admitted to Dr. Potter that Pompey was in the house at dawn.) He leaves the house, feeling remorseful about what happened, but assures Mrs. O'Gorman that he will see her again, because he is confident that Master Georgie will not be able to do without him for very long.

## Chapter 2, Plate 2 1850 "A Veil Lifted" Analysis

Four years have passed, and the fallout concerning the secret of Mr. Hardy's death has played out to some extent in the lives of Myrtle and Pompey Jones. Myrtle has been, after all, sent off to boarding school, where she is learning French and becoming a lady worthy of the status of the Hardy household. Jones, on the other hand, is taken in to the employ of Master Georgie, doing menial tasks at one point, but eventually refusing this kind of work due to his privileged knowledge of Mr. Hardy's death. He has made a habit of sneaking into the Hardy house on Blackberry Lane and throwing things out of kilter by moving objects around. Once again, things are not as they seem, only now it is on a physical plane. He also has a hold on George due to the homosexual overtures George has made towards him.

Jones represents a self-sufficient character, one who is not afforded the luxury of a decent birthright, but one who by nature of his cunning, intelligence and ambition, seems to be able to survive quite well in Victorian England, where birthright and social class are everything.

George, on the other hand, seems to be confused about his sexuality, and is sinking into a state of self-indulgent alcoholism. It is revealed that he is now married to Annie, yet makes appointments to meet Jones. In spite of this confusion, he still yearns to accomplish something good on a moral level. The experiment on the ape is an effort to do something worthwhile with his skills as a physician. He has also repaired Jones's

scarred lip. However, as Jones insightfully observes, fixing the ape's cataracts can not be much good, if in the end, life can only be viewed through the bars of a cage.



## Chapter 3, Plate 3 1854 "Tug-of-War Beside the Sweet Waters of Europe"

### Chapter 3, Plate 3 1854 "Tug-of-War Beside the Sweet Waters of Europe" Summary

Master Georgie, Dr. Potter, Myrtle, Beatrice, Annie, and the children set out for Constantinople on the 27th of February on the steamer, *Cambria*. The ship is also filled with two hundred British soldiers on their way to the impending war in the Crimea. Dr. Potter has tried to talk Annie out of coming on this dangerous journey, but to no avail. Myrtle had been in favor of her coming, he says, on account of the children. The steamer is crowded, the food is excellent, he notes, and Beatrice is seasick for most of the journey. The ship's collie has puppies, and one of them is earmarked for the children. George has been drinking to excess on the trip.

A Mr. Naughton, a representative from the Liverpool Board of Commerce, is also on the ship. After four days he is smitten with Myrtle. He takes George aside and makes his feelings for Myrtle known to him. George replies that Myrtle is betrothed to a man who is waiting for her to join him in Constantinople. As the fiance is only imaginary, of course, and there will be no fiance to meet them, George tells Dr. Potter that he will deal with the fallout of the lie, once they reach their destination. At dinner one evening, Mr. Naughton blurts out in front of everyone that Miss Hardy's fiance is indeed a fortunate man. Everyone is shocked except for Myrtle, who calmly replies, looking at Master Georgie, that it is she who is the fortunate one.

Mr. Naughton chooses to keep company with Dr. Potter, which annoys Potter, because he finds Naughton tedious. They argue about the merits of the war and the intelligence of the so-called educated men leading the country into it.

The party arrives at the port of Valletta. They disembark, taking in the country, the colorful peoples and the exotic food. The women find it interesting, but Dr. Potter finds it tedious. He spends the night in a hotel with Beatrice, admitting that he can't do very well without her. Back on board the ship, he tells Beatrice the story of the hermit of Malea, a bearded solitary who was once a wealthy ship owner. He took such pride in himself and his abilities that he insisted on commanding a ship of his fleet. Three times he steered the vessel off course, only to have it founder on the rocks off Cape Malea where his men drowned. As the *Cambria* passes the Cape, Dr. Potter tells his disinterested wife that the man lives as a hermit there, to do penance for his lost men.

The party arrives in Constantinople where the first two weeks are filled with expeditions, luncheon parties and late night suppers, much to Dr. Potter's chagrin. The women seem to enjoy the activities, all except for Myrtle. She is busy taking care of the children. Beatrice befriends a Mrs. Yardley, who is traveling from England in the company of a colonel of the Guards. In the midst of this gaiety, some confusing military news arrives.



The party learns initially that the Turks have won a glorious victory, only to find out soon after that the Duke Of Cambridge and Lord Raglan were on their way to Malta to make a declaration of war against the Russians. In a distressing incident, Myrtle faints dead away after witnessing the children's puppy being torn to shreds by a pack of dogs. This surprises Potter and the rest, as Myrtle is known for her strength and fortitude.

George appears to have stopped his excessive drinking. One evening, George asks Mr. Potter to be his executor in case something untoward happens to him on the trip. This request (and example of foreshadowing) makes Potter uncomfortable. George asks that if he gains a post at Scutari, Potter remain in Constantinople and obtain passage back to England for Annie and the children. He then goes into a discourse about his past life, regrets and shortcomings. He says to Potter that he believes the war will afford him an opportunity to do something useful with his life. Mr. Naughton approaches the two at this time, and inquires once again about Myrtle's fiancy. (He believes that the handsome young guard who came to Myrtle's aid during the puppy incident is her finance.) George decides at this time to break off the phantom engagement, telling Naughton that the man has treated Myrtle disgracefully, and that the marriage is off.

It is decided that Beatrice, Annie and the children will sail home at the beginning of May. George has achieved his goal of gaining the post at Scutari, where he has been appointed assistant to a Turkish doctor at the Barrack Hospital. Potter notices that George seems to be a changed man, conveying an air of candor and innocence of spirit that has been lacking in him since his youth. Before the women and children depart, a last outing to The Sweet Waters of Europe, which is a fancy, popular Turkish resort, is planned. It is a two-hour ride across country from Constantinople. Naughton is present on this trip, and still seems to be very interested in Myrtle. The party stops for lunch at a sumptuous palace belong to the sultan's brother. The navy happens to be holding athletic contests on the grounds at the time, and the party stops to watch. Mr. Potter, as he is resting near a tree, meets a scholarly man he once knew, a Mr. Gustav Streicher, the director of the Archaeological Collection at Kertch. A strange conversation follows, in which Streicher says he knows of no war going on, commenting that Troy has already been sacked. At the end of the day at the palace, George insists on everyone posing for a photograph.

Later that evening, the group visits the opera in the European quarter of the town of Pera. The theater is filthy, according to Potter, and he is cross for having to attend. He comments on how smelly and hot it is, and how the furniture is broken. Myrtle, however, seems to be moved by the Verdi opera, as she is crying. Mr. Naughton, in a box opposite of where Myrtle is sitting, notices a young officer and a young woman embracing in a box near Myrtle's. He recognizes the officer as the handsome young hussar officer whom he took to be Myrtle's ex-fiancy, given the misinformation supplied to him by Mr. Potter and Master Georgie. In a stunning display, he stalks over to the box, attacks the hussar and causes him to pitch over the railing to the ground level. Naughton later tells Potter that after seeing Myrtle crying, he felt called upon to avenge her honor. Fortunately, the hussar captain survives the fall, and Mr. Potter ironically recalls the dressing down he gave Pompey Jones years before about the tiger skin rug incident.



