

The Piano Tuner Study Guide

The Piano Tuner by Daniel Mason

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Plot Summary

Edgar Drake, a piano tuner living in Victorian London, is commissioned by the army to travel to Burma to fix the piano of Surgeon-Major Carroll. Edgar sets off on the long journey and encounters many different cultures on the way. Eventually he reaches Mae Lwin in Burma and fixes the piano. He plays music for a local Prince, which helps to convince the Prince to sign a peace treaty. Meanwhile, Edgar develops feelings for a beautiful Burmese woman called Khin Myo. Just as he is coming to love Burma, however, Mae Lwin is attacked and he is forced to leave. He is picked up by the British, who accuse him and Carroll of being traitors. He learns that just three days after the peace treaty, the Shan Princes attacked British forces. Edgar manages to escape and tries to run back to Mae Lwin, but he is shot.

Edgar is called to the War Office in London to see Colonel Killian, who commissions him to fix and tune a piano in Burma belonging to Surgeon-Major Carroll. Edgar agrees. When his wife, Katherine, finds out, she is upset, but she encourages him to go. He packs, and boards a ship to France. From France he boards a ship to India. While on board the ship, he hears the tale of the Man with One Story, who tells him about music so powerful and beautiful that it made him deaf.

At Bombay Edgar catches a train through India, then a ship to Rangoon in Burma. He is met by an officer called Dalton, who invites him to go hunting with him and two other officers. They hunt a tiger that has been troubling a local village, but Witherspoon accidentally shoots and kills a young Burmese boy. Edgar is devastated by this.

Edgar boards a boat going upriver from Rangoon to Mandalay in northern Burma. At Mandalay he is met by Captain Nash-Burnham who is more appreciative of local culture than other officers, taking Edgar to see local street theatre. Edgar meets Khin Myo at Mandalay, a beautiful Burmese woman whose job it is to look after the army's guests. Edgar's trip to Mae Lwin is delayed when the village is attacked, but when Edgar receives a letter from Carroll begging him to come, he goes ahead without his army escort. He, Khin Myo, and one of Carroll's men called Nok Lek, travel to Mae Lwin. They are attacked by bandits on the way, but they manage to get away.

At Mae Lwin, Doctor Carroll shows Edgar the local scenery and tells him about the people and their myths. He also shows Edgar the surgery where he helps cure the local Shan people. He then shows Edgar the piano and Edgar sets about fixing it. As Edgar stays in Mae Lwin he begins to fall in love with the place and to develop feelings for Khin Myo, who is in a relationship with Carroll. One day Carroll asks Edgar to play a piece of music for the visiting Shan Prince of Mongnai. Edgar chooses a piece that conveys a sense of beauty through order, which he hopes will promote the signing of a peace treaty. This is successful, and the Prince leaves happy, promising to arrange a meeting with the Limbin Confederacy who are currently defying British rule.

Later, Carroll asks Edgar to accompany him on a journey to a local town. When they arrive, Carroll reveals that this is actually a meeting of the Limbin Confederacy to sign a



peace treaty. Carroll wants Edgar to pretend to be a British officer so that the Shan Princes will think this is legitimate and officially sanctioned. Edgar is annoyed at being manipulated in this way, but does not have much choice. He goes along with it, and a peace treaty is signed.

A few days later, Mae Lwin is attacked. Carroll tells Edgar he must leave with the piano. They strap it to a raft and Edgar, accompanied by two boys and Nok Lek, set off down the river. They are captured by British officers and the three boys are shot. Edgar is told that he is suspected of being a traitor along with Carroll. Limbin forces have attacked British troops, and the British suspect that Carroll was really signing an alliance with them against the British. They believe that some of his notes containing chemical formulae and Shan music were actually code. Edgar tries to argue but they will not listen. When Nash-Burnham gives him the chance to escape, Edgar runs away. He tries to reach Mae Lwin but gets lost. As he is running along a road, he is shot from behind.