George, Potter and Myrtle settle in at Scutari where George begins regular work at the hospital. Potter notes that Myrtle appears to be changing from a pale, thin young woman to a rounded, glowing one. Naughton is summarily shipped back home. George then accepts a post at Varna, where the three doctors before him have all succumbed to cholera, which worries Potter. He considers returning to Constantinople, but doesn't want to leave Myrtle, whom he knows will never leave George.

Conditions, meanwhile, are fast becoming dire. During the voyage to Varna, an officer in the Dragoons suddenly dies while eating, slumping over into his dinner plate. The three companions arrive at Varna, where the pier is broken and rotting, and a horse breaks its leg and has to be shot. The town is in a state of disarray due to the large numbers of horses, troops and supply carts. Rats are running rampant. Cholera is raging through the area. George checks in to the General Hospital, where he notes that the conditions are disgraceful and that men there are dying at an alarming rate due to the terrible conditions and lack of medical supplies. Things become so bad all around that Potter muses that he is lost in both mind and spirit.

## **Chapter 3, Plate 3 1854 "Tug-of-War Beside the Sweet Waters of Europe" Analysis**

George now has the excuse he needs to accomplish something morally good - the war in the Crimea. The entire crew is packed onto a ship and heads for Constantinople and eventually the war zone, where George hopes to gain a post as a military surgeon. Once again, things are not as they seem. Onboard the ship, A Captain Naughton becomes smitten with Myrtle, and George and Potter cook up a convoluted story about her supposed fiancy. This is more evidence of the conflicted George, who is unable to claim Myrtle as his own, but who is also unable to live without her, either. By this time, she has become a symbol of strength and fortitude among them all.

This chapter is told by Mr. Potter, the geologist, who sees the world from an intellectual viewpoint and who decries the lack of educated men in higher office, the ones leading the country into war. He therefore thinks the war is folly, and at every possible moment inanely brings up his vast knowledge of Greek mythology, applying the feats of Homer and Ulysses to the present situation. He talks of the hermit of Malea, hearkening back to a lost romantic time, a time he wishes he could be living in. He seems to be out of touch, but then, his ability to descend into his fantasy world may be the thing that saves him. The real world is steadily becoming more horrible and harder to comprehend.

George, on the other hand, seems to be thriving in the present situation. He has stopped his drinking, and admits to Potter that the war is a crutch that is holding him up, beyond Myrtle. He says there are things he has done that are not right. In this present unhappy reality, while Potter is gradually drifting off somewhere else, George is plunging himself headlong into it. Whether or not he has the strength to survive it, remains to be seen.

Finally, Potter recognizes that the lies he told to Mr. Naughton, regarding Myrtle's fictional fiance, have not been without consequence. He thinks back to the time when Pompey Jones moved pictures and things around at the house in a haphazard way, resulting in Annie's miscarriage. After Mr. Naughton practically kills an innocent man, he concludes that haphazard actions like these should never be underestimated. In a larger sense, this reasoning applies to the war and the motives, or lack of reasonable motives, that have all brought them there in the first place.





# Chapter 4, Plate 4 August 1854 "Concert Party at Varna"

## Chapter 4, Plate 4 August 1854 "Concert Party at Varna" Summary

George instructs Potter to buy Myrtle a pony. She spends time riding in the countryside with Mrs. Yardley. One day, the women pass two young soldiers in the woods, who are enjoying some leisure time. During this foray, they come across some villagers, witness a goat giving birth, come across a threatening pack of dogs, and have a conversation where Mrs. Yardley reveals that Mr. Naughton, now back in England, is having financial struggles due to the neglect of his business. They also talk of the vicious dog attack that killed the children's puppy. On the ride back home, they come across the same two soldiers they saw earlier, only now one of them is dead, still sitting with his back against the tree.

One night, Dr. Potter is accosted in his tent by a group of French officers, who believe that his tent is a designated brothel. One of them tries to kiss him. He is shocked, because it has always been his belief that the French are more civilized than the English. Myrtle is spending her time looking after twenty or more orphaned children, noting that it is difficult to love children that are not your own. Master Georgie has a row with his superior, Dr. Hall, complaining about him profusely, and then quickly jumping to his defense after Potter criticizes him as well. Myrtle makes a sexual advance toward Master Georgie in his tent, but she is pushed away. This reveals for the first time that a previous sexual relationship existed between them. George tells her that he would like to be alone. Myrtle believes that she is being rejected, because she is having her period. To make up for it, George insists that they have dinner together. Mrs. Yardley and her colonel join them for dinner, though they have to bring their own food, because rations are low. A recently arrived concert troupe entertains the group after dinner, with a fire-eater coming on stage during the second act. Myrtle notices that a ballad called "Saved by a Child" has a profound effect on George. He asks Myrtle to forgive him, and says that he will come to her later that night.

Myrtle readies herself for the arrival of George, and waits until dawn, but he still does not come. She goes into the medical tent where she finds him asleep. The fire-eater, who it is revealed to be Pompey Jones, is sleeping beside him. She walks out toward the lake in a state of shock, where Mrs. Yardley finds her. She greets Pompey Jones later that morning after he has had a bath in the river with George. Myrtle reveals that three years ago, shortly after being 'made into a lady,' she has had her first sexual encounter with Master Georgie.

The concert troupe poses for a photograph. Pompey Jones, the duck-boy, is now an assistant to a photographer whom he met in Chester. He is still driving the original Punch and Judy van which, years ago, transported the dead Mr. Hardy from the brothel



to his house on Blackberry Lane. In a conversation with Jones, Myrtle learns that the act of kindness that she witnessed, in the return of the duck to the poor woman, was merely a street trick that inspired passersby to give him a coin or two as a reward for honesty. He tells her that he 'knows about the children,' meaning that he believes that Master Georgie's children, are, in fact, Myrtle's, and not Annie's.

Myrtle has a conversation with Mr. Potter, and learns of his misgivings concerning the character of Pompey Jones. She says to Potter that Jones knows about the babies being hers, and that it was George who told him. She tells Potter that Jones keeps a photograph of her pressed to his heart. Potter warns her that some day, Jones's mask of kindness and concern will slip away, and he will be revealed for what he is, which is a cunning, selfish confidence man.

## **Chapter 4, Plate 4 August 1854 "Concert Party at Varna" Analysis**

This chapter is told from Myrtle's viewpoint. She and Mrs. Yardley go on a trek through the woods, and meet up with a local family who show them hospitality. Myrtle tells Mrs. Yardley that they must give them something in return, because she states that nothing is given for free in this world. This is a key to Myrtle's strength. She goes on and on as she does, because she feels that nothing is owed to her. She will work for everything she has, including the love of Master Georgie, which she never takes for granted.