Part One: Chapters 1 and 2

Part One: Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Edgar Drake is a piano tuner hired by the British army to travel to Burma to fix Surgeon-Major Carroll's Erard Grand Piano. The journey is long and eventually he reaches Mandalay in northern Burma. Here he meets a Burmese woman called Khin Myo who takes him to Carroll at the fort of Mae Lwin. He fixes the piano, and then becomes enchanted by the idyllic village. He decides to stay for awhile, and begins to develop feelings for Khin Myo, who is in a relationship with Surgeon-Major Carroll. One day Edgar is asked to play the piano for a visiting Shan Prince, and then to accompany Carroll to a meeting in order to establish a peace treaty. Mae Lwin is attacked soon after and Carroll makes Edgar leave with the piano. Edgar is picked up by the British, who arrest him as a traitor. They suspect Carroll of allying himself with the Shan Princes against the British. Edgar escapes but is shot as he tries to return to Mae Lwin.

Edgar Drake receives a letter asking him to report to the War Office. When he arrives, Colonel Killian tells him that Surgeon-Major Carroll, stationed in Burma, requested an Erard Grand Piano to be sent to him. The army was reluctant but decided to grant this request, as Carroll is influential with the locals and is vitally important in helping to maintain the peace. Now Carroll has requested a piano tuner to come fix the piano. The army looked for the best tuner in London and found Edgar, whose specialty is Erard Grands. They are offering to pay Edgar a year's fee if he will travel to Burma to fix the piano, even though they anticipate this taking no more than three months. They will not allow his wife to accompany him. Edgar agrees, and Colonel Killian gives him a package of information about Burma, which was provided by Carroll.

Edgar goes home but is afraid to tell his wife the news, thinking that it will upset her. The next day he reads information in the package about the history of Burma and the deposition of the most recent king, Thibaw, who was exiled to India when the city of Mandalay was annexed. Edgar then goes to a tuning job. When he returns, his wife Katherine is reading the papers about Burma. She tells him that an officer called at the house with Edgar's briefing, and so she found out about the trip. She is upset that he did not tell her, but she urges him to go on the journey. She thinks it will be character-building for him and the opportunity of a lifetime, as well as a chance to do something important for his country.

The following weeks are spent packing and preparing. They spend their last days together, then on the final day they go to the Royal Albert Dock. Edgar boards his ship and leaves.



Part One: Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

The first chapters introduce the character of Edgar Drake, the main character of the novel. He is a quiet and slightly shy man who seems very soft spoken and mild-mannered. He is a very likeable character as he does not exhibit the usual prejudices of a Victorian man, and does not seem to feel anger or hatred for anyone. He does not come across as the adventurous type, and so is initially unsure about the idea of travelling to Burma. However, he is a curious man, and he recognizes the fact that this is an opportunity he will never have again, to see something of the world outside England. He also finds himself a little swept up in the mystery of the affair, as it is such an unusual request.

Edgar feels an instant connection with the Surgeon-Major, Carroll, who first requested a piano and then a tuner. Colonel Killian disapproves of Carroll and makes it clear that his methods are not looked on highly by the rest of the army. He is considered slightly eccentric, but too useful to deny. Edgar finds himself sympathizing with Carroll, who wishes to bring music to Burma instead of weapons, and to establish peace through culture rather than violence. Edgar has never particularly liked military men or violence, and he supports the idea of Home Rule, which means he feels that the people of the East should be allowed to rule themselves. He therefore feels a connection with Carroll as a man of peace and reason amid the imperialistic attitude of the army. He also feels a deeper connection with Carroll as a man who obviously loves music so much that he would struggle to bring a piano all the way to Burma. Unlike the Colonel, Edgar has no trouble imagining why a man would request a piano to be sent to the East. He understands the power of music and its importance in some people's lives.

Edgar himself seems to approach most things in life in terms of music. He cares more about music than politics. He is influenced to go on the trip to Burma because of his interest in the piano and the man who wanted it, rather than a feeling of duty to his country, which his wife gives as a potential reason for going. When courting his wife Katherine, Edgar did so in terms of music, comparing his time with her to a song. Rather than take the traditional Victorian view that all Oriental people are lazy, Edgar looks at the history of the piano, which involves important innovations by a Chinese musician. He takes this as evidence that the popular opinion is wrong. Edgar is often a little dreamy, seeming to be lost in music rather than completely present in the real world. His wife, Katherine, points out that he needs adventure and that the journey will be good for him. The reader can see that this might be true, as it might help to improve Edgar's confidence in himself, as well as to broaden his perspective on life by showing him more of the world beyond music.

The first two chapters also describe Victorian London to the reader. The attitudes of Empire are emphasized; the Victorians think they are better than the people they conquer, who they consider little more than lazy savages. The Victorians believe their culture is superior and that the East should be subjugated in order to civilize it properly. As Edgar tunes pianos he experiences the strict hierarchy of London, in which he is considered not as important as the wealthy people whose pianos he tunes. He is



servicing them, so is kept at a distance, though he is treated as being a step higher up than the actual servants. By working in a profession in which he works with his hands and fixes things, he is looked down on a little, despite having been educated to a very high level. He feels as though he does not quite fit in with either social group. The reader is reminded that in Victorian London there is a very strict sense of place in which a person must stay. Victorian London is also shown as a cold, damp, dreary and foggy place, with dirty cobbled streets, cabs and omnibuses everywhere, and tall houses packed in very tightly together. These descriptions of London are emphasized because it is so different from where Edgar is going. This helps the reader to understand why Burma affects him so profoundly later in the story.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Edgar travels from London to Calais, then to Marseilles, where he catches a boat across the Mediterranean. They stop in Alexandria, then pass through the Suez Canal into the Red Sea. Edgar speaks to a deaf man on the boat who is known as the Man with One Story. The man tells him the story of how he lost his hearing:

The Man with One Story was a deckhand on a ship travelling this route, when the ship was wrecked in a storm. He was washed up on a beach on the African shore. He wandered, hoping to find traders, and slept by the sea. He was woken by two boys herding goats. He followed them to a huge encampment of different tribes and traders in the desert. He was taken to a tent where a woman spoke Arabic. She told him that a mysterious 'She' would appear soon and that because of this there are people in the camp who would kill him to protect the secret. He slept in the tent. The next day he wandered outside and saw red in the desert. He investigated, stepping over the ritual protective barrier into the desert. He found a veiled woman dressed in red. She knew his name. She lifted her veil and he was shocked to see that she had a woman's eyes but a deer's nose and mouth, with soft fur. She vanished and he heard singing as a sandstorm swirled around him. He then saw visions and heard screaming, then nothing. He woke up by the Red Sea again. Some men lifted him up and took him to their merchant vessel. He was now completely deaf. When he looked at the ship's calendar he saw that twenty days had passed since the storm, so he could not have been lying on the beach that whole time dreaming the entire thing.

Edgar's ship passes through the Red Sea into the Straits of Bab al Mandab, then into the Indian Ocean. They stop at Aden, where the Man with One Story gets off the boat.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

As Edgar travels further into the East, things begin to get a little more magical and strange. He hears the story told by the Man with One Story, about a supernatural encounter in the desert. This signifies that Edgar has left everything he knows behind. He is no longer in Europe but is in a strange world with new superstitions, where perhaps magic really does exist. The Man with One Story's tale also picks up on an important theme of this book: the power of music. In this story, the singing of the red-veiled lady is so beautiful that it is life-altering. The man says he had never heard anything so beautiful, and that perhaps it was worth losing his hearing for that. In his tale, music is magical and wonderful, but also a little frightening and dangerous. Music here is like nature. It is powerful but inscrutable and mysterious. It shows music as a force beyond mankind, something that is played by humans but not necessarily controlled by them. Music is incredibly powerful. This theme becomes very important as music follows Edgar throughout his journey, and then becomes one of the methods by



which Carroll attempts to achieve peace. Music is shown as a force that can cross cultural boundaries, a deeper thing than language that all people can understand and enjoy.

Edgar is also beginning to encounter some Eastern superstitions. He is told that the moon is a portent, signifying different things at different stages. So the full moon means new beginnings, making it very appropriate that Edgar's journey is accompanied by a full moon. Edgar is at the beginning of something amazing and life-changing. For the people of Burma, a new moon is not 'new' as to them it appears as though it has disappeared. For them, this is an omen of death and endings. This demonstrates how differently two distinct cultures can view things, showing that Edgar will face very new ways of thinking and may be forced to reevaluate some of his own beliefs. Edgar also notes that water turning red is an omen of devastating war. He is thankful that the water the ship is sailing in remains perfectly blue. However, this is perhaps a false comfort. Edgar is travelling through the Red Sea, which could be seen as symbolic of the water being 'red.' Is Edgar sailing into trouble? This small omen foreshadows events to come, as Edgar's story will indeed end with devastating war.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