The shocking, senseless nature of the war is conveyed in the instance of the dead boy, sitting against a tree. Myrtle and Mrs. Yardley pass him on the trail as he is eating some cherries, actually a pretty picture to behold. When they return a few hours later, he is still sitting in the same position, only now he is dead, flies crawling along his fingers and at his mouth, stained with cherry juice. The inane, senseless nature of this event is not lost on the women. Myrtle weakens momentarily, second-guessing her love for Georgie by the image of this dead boy. In her mind, she sees herself still a girl, but Master Georgie grown old, his hair all white, and with all the love she has given him rotting on his lap like the dead soldier's cherries.

During the concert party, the performance of the song, 'Saved by a Child,' gives a clue as to Georgie's mental and emotional state. The song is about a world-weary man who hears a child singing, which melts his heart of stone. Georgie reaches for Myrtle's hand after this, and asks that she forgive him. George is aware of all the harm he has done Myrtle, and this action exposes his soft heart and contrite feelings. He says he will come to her later that night, but she waits in vain, as he succumbs to his urge for the duck-boy, Pompey Jones. Being thrust into a landscape where death is as common as taking a sip of water, still has not helped Master Georgie sort out his feelings, and decide as he stands at death's door himself, what truly matters to him. It has also apparently not afforded him a moral center, which is the thing he has been searching for so diligently ever since he was a young man, and the reason he has come to the Crimea in the first place.



Myrtle also has an old illusion dispelled. She finds out that the return of the duck to the woman in Washington Square was a dishonest street trick that Jones often engaged in. What was believed to be old truth, now becomes more fiction. It is simply the pile-on of more illusion. Another cover-up, finally laid bare, is that Myrtle admits to Jones that it is she who is the mother of Master Georgie's two children, and not Annie. When Potter hears about their conversation, he thinks Myrtle is a fool for confiding in the supreme confidence man himself, Pompey Jones.



# Chapter 5, Plate 5 October 1854 "Funeral Procession Shadowed by Beatrice"

## Chapter 5, Plate 5 October 1854 "Funeral Procession Shadowed by Beatrice" Summary

The group leaves Varna by sea in September, along with sixty-four thousand British, French and Turkish troops. Mrs. Yardley has gone home. George is angry, because a good deal of the hospital equipment has to be left behind. Many people are dying, and bodies are summarily flung overboard. A fire breaks out on board the ship.

On the fourteenth of the month, the ship lands in Kalamita Bay in the Crimea. They put up tents for shelter and start cooking fires. Medical supplies are in appallingly short supply, and George is upset about this. Food is also scarce, and the flies are thick. On the 18th, the order comes to march. Dr. Potter, in order to forget his misery, dreams of walking through the plum orchard back at Blackberry Lane. After twenty-five miles of marching, the group nears Sebastopol, and shortly thereafter the orders come in that it is to be encircled by the troops. During this trip, Myrtle takes a spill from her horse and lands near a grisly amputated limb. The sight is disturbing to her and she initially says she would like to go back, though she eventually trudges on.

Dr. Potter begins ruminating on Homer's *Odyssey* as the port city of Balaclava is seen from a distance. He begins to try to extricate himself mentally from the present by making connections to the past with every thought of home that presents itself. He hears the dialect of a Scotsman in the infantry, and dwells on his own childhood connection to that country. In a conversation with Myrtle, he wonders about chance and circumstance and her relationship to Master Georgie. She finally makes the comment that it is he they should be talking about, and not her, as if she has determined he has become mentally undone and needs help.

Potter and George have dinner with a Captain Jerome, a Captain Frampton, and a young lieutenant, named Gormsby. They talk of the war in technical terms, all except for Potter, who finds it befuddling. As they speak, he dreams of Beatrice. He finally contributes to the conversation by bringing up more Greek mythology, telling those present that human beings are a despicable race and deserve the punishment of the gods. He is taken aside by George afterward and upbraided. George tells him that these soldiers are knocking on death's door, and there is no need to alarm and upset them further with his ramblings. Word comes that George's old friend, William Rimmer, is killed somewhere in the Crimea from a head wound.

Pompey Jones is on the scene in his photographer's van as the group prepares to break camp and move on toward Inkerman where the Russians await. While Potter is foraging for firewood, he witnesses a soldier shoot himself in the foot on purpose. Just before leaving the area, a funeral service is held for the many corpses lying about. Pompey



Jones sets up his camera and photographs the occasion. Potter thinks of how the lens of the camera is incapable of exposing the turmoil inside the human brain. As he poses for the picture, he has a sexual fantasy of Beatrice in her nightgown. He then sees a vision of her standing near the wrapped corpses and beckoning to him, showing him some blue cornflowers. Potter thinks morosely that the human race faces not only extinction, but also all traces that it even existed.

## **Chapter 5, Plate 5 October 1854 "Funeral Procession Shadowed by Beatrice" Analysis**

Told from Dr. Potter's viewpoint, events are steadily spinning out of control and his mind with them. Sickness and death are everywhere, with bodies being flung overboard only to float up again, bloated. It's as if death and its constant presence can never be escaped. In an attempt to divert himself, Potter fantasizes about his wife and the Hardy home at Blackberry Lane. He desperately fastens his mind onto any other connection to home, such as the Scotsman's dialect. He sinks into his intellectual world by pontificating on Greek mythology at the most inopportune of times.

Potter struggles with the notion that it is perhaps chance, or fate that has brought them all there at this particular wrenching moment in history, and that the never-ending succession of horrible events have gained such momentum that there is nothing any puny human being can do to alter them. Each of them is flung about at the whim of the gods. Potter concludes that destiny cannot be wholly decided by one's own initiative, moral strength or intellectual fortitude, but that the vagaries of chance play a large and inexorable part.

The vision of Beatrice in her nightgown perhaps refers to an event that has not been directly revealed, but which can be surmised. Beatrice has died back in England, and now Potter is faced with her ghost on the battlefield near the Tchernaya River. Either this, or it is a vision. She beckons to him sorrowfully, showing him a blue flower, which he reaches out and plucks. She shakes her head as if to say that it is not yet his time yet, and that he must remain.



# Chapter 6, Plate 6 November 1854 "Smile, Boys, Smile"

## Chapter 6, Plate 6 November 1854 "Smile, Boys, Smile" Summary

The group, including the army attachment, is now positioned on a ridge above the Tchernaya valley, opposite some ruins. They are a little more than two miles from the Mount at Inkerman, where a battle is raging, and which the attachment may be forced to defend should the commander, Lord Raglan, call them to do so. Pompey Jones and Potter have a conversation in which they decide that willpower and concentration will ensure survival. Jones determinedly states that he will be a survivor. Once he gets out of this, he says to himself, he will marry a good woman, grow old surrounded by his children, and that no child of his will ever have to beg, as he once did.

Myrtle and Potter have moved in to the hospital tent with George, while Jones remains in the Punch and Judy van. Men with grisly wounds descend upon the hospital at a rapid rate. A twelve-year-old drummer boy is brought in, and Jones holds a cloth of ether over his face, as he once did years ago with the ape, until he dies. Potter chatters on about Beatrice, and George tells Jones that he thinks Potter is going out of his mind. A soldier with a blown-off ear arrives, and absurdly begins shaking everyone's hand, the blood flying everywhere. The story goes that, when he first arrived at the front, he was suffering from amnesia and has been answering to the name Private Knowlitt. As the moment the shell blows off his ear, he instantly remembers his former life and that his name is Harry St. Claire. As he continues to shake hands with the hospital staff, his face whitens, his eyes grow as round as saucers and he drops dead as the guns boom in the distance. George says he has died from exhaustion and blood loss. Myrtle, Potter and Jones take the deaths of these two very hard.

The next day dawns, thick with fog. Potter and Jones converse about the relationship between Master Georgie and Myrtle, Potter asking Jones what it was that George did to Myrtle all those years ago to make her love him so. Potter says that he doesn't believe Master Georgie is a man swayed by emotion, at which point Jones thinks that Potter is not at all as clever as he makes himself out to be. Potter mentions the subject of pictures, telling Jones that now is the time for the truth to be told. Jones thinks he is talking about the photographs he has been taking, but Potter is referring to the picture on the wall at Blackberry Lanes of the ships of Mersey that Jones moved around all those years ago, as if he is trying to set the record straight before dying. Jones thinks back to the time when he was barred from the household on account of his actions. He also remembers that it did not prevent George's sexual advances, as he tried to see him at the Washington Hotel later on. Potter insists again on an explanation for the picture, which Jones refuses to give him.



Jones describes his recent photography, referring to it as art. It includes pictures of piles of amputated limbs and the recent funeral ceremony that the group attended. He notices a woman in the picture, which puzzles him, as he believes that the three women present were all accounted for and not within range of the camera lens.

The orders come that the company is to march. The fog is still very thick and the job of breaking down the camp and loading up the supplies is chaotic. The company begins to move through the fog, but progress is slow. Myrtle wants to go faster in order to catch up to George, whom she cannot see ahead of her. A skirmish breaks out and Jones and Myrtle end up on the ground, lying still together, to avoid the enemy soldiers. Jones makes an overt sexual advance, which Myrtle rejects. He explains that the only thing he has ever wanted of her was that she recognize they are of a kind, and that fate has positioned them together in Master Georgie's life.

After the enemy soldiers disappear, Jones is forced to shoot the horse, which has had both its hind legs broken. Myrtle tells Jones that she is going forward to find George, no matter what. They walk along, stepping over piles of bodies. Jones leaves Myrtle after he is ordered to join a column of the 4th division. He engages in hand to hand combat, describing the experience of stabbing a man to death as ordinary after he has done it a few times. He watches two officers engage in hand to hand sword combat, surrounded by cheering soldiers, with both eventually falling, mortally wounded. Jones kills a young boy, whom he says he would like to spare, but is unable to as the boy slashes his brow. He admits he has no explanation of why he is killing, though he thinks Potter can tell him.

He is then ordered to retreat from the Battery to defend the Regimental colors. He wonders what the purpose is in coming to the aid of a square of silk. He says that he has become a circus animal, and would jump through hoops if he were told to. In the heat of this ferocious battle, he sees a big ball come on towards Potter, and just as it is about to hit him, sees him jump aside as though an angel were watching over him. The Russians retreat shortly thereafter.

After this intense battle, Jones finds George two hours later tending to the wounded, with Myrtle at his side. Jones helps to dig trenches to bury the dead. George is carrying a stretcher, tending to an officer who has lost both his feet. Suddenly Myrtle calls out George's name, as she has hurt her foot. He turns around, and just as he does so, a wounded Russian lifts up his musket and fires. As George lies there, dying, Jones thinks he hears George tell him that he is a good boy, as he once said to him all those years ago.

Back at the hospital tent, Potter is told that George is dead, but he doesn't seem to comprehend it. The photographer has arrived and says he would like to take a picture of the survivors to show the folks back home. He says the balance isn't right, that he needs another soldier. Jones walks over to George's body, slings him over his shoulder and props him up between the men. The photographer urges them to "Smile, boys, smile." Myrtle is standing a little ways away on a hill, turning round and round, lost.



## Chapter 6, Plate 6 November 1854 "Smile, Boys, Smile" Analysis

The conversation between Potter and Jones about survival foreshadows the outcome. They believe that they can will themselves to survive. Jones might be the most adept at this, for he is a man who has practiced survival skills very artfully all his life. Potter, on the other hand, in spite of his intellectual ramblings, which can possibly be seen as coping devices, might have a more unearthly protection - the ghost of his wife. While Jones looks at the picture he took during the funeral service before leaving for Inkerman, he, too, sees the form of a woman in the picture, whom he cannot account for. Potter may have a guardian angel. George, on the other hand, plunges headlong into the heat of the battle, as he always has. His protection for much of his life has been Myrtle, and she is a woman made of flesh and blood.

Jones's description of his art is an example of skewed reality. He views his pictures of the piles of amputated limbs as beauty. The world has fallen apart. What has once been seen as a horror, has now become commonplace and attractive. Jones is able to survive in this kind of world, but not Master Georgie.





# Characters

## Myrtle

Myrtle is one of the four main characters in the novel, and the one who commands the most sympathy. She is an orphan, taken into the Hardy home when she is a young child, and remains there only because the Hardy daughter, Beatrice, takes a liking to her. Beatrice, however, soon loses interest in her adopted sister, when the family acquires a puppy. Myrtle describes herself as being unloved, but it doesn't bother her, because then she can focus all her affections on her adopted older brother, Master Georgie. She never lets him out of her sight, running after him as a slave would do in Roman times. Any time she learns that he is paying the least bit of attention to her, she is happy. If he scolds her for one thing or another, she is overjoyed, because this means that he is thinking about her. Censure is better than silence.

Myrtle longs for any moment, any comment from him that proves she is on his mind, for any reason. The housekeeper, Mrs. O'Gorman, beats her but she says that it is for her own good. It seems that she is inured to her own pain or discomfort, can live in some regards outside of her own self, because of her single-minded pursuit of Master Georgie. Her life is to be in his thoughts, to be near him, to be spoken to by him.

The event of Mr. Hardy's death, and the secret she must keep regarding it, sets her life on a new path. She is sent away to boarding school where she learns to become a lady. Mr. Potter describes her as being a small woman, flat chested, and quiet in demeanor. When she smiles, however, she seems to light up a room. When she returns from boarding school, she begins a sexual relationship with Master Georgie, and bears him two children, in spite of the fact that he is married to Annie. Annie has been unable to have children. The true parentage of the children is another secret. The two women simply go away together during the pregnancies, and each time they return, they come back with Annie and George's baby. Myrtle's motives, as she becomes a woman, seem to be the exact same ones as when she was a girl. She just wants to be near Master Georgie, to devote herself to him. She apparently has no wish to disrupt his life in any other way, either by publicly claiming the children as her own, or by causing hurt to Annie.