The ship arrives in Bombay, where Edgar catches a train through India. The train stops occasionally at small stations where local traders press up against the windows, trying to sell items to the passengers. At one station a boy stands outside Edgar's window until he is curious enough to ask what he is selling. The boy tells him that he sells poems and will tell him a story about the 'leip-bya' of Burma. Edgar asks how he knows where he is going and the boy replies that his poems are 'daughters of prophecy.' Edgar pays, but the train moves away too quickly for him to hear the poem.

At Calcutta Edgar gets off the train and boards a ship, which travels to Rangoon in southern Burma. On the way, Edgar reads more about the history of Burma:

Once the Shan Empire ruled all Burma, when the Shan capital of Ava took over from the Burman capital city of Pagan. However, in 1555 the Burman state of Pegu took over from Ava and started three centuries of Burman rule again, leading to the recent King Thibaw. The Shan States fragmented into small principalities ruled by a sawbwa or a kind of local Prince. In 1880 Thibaw ruled Upper Burma while Lower Burma was under British control. Some of the Shan sawbwes rebelled against Thibaw, unhappy with a land tax they found unfair. They formed a group called the Limbin Confederacy and attempted to depose Thibaw in favor of one of his relations. However, as they marched on Thibaw, war broke out between Britain and Upper Burma. Britain succeeded in deposing Thibaw and annexing Mandalay. Now the Shan Princes decided to switch their rebellion, attacking the British in the name of Shan independence.

The Limbin Confederacy left many thrones empty as they fought the British. Local bandits and warlords moved in. The worst one, known as Twet Nga Lu, seized Mongnai. In 1886 (earlier in the year Edgar travels to Burma), Limbin forces attacked back and reclaimed most of their land. Twet Nga Lu fled back to his native town, but he still continues his violence against the Limbin towns and villages. So now the British have two problems, the bandits and the fearsome Twet Nga Lu, as well as the resistance of the Limbin Princes.

When Edgar finishes reading this he amuses himself by writing a history of Erard pianos to send back to the army. When he arrives in Rangoon, Edgar is met by a military Captain and driven to the army outpost near the famous Shwedagon Pagoda. After being shown his room, Edgar visits the pagoda. He listens to the music there, then sees a beggar woman and gives her some coins. Back at his quarters, he is invited to join a tiger hunt the next day. Reluctantly he agrees.



Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

Edgar is beginning to feel a very deep connection with Carroll, despite not having met him yet, by reading his accounts of Burma. Carroll's writing is more interesting than the dry historical reports of the army, which are too focused on warfare, numbers and tactics. Carroll's account explains politics in terms of people and their reactions, providing a greater insight into what is really going on. For instance, he recognizes that the Shan Princes do not necessarily object to a non-Shan ruler, as they were going to replace Thibaw with one of his relatives anyway, but that they do not like a non-Burmese ruler. This is an important distinction that the army does not appear to have made. The Shan are worried that their autonomy will be taken away and need some reassurance that they will be allowed to live as they always have. Carroll seems dedicated to peace rather than fighting, something that Edgar respects. Edgar also sees similarities between himself and the doctor. They are both highly educated but not landed gentry, so both are 'out of place' in English society. Both can find a sense of importance here that they would never be allowed to hold in England. Both are also removed from the hierarchies of normal society. The doctor deals with illness that does not discriminate between social classes. Edgar deals with pianos that break or go out of tune in the wealthiest houses as well as those lower down the social ladder. Both are men who fix things, and both prefer order over chaos and violence.