When the group travels to the Crimea, Myrtle is insistent that Annie comes. Her reasons are, of course, that she wants the children to be with her. She devotes herself to taking care of the children on the trip. She becomes known as the person amongst them who is the fountain of strength. Dr. Potter describes her as such, and George, also, admits that he cannot do without her. Quiet, determined, and dogged, she follows Master Georgie as he gains a post at one hospital, and then is moved to another. She witnesses death, time and time again, but it does not dissuade her from following her master into the death zone. The other women, Beatrice and Annie, return to England halfway through the trip because of the danger it poses. There is never a question that



Myrtle will go back. At one point, she asks why she does it, why she loves him as she does when she knows that he is confused and his heart is divided.

Pompey Jones, his other lover, is her competitor. She asks the question several times in her mind, and once out loud to Mrs. Yardley, after he has chosen Jones over her, but the question seems to fizzle in the air and float away as she knows that no matter what the answer, she will never leave him for any reason. When he is killed, she is described as turning round and round on a nearby hill, as though she is lost forever. She probably is.

## Dr. Potter

Dr. Potter, the intellectual, geologist, and lover of Greek mythology, is probably the least subjective observer in the novel. He is able to see things clearly, as though looking at a subject under a Petri dish. This may be why that he is the one who becomes unhinged as the story progresses, and the reality of the war turns the tables on his ordered, Victorian world.

At the beginning of the novel, Dr. Potter is a frequent visitor to the Hardy household, with his constant presence there not clearly explained except for the fact that he is courting Beatrice. After Mr. Hardy dies and Mrs. Hardy disappears into her bedroom, Potter becomes an avuncular presence in the household, watching George carefully and correctly guessing as to some of his secrets. He also may have been George's confidant on the subject the parentage of the children. He is the first of the main characters to describe in the first person, the trip to the Crimea, commenting on it in subjective, pessimistic detail. His observations and feelings are not unfounded. As the story progresses, he becomes lost in intellectual meanderings and fantasies about his wife, in order to escape the grim reality he has found himself in. It is apparent that this particular coping mechanism will be sorely tested, given the fact that the story boils down to the simple equation of life, or death. Education, one of Potter's favorite subjects, and the thing that he lived by heretofore, will have nothing to do with it.

## Pompey Jones

The most calculating, cynical, and opportunistic of individuals, Jones is all about the subject of survival, in a novel, which turns out to be, in the end, very much about survival. He engenders the least amount of sympathy, as his life and his motives are about, to and for himself. He appears in the story first as the duck-boy, whom Myrtle observes returning a stolen duck to a poor woman in Washington Square. This turns out to be a ruse, a street trick, and is a neatly packaged metaphor for Jones's unsavory personal character. Physically, he has a dark complexion and has a scar on his lip, which Master Georgie will eventually repair surgically. Once he becomes privy to the truth about Mr. Hardy's death, he places a hold on Master Georgie that the latter is unable to shake for several reasons. First of all, George must keep this opportunistic young man quiet, so he gives him a variety of jobs. He gives him a some menial tasks,



which he rejects, and then he is finally made into a photography assistant. George is also attracted to Jones on a sexual level, perhaps partly on account of his street smarts and strength, which George must be aware override any moral choices Jones might make. George, on the other hand, is tortured by moral choices and his inability to make the right ones.

Jones becomes a regular visitor to Blackberry Lane before the war, laughingly throwing the household into an uproar. His stunt with the tiger skin rug results in Annie's miscarriage. He later appears in the Crimea as a performer with a concert troupe, and as assistant to a war photographer. His arrival here has come at the most inopportune of times for Myrtle, as he aces her out of the George's attentions, when she needs them most. His twisted, cynical nature is further revealed in his photography portfolio, which he refers to as "art." It consists of pictures of piles of amputated limbs, taking keen pleasure in one picture, where a tuft of grass is spraying up from a clenched fist. He is a survivor in the end, and this turns out to be an unsurprising outcome.

## Master Georgie

The character whom the novel is named for, Master Georgie remains an enigma, even to the end. Growing up in Victorian England in an upper-middle class household, he indulges his passion for photography at the same time as he attends medical school, eventually becoming a qualified surgeon. An adopted sister comes into his life when he is a young man, who attaches herself to him in an unusual manner by following him around everywhere he goes and worshipping the ground he walks on. As the novel is never told from his viewpoint, knowledge of his character and person are only gained by the perspectives of those who know him, and they are often not objective. The most subjective viewpoint would be Myrtle's. She simply wants to be with him and have him think of her, at all costs and at all times. She idolizes him. It is never explained why Myrtle loves him this way. Dr. Potter asks her at one point, and she retorts back, asking him why he loves Beatrice as he does, even when she has seen her hit him. The novel seems to provide no explanation for the reason love exists.

George struggles with his place as a contributing member of his family, his country, or as a human being. It is not exactly clear what it is, but he tells people that he needs something, and the impending war in the Crimea conveniently seems to provide it. He can now tend to the wounded, and feel that he is a worthwhile individual. The reasons for his turmoil may have something to do with his conflicted sexuality. He loves Myrtle, and has had two children by her, but he never claims her as his own. Annie, his wife, seems to be a cardboard prop, providing him the perfect facade in his strict, staid Victorian world. He has taken the duck-boy, Pompey Jones as his occasional lover, and therein lies the rub. The guilt that he feels about this relationship, and the truth of his being that it reveals, (remembering that these are Victorian times) is almost too much for this sensitive man to bear.

In facing a choice, George just decides not to choose. He plunges himself into his work as a doctor, taking care of horrendously wounded men and seeming to blossom under



this charge. He has the indispensable Myrtle at his side. He satisfies himself with Jones, when he conveniently appears. He dies by a bullet fired by a Russian soldier, in a place where backbone and fortitude, such as Myrtle has, or luck or chance, as Potter has, or the animal instinct for survival, which Jones has in spades, eludes him. He has none of these things. He is the vulnerable Master Georgie, passionately loved by the flesh and blood Myrtle, looked after by Potter to some extent, and disdainfully reviled by Jones. He has no armor of his own, and a lead bullet fells him.

## Mr. Hardy

Mr. Hardy is responsible for making the decision of taking Myrtle in as a young child. His double life as an apparent whorehouse regular is the reason the four main characters having the fateful interlocking relationships they do. He is a jolly, overly loud person, whom Myrtle describes, at one point, as making a sexual advance toward her, when she was just a child. He disappears after the first chapter, as he is found dead in the whore's bed and then surreptitiously transported by George, Jones, and Myrtle back to the Hardy residence, where he is placed in the blue bedroom and found later that evening by a maid. The repercussions of his death, however, and its circumstances, reverberate throughout the novel.

## Mrs. Hardy

Mrs. Hardy is the mentally unstable mother. Her clinging, insecure attitude toward Master Georgie might also have some bearing on his guilt. At the beginning of the story, Myrtle is required to run behind Master Georgie wherever he goes, and is sent back to the house at intervals to check on the status of Mrs. Hardy, in case he is needed, depending on her state of mind.

## William Rimmer

Mr. Rimmer is a friend of Master Georgie's and a fellow medical student. Before the war, they travel to Blundell Hall, the home of Rimmer's uncle, to perform experimental cataract surgery on an ape. Earlier, George has had an argument with him outside the hotel in Washington Square, which Myrtle overhears. It is understood that George wins his wife, Annie Prescott, over Rimmer, who may have loved her and had a relationship with her at one time. It suits either George's ambitions or his convenience to take Annie as his wife, over the protestations of his friend. News comes to George in the Crimea in 1854 that Rimmer has died somewhere on the front.

## Beatrice

Beatrice is Master Georgie's sister. She is also the beloved, but somewhat shallow, wife of Mr. Potter, who has visions of her as he is going out of his mind in the Crimea. She is responsible as a girl for Myrtle remaining with the family, as she has a temper tantrum,



when Myrtle is set to return to the orphanage after the smallpox epidemic is over with. She travels with the group to the Crimea, but is sent back to England halfway through the trip, along with Annie and the children. An apparition of her appears to Potter at Tcheynaya, and it may be that she has died back in England, and it is her ghost that he sees.

## **Annie Hardy**

Annie Hardy is Master Georgie's wife. She is the supposed mother of their two children, but it is revealed that Myrtle is, in fact, the biological mother of the children. Early in the marriage, she has a miscarriage after being startled by the tiger skin rug that Jones has moved into the diningroom. She accompanies the group initially to Constantinople, but returns home halfway through the trip with Beatrice and the children. She is fond of Myrtle in spite of the odd situation.

## **Master Freddie**

Master Freddie is the third Hardy sibling. It is told that he played with Myrtle as a child. He has apparently died very young, as he quickly disappears from the story.

## **Mrs. O'Gorman**

Mrs. O'Gorman is the Hardy's housekeeper. A commonsense, working class Victorian woman. She disciplines Myrtle, and takes a liking to Pompey Jones, as his social class is nearer to hers than any of the Hardy's.

## **Mr. Naughton**

Mr. Naughton is a representative of the Liverpool Board of Commerce, who is on his way to the Crimea to check on supplies should the war commence. He becomes enamored of Myrtle, and almost kills a man over her. He is sent packing after this embarrassing, and nearly tragic incident.

## **Mrs. Yardley**

Mrs. Yardley is a woman accompanying a British guardsmen, who becomes a traveling companion to Beatrice and then Myrtle.

## **Dr. Hall**

Dr. Hall is the principal medical doctor of the expeditionary force.



## **A Captain in the 11th Hussars**

The Captain is a man mistaken by Naughton as Myrtle's fiance.

## **Lord Raglan**

Lord Raglan is the Commander of the expeditionary force.

## **Gustav Streicher**

Streicher is the Director of the Archaeological Collection at Kertch. Potter runs into him resting under a tree at the sultan's palace. He had made his acquaintance twenty years earlier. Wonders aloud what war Potter is speaking of.

## **Punch and Judy man**

There is a man in charge of the Punch and Judy show in the park, whose disguise is given away after he falls out of his van. The van ends up in the hands of Pompey Jones.

## **Woman at the Brothel**

A woman shows Master Georgie and Myrtle Mr. Hardy's body in an upstairs bedroom. It is presumed that she was with him, when he died.

## **William Rimmer's Uncle**

It is at Rimmer's uncle's home that the operation on the ape is performed.

## **Captain Jerome , Captain Frampton and Lieutenant Gormsby**

George and Potter join these three for dinner one evening, while encamped near Sebastopol. Potter makes the inopportune remark at this time about the deplorable state of humanity, and how people deserve the punishment meted out by the gods. George has to apologize for Potter over the remarks.

## **Sir Richard England, General Buller and Sir George Cathcart**

Three military commanders mentioned as responsible for leading the war effort.



# Objects/Places

## Liverpool, England

Liverpool is the Hardy's hometown. It is also the place where Master Georgie feels he must leave to find satisfaction in his life. The story begins in Liverpool in 1846, when George finds his father dead in a whore's bed. Nine years earlier, Myrtle has been found next to a dead woman in an equally distasteful setting, somewhere in the city. The story takes place in the Victorian era, when social class and consciousness are very important. Pompey Jones and Myrtle come from the wrong side of the tracks, and fall into the lives of the respectable, upper-middle class Hardy family. It seems that the only thing Jones aspires to is to be accepted into the gentry class. He also never wants to have to beg on the streets of Liverpool, or anywhere else, again.

Myrtle is oblivious to this place. She seems to be indifferent to her social class and standing, because the only thing she wants or cares about is Master Georgie. It is by chance that she becomes a lady, she has not aspired to it. Due to George's soul searching, he and the members of his family board the ship the *Cambria*, and land in the Crimea on the Black Sea, the place where George hopes to find some meaning in his life.

## The Hardy house on Blackberry Lane

Myrtle comes to Blackberry Lane as an orphan, saved from the cholera epidemic and life in the orphanage. It is here that she grows up and loves Master Georgie. This is also the place where Pompey Jones insinuates himself, entering the house and moving around as if he is the owner, and wreaking havoc on the Hardy family by his tricks. Mr. Hardy's dead body is brought here from the brothel where he died, and brought up to the blue bedroom where he is placed on the bed. A maid finds his body. Mrs. Hardy believes that her husband died there on the bed, from a heart attack.

## Blundell Hall

Blundell Hall is the home of Mr. William Rimmer's uncle. George and Rimmer go to Blundell Hall to perform cataract surgery on an ape.

### *The Cambria*

*The Cambria* transports the group to Constantinople in 1854. It is onboard the ship that a Mr. Naughton makes Myrtle's acquaintance, and falls passionately in love with her. Two hundred soldiers are also on board the ship, heading to the Crimea.



## Constantinople

Constantinople is the first destination of the journey. The group stays here for some time, sightseeing and attending picnics and dinners. Potter has a pessimistic view of the place. It is here that the children's dog is torn apart by a pack of wild dogs, foreshadowing events to come. George, who does not have a post when he arrives, spends his time practicing his photography or going to the beach with Myrtle. He finally makes preparations to visit Scutari, where he hopes to gain a surgeon's post. The conditions in Constantinople become crowded and uncomfortable, so it is decided that the women (except Myrtle) and children will sail back to England in May.

## "The Sweet Waters of Europe" resort

Before the women leave, the group visits this resort, which is a short distance from Constantinople. It is a palace belonging to the sultan's brother. The navy is engaging in athletic contests on the grounds, and the group spends the day there.

## Theater at Pera

The party attends the opera at Pera after spending the day at the resort. It is here that Mr. Naughton observes the man whom he believes to be Myrtle's ex-fiance, embracing another woman in a box near Myrtle's. He attacks the man, almost killing him.

## Scutari

George obtains a surgeon's post at Scutari, arriving with Myrtle and Potter. Potter rents a portion of a house where the three stay. While in Scutari, Potter notices Myrtle's blooming appearance, and George stops his drinking.

## Varna

George is informed that he will be attached in the capacity of Assistant Surgeon to the 2nd division of the army, which will be quartered at Varna. Of the three doctors who were posted there before him, all succumbed to cholera. The town is in disorder due to all the soldiers, horses and troops. Hospital conditions are terrible, with very few medical supplies available. It is here that the three reacquaint themselves with Pompey Jones, as he arrives with a concert troupe and performs his fire-eating routine. It is near Varna that Myrtle and Mrs. Yardley see the body of the dead soldier, resting against a tree. Due to the horrible conditions and constant presence of death, this is the place where Potter first begins to become mentally unhinged.