At the station in India, Edgar once again comes across a mysterious, almost magical event. The poet boy somehow knows where he is going, and claims that his stories are prophetic. He tells Edgar that he knows the direction of stories, and seems to feel that this particular one is important for Edgar to hear. Poems are similar to music in that they have a sense of rhythm and emotion to them. In the incidents of the Man with One Story and the poet boy, the author draws a connection between music, poetry and stories that is important in this novel. Music is part of Edgar's story, and it is drawing him to the East. The Man with One Story and the poet boy both have one important tale to tell, just as Edgar has one story that he is meant to follow. Later, Edgar will talk about how each piano has one song in it that can be drawn out. Carroll will also speak of his own story, comparing it to that of Odysseus. Stories and music are connected, and each person seems to have one composition or tale that they must follow. This brings in the idea of fate, making the things that happen to Edgar seem somehow destined to happen. This is where Edgar is meant to be and what he is meant to be doing. Again, this adds a sense of mystery and magic to Edgar's journey, as he moves further away from 'Britishness' and everything that is familiar to him.

In Rangoon, Edgar begins to see the strange mix of Eastern and British influences in Burma now that the Empire has taken over. There are churches and mosques, as well as pagoda-style temples. There are open air markets and bazaars, with street vendors selling exotic and strange goods. Spices fill the air and even spatter against the windows, turning them gold. Over all this stands a statue of the Roman god Mercury, a very Western symbol of commerce. In the streets British gentlemen and ladies in proper Victorian attire wander the streets among the exotically dressed men and women, the latter with painted faces in local tradition. Whereas the majority of British visitors and



army officers seem to ignore this cultural mix, disapproving of the local customs and surrounding themselves with familiar things, Edgar is more curious. Edgar wants to see everything and soak up the Burmese culture. He visits the temple and enjoys the local music. He removes his shoes and tries to be respectful of local customs whenever he can. He shows that he is a more accepting and open-minded man than most other Victorians. He is also kind-hearted. When he sees a beggar girl with a sick baby, he thrusts coins into her outstretched hands without even counting them, desperate to help her. Later in his journey he will think about her again and wonder if her child got better. Images like this stay with Edgar. He is not able to shrug them off as other British visitors do, as he really does care about the people here, seeing them as normal human beings like himself. This makes him a likeable and sympathetic character.

There is more foreshadowing in these chapters as the reader is told that Edgar is going to disappear. A sense of mystery and suspense is created as the reader does not know why Edgar will disappear and whether this will be his own choice or something more sinister. More foreshadowing comes in the form of Edgar's mention of the French Revolution. Given that Burma is on the brink of war, is similar rioting and bloodthirstiness going to affect Burma? This letter also hints at the tumultuous events at the end of the book, when Edgar and Carroll will be accused of beginning their own form of revolution. Is this letter, written in innocence, just another piece of evidence that will later condemn Edgar?



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

Edgar and Captains Dalton, Witherspoon and Fogg set off on a hunting trip to shoot a tiger that has been terrorizing a local village. In the jungle Edgar is entranced by the beautiful sights, until Witherspoon sees a baby monkey and insists on shooting it, despite Dalton's warnings that it could scare away the tiger. When they come to a village, Edgar interacts with the local children and throws a coin to one of the boys. One of the villagers points them in the direction of the tiger and they set off. For a while the little boys follow, then go off to play in the forest. As the hunters near some bushes, they hear rustling and think it is the tiger. Edgar sees women running towards them from the village, screaming. He points this out and Dalton shouts at Witherspoon to put his weapon down. Witherspoon, however, is too intent on shooting a tiger and fires into the bushes. He accidentally kills the boy Edgar had thrown the coin to. The boy's mother wails and throws herself on the body. Edgar is overcome with grief.

Afterwards, Edgar is called to give evidence several times, and Witherspoon is fined. The boy's mother is compensated with money. Witherspoon and Fogg then leave for Pegu to relieve two officers there. Edgar cannot face speaking to Dalton again.

Finally, Edgar leaves on a train to Prome, where he gets a boat up the Irrawaddy River to Mandalay. On the boat he meets enlisted men and tells them football scores from England. All the men have heard of and love Dr. Carroll, and they tell Edgar stories about him. One man tells him that Carroll and his men were attacked on their way to Mae Lwin, but Carroll played some local music and the attackers stopped. They then escorted Carroll and his men safely to Mae Lwin where the local chief agreed to let them build a fort in exchange for a surgery and more music. Edgar asks what Carroll played, and the man tells him that it was a Shan love song which no Shan man could ever commit violence while hearing. As the boat travels north the men tell him other tales about Carroll, and he realizes that whether they are true or not, the men need something to believe in. He realizes that he does too.