## **Kalamita Bay**

The group leaves Varna by ship on the 14th of September to arrive at Kalamita Bay, located on the western shore of the Crimea. Many dead are buried upon arrival. From here, the attachment will travel twenty-five miles to Sebastopol.

## **Sebastopol**

At each progressive destination on the Crimean odyssey, conditions worsen and existence becomes more and more of a life or death struggle. Sebastopol is a military camp. Potter spends his morning foraging for firewood. George tends to brutally wounded and maimed soldiers. Jones shows up again, though this time with his van as an assistant to the war photographer. A funeral service is held in Sebastopol for many casualties. This is the final stop before plunging head on into the eye of the storm, which is Inkerman.

## **Inkerman**

It is at Inkerman, after a raging battle, that George is killed. Jones also takes to killing, as the party stumbles into a group of Russian soldiers, and hand-to-hand combat ensues. It is here that the conclusion of the life or death struggles in the novel is played out to the end.

## **Punch and Judy van**

The van first appears in Washington Square park as the Punch and Judy man is putting on a show. Pompey Jones shows up with it at the brothel, and it is used to transport Mr. Hardy's body back to Blackberry Lane. It is a constant presence in the novel, as it becomes the van, which carries the photographic equipment, even in the Crimea.



# Themes

## Chance and Fate

Without the hand of fate, this story might never have happened. Pompey Jones is well aware of this fact in that he tells Myrtle the two of them are a kind, and it was fate that threw them together in Master Georgie's path.

It was by chance that Myrtle is found, and by chance that she ends up in the Hardy home. If it were not for the smallpox epidemic, she would have ended up in the orphanage. Master George, Myrtle, and Pompey Jones are together in the bedroom of the brothel, looking at the body of Mr. Hardy. It is fate that has brought them there together, Jones believes, and a moment in time, which will forever changes their lives.

From that point on, Jones becomes a part of George's life, working for him as an assistant and having an occasional sexual relationship with him. Myrtle becomes a lady. Chance has help remove her from the lower class status she was born into. At this point, George also begins a sexual relationship with her. Whether or not the Victorian gentleman Master Georgie would have had a physical relationship with Myrtle before she became a lady, can only be speculated upon. It is also a strange twist of fate that has brought Annie into the dining room looking for her needlework, just when Jones decided that morning to prop the tiger skin rug up on a dining room chair. Anyone could have wandered into that room and seen the rug, but it had to be Annie, who was four months' pregnant and whose pregnancies had always been tenuous. Now, it is Myrtle who is to be the mother of George's two children. Is it chance or fate that saves Potter from a bullet? Jones observes that it is as if an angel were guarding him, the way he was removed from the path of the bullet at the last possible instant.

## The Lens of the Camera

The camera lens is an important theme throughout this novel, as it captures, in each chapter, significant action, which has thematic implications. The novel is divided into six chapters, which are referred to as "plates," referring to the photography sub theme. In the first chapter, entitled, "Girl in the Presence of Death," Master Georgie takes a picture of Myrtle posing next to his dead father. Myrtle's life will change course dramatically on account of Mr. Hardy's death, as if this picture foreshadows the unbreakable link now forged between herself and the Hardys. Much later on, Myrtle learns that Pompey Jones keeps this picture on his person, as if he, too, is encircled by this relationship, as he considers himself and Myrtle to be of a kind. The next chapter, "A Veil Lifted," refers to the photograph of the ape taken after its successful cataract surgery. Finally the blind ape can see, as if a veil is lifted. What good is it, however, to be able to see if you are living behind the bars of a cage? This observation, made by the morally unhindered Jones, may well be best applied to Master Georgie, who will spend his life trying to lift a veil from his own eyes to find his place, and to find some peace for himself.



In the next four chapters, pictures are taken of the group, either near to the Crimea or in it. The irony of these pictures is that nothing is really as it seems. In one, the group is photographed at the Sweet Waters of Europe resort, with Potter describing the scene. He remarks that Beatrice props a finger under her chin so as to appear reflective, Annie removes her shoes to become shorter, and Potter takes a child in his arms as if he has an ounce of fatherly instinct, which as he would admit himself, is preposterous. Behind them there is a tug-of-war going on between men versus officers, which would be truer than anything else in the picture. In another picture taken at Sebastopol, a vision of Beatrice appears. Is it really her, or a figment of Potter's imagination. Interestingly, Jones sees it later on, when he develops the picture.

## Truth vs. Fiction

What is true in this novel? There are myriad numbers of cover-ups, lies and secrets. The list goes on and on. It begins even before the death of Mr. Hardy, with the Punch and Judy show in the park. Myrtle comments that she has never seen the Punch and Judy man, and because a horse rears up and disrupts his van, she comes spilling out on the ground, cursing, his disguise given away. He puts on an entertaining show, but is he anything like the show he puts on? Mr. Hardy's death, of course, is the biggest lie and the glue that holds the four main characters together. It changes the course of all their lives. There is the secret about the true parentage of the children, the secret of Master Georgie's homosexuality, the secret of who it is who is moving things about in the house. What is the real reason that George wants to go to the Crimea, and take his entire family with him? Does he want to do something noble, or is he trying to somehow escape himself and what he sees as his own worthlessness?

The camera lens is a clever conceit that glaringly exhibits reality, but can it tell fact from fiction? Potter remarks that the lens cannot tell what is going on inside the human brain. It can't catch the turmoil going on inside the human heart. In George's case, this is especially true. As the one character who never speaks in the first person, and in spite of the ever-present camera in this work, Master George Hardy is still an enigma. It raises the question of whether or not anyone can really be known. Myrtle has devoted her entire life to George. He has occupied her thoughts ever since she can remember, yet she asks Mrs. Yardley why it is that she can't have him, or more accurately, why he won't have her? If she really knew him, could she unlock his secrets? In the very last scene in the novel, the camera mockingly reveals its power to both cover up the truth, and then to glaringly reveal it. Letting the readers in on the bitter irony, the photographer asks for another soldier to make the balance of the picture right for the folks back home. George's body is propped up among them, as the photographer says, "Smile, Boys, Smile."

# Style

## Point of View

This story is told from the point of the view of first person, meaning that one of the characters in the novel is telling the story from his or her point of view, using the pronoun "I." Three characters take turns telling the story. They are Myrtle, Mr. Potter and Pompey Jones. The reader is privy to the thoughts and feelings of each as they take their turn, but is limited as to what they can know of other characters except through the speaker's observations. Of the six chapters in the novel, each speaker has two chapters in which they narrate the story. As they all interact with one another and with Master Georgie, the reader can then decide what might be fact, and what might be fiction regarding people and situations. Readers can also decide for themselves the true, inner nature of a character, as they are presented from several viewpoints by the end of the story.

## Setting

The story begins in Liverpool, England, in 1846, at the height of the staid Victorian era. It is a time when an individual's birthright means everything, as Victorian England was an extremely class-conscious society. Of the four main characters, two were born into the gentry class, and two were not. The differences between the lives of Pompey Jones and Myrtle, at this time in English history, as opposed to those of Master Georgie and Mr. Potter, are extremely stark. As the story progresses, however, not all things remain as society would dictate. It is due in part to the change of setting. In 1856, the group boards a ship for Constantinople, with the ultimate destination being the Crimea, and the impending war. The group is thrown into a place where class, birthright and education hold very little sway over anyone. The final struggle, and the one that each character has to face alone, is the life or death struggle on the battlefield.

From the time of the ship's landing, the setting ultimately becomes more and more inhospitable to human life. From Constantinople, to Varna, to Kalamita Bay, to Sebastopol, and finally to hell itself - the battlefield at Inkerman - the lives of the characters are more and more threatened, until at least one of them does not survive.

## Language and Meaning

This is a work of historical fiction. It takes place in Liverpool, England, and in the Crimean peninsula in the Black Sea during the Crimean War. The war being fought was between Imperial Russia on one side, and an alliance of Great Britain, France, Sardinia and part of the Ottoman Empire on the other. The main characters are British citizens of Queen Victoria's England, a class-conscious society. The characters who are members of the gentry class include Dr. Potter and Master Georgie. Both of these characters speak as educated Englishmen of their era. Myrtle also speaks and thinks as an



educated woman, as she was sent away to boarding school as a young woman. The other character, Pompey Jones, comes from a lower class. He and Mrs. O'Gorman, for instance, have a close relationship, as they are of a kind, so to speak. Jones's language is not filled with many colloquialisms, however, as he has made it a point in his life to strive to do better for himself. He aspires to the upper classes. He watches and listens, not wanting to set himself apart from that which he wishes to be.

## Structure

The story is told in six long chapters, also referred to as "plates" as a reference to the photography theme. It is told in a linear fashion, except for the very beginning, where the 12-year-old Myrtle tells about her past, and about the events of one day that have brought next to the body of Mr. Hardy posing for a picture. Three people who rotate the narration tell the story in the first person.



## Quotes

"It was only Mrs. O'Gorman who ever beat me, and that for my own good. I was not loved and counted it a blessing; it meant my affections raged undiluted and I could lavish all on Master Georgie." Chapter 1, p. 10

"No one I knew had ever set eyes on the man who jiggled Mr. Punch into life. Some said he was a dwarf and others that he was nine foot high. He fixed up his stall against the doors of the van and crept in from behind, so as to keep up the illusion." Chapter 1, p. 15

"When I approached he took the cloak from me without comment, though its hem was soaked. He neither thanked nor scolded, which made me sullen, for either praise or censure would have been some indication of my existence." Chapter 1, p. 33

"I had intended to arrange it under the windows, where it used to lie when Mr. Hardy was alive, only I was chuckling so much at the absurdity of my dance through the hall that I dropped it in a heap and helped myself to a mouthful of port wine from the decanter on the sideboard." Chapter 2, p. 45

"I had a photograph of Myrtle, though it was only me who would have known it. It had been taken in old Mr. Hardy's bedroom and thrown aside on account of coming out black. I'd made pin holes in her eyes and scratched lines where her hair might have been, and in time I believed I saw her plain, though possibly she was in my head and it was my mind that printed her likeness." Chapter 2, p. 50

"I kept my opinions to myself; I didn't doubt their cleverness, but what use was a world only glimpsed from a cage?" Chapter 2, p. 55

" 'You're a good boy,' he murmured, and then he raised one knee on to the coverlet and hoisting himself up leaned across to touch my cheek. I knew instantly what he was about, and quit the room." Chapter 2, p. 61

"It would not be incorrect to say that George had placed him on a pedestal, and a pretty lofty one at that. Mr. Hardy's topple from the heights had shattered both of them. It was Myrtle's destiny in life to make George believe he had stuck himself together." Chapter 3, p. 72

" 'Crutch, even,' he said. 'A man like me needs something to hold him upright. Beyond Myrtle, that is. There are things I have done that were *not right*.'" Chapter 3, p. 85

"Cause and effect, I thought. One should never underestimate the disruptive force of haphazard actions." Chapter 3, p. 97

"Deep down I was lost, my mind out of kilter. Often, drifting into sleep I silently recited those lines of Hesiod - *They by each others' hands inglorious fell, In horrid darkness plunged, the house of hell.*" Chapter 3, p. 103



"Thinking of such intimate things filled my head with pictures - Georgie fetching me from school in Southport and my seizing of his hand on the journey home - Georgie escorting Annie to a supper party in a hotel down by the docks, myself trailing behind, the early moon above, the lanterns lit in the rigging of the ships and my breast so full of innocent joy that I bit my lip for fear I squealed aloud. Not quite innocent - " Chapter 4,p. 110

"Nothing is for free in this world." Chapter 4, p. 113

"There's a sameness about death that makes the emotions stiffen - which is for the best, else one would be uselessly crying the day long. It's why Georgie often seems insensitive to other people's feelings. Dealing with the dying, one must either blunt the senses or go mad." Chapter 4, p. 118

"How strange it was to be encamped in a foreign land, Queen Victoria plumply gazing into the mist-wreathed night, the voices ringing out beneath the hidden stars! How portentous the message, how wrapped in sentiment the cheapness of life!" Chapter 4, p. 129

"I must bear and forbear and not wish things to be other than they are. Which is why I am engaged in contemplating my earlier existence, with a view to tracing whether chance or fate has brought me to this dreadful place at this particular moment in history."

Chapter 5, p. 151

"The lens is powerless to catch the interior turmoil boiling within the skull, nor can it expose lewd recollections - which is all to the good." Chapter 5, p. 163

"There's no telling who will live and who will not. A man can have his limbs torn off, the blood draining out of him like a leaking barrel, and recover; another can stumble in with no more than a flesh wound to the groin and snuff it within twenty-four hours." Chapter 6, p. 170

"It wasn't just the conflagration that had prevented me from keeping my appointment with George - it rankled that he'd stipulated the kitchen entrance rather than the front steps of the hotel. I was finished with being consigned to the shadows." Chapter 6, p. 178

"All I'd ever wanted, as regards Myrtle, was the recognition that she and I were of a kind, seeing that fate had tumbled the two of us into Master Georgie's path." Chapter 6, p. 183

"I didn't know what cause I was promoting, or why it was imperative to kill, though I reckon Potter could have told me." Chapter 6, p. 187



## Topics for Discussion

Explain how chance and fate have played a part in the lives of the four main characters. Was it fate that brought them together? If so, how did it change their lives?

What does the camera lens see in the six pictures of each "plate?" What doesn't it see?

What does each character need individually in order to survive?

As Inkerman looms on the horizon, and in the time leading up to it, how does each person go about ensuring their survival?

What are some of the haphazard actions that happen in the novel, and what are their effects?

From a moral standpoint, would you consider the outcome of this novel to be fair? Did each character get his or her "just desserts?"