Later, some bandits are brought onto the boat. They are the leaders of a group that attacked a village on the way to Mae Lwin, and are now being taken to trial. The other bandits with them were all killed.

The boat stops off at Pagan, the old capital, for sightseeing. Edgar climbs to the top of a temple and watches the sunset. He sees the Shan Hills in the distance. That night the boat reaches Mandalay.

Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

In these chapters, the violence of the hunt and the boy's death is contrasted with the peace and beauty of the country, and the simple, peaceful life of the villagers that is so



suddenly torn apart by the British men. Edgar marvels at the beauty of the rainforest as they ride through it, but Witherspoon is only looking for hunting trophies. While Edgar wants to appreciate the beauty, Witherspoon has only come to kill and destroy. This is his way of dominating, which makes him feel powerful and superior. By procuring a tiger pelt, he will be able to boast that he has conquered the most fearsome creature in Burma, and so has conquered the land with his British superiority. When he sees the beautiful baby monkey, Witherspoon's only thought is to kill it, and he cannot even let it go when Dalton points out that the noise may alert the tiger. Witherspoon shoots the baby monkey, which is a foreshadowing of the boy's death later in the chapter. The monkey is described in sad, sympathetic terms, with the spreading blood stain contrasted with the "shifting shadows of the forest" (p107).

The village is also beautiful in its own way. The villagers are poor and live a simple life, but they seem happy. The children play, are curious and carefree. Edgar attempts to interact with them and throws one boy a coin, thinking he is being kind. He likes to imagine that he is protecting the village from the tiger and is proud to be able to help. It lets him feel that the British are doing some good here after all. However, this all ends in disaster. The little boy is shot and killed, and this is partly Edgar's fault for encouraging them to think of the British men as a curiosity, and as something kind. He now feels very guilty, and he realizes that the British are not helping at all. The village did not need protecting from the tiger; they needed protecting from the British men. Now a little boy is dead and has been treated with as much respect and care as the monkey. Twice in one trip has the peace and beauty been disturbed simply because Witherspoon wanted a trophy. This is a neat analogy for British rule in Burma. When the British impose their rule and show their power, they hurt the ordinary people of the country in unimaginable ways. They disturb the peace and the natural beauty of the land. Edgar is sickened by all this, and it forces him to reassess even his own attitudes towards the Burmese people.

Edgar is surprised that the incident is even reported at all, particularly that compensation is paid to the mother and Witherspoon is fined. After being called to give evidence several times, Edgar realizes that this may have something to do with a deep-seated British sense of guilt. The British have come in and disturbed the lives of these ordinary people who are just trying to get by. Although many of the British do seem to believe that they have a right to be here, perhaps some of their superiority is bluster, and perhaps they do feel guilty for what they are doing. These are not the men who make the foreign policies, but they are the men who have to live in the affected country among the affected people. Edgar thinks that all this bureaucracy and determination to compensate the woman must be a kind of salve to soothe the discomfort they feel.

In these chapters there is even more foreshadowing as to Edgar's ultimate fate. He explains that according to a local custom, a man who inherits a talisman from another is destined to share his fate. Edgar picks up the coin he gave to the dead boy, not wanting to see it lie in the dirt as if forgotten, like the boy himself. He keeps the coin with him as a talisman to remind him what happens when foreigners interfere, even if they think they are doing something kind. Unknown to Edgar at the time, the coin was left on purpose as it would be extremely unlucky to whoever took it. By picking up the coin and keeping



it with him, Edgar is fating himself to a similar death. This is heavy foreshadowing for the end of the story, as Edgar will indeed be shot.

In chapter eight Edgar hears another story about the power of music, now a strong theme running through this novel. According to the soldiers on the boat, Carroll prevented an attack by playing Shan music, ensuring that he was given safe escort to the local chief. He then used music to charm this man, and was allowed to build a fort on the site. How much truth there is in this story is not clear, but Edgar realizes that this does not matter. The men need to believe in something, and Carroll is a symbol of hope for them. Carroll seems to represent how a person can gain peace through a deeper understanding of the culture, and he is trying to achieve this through music. If one song can stop a band of attackers, then maybe music really can create peace. Edgar finds that he needs to believe in this as much as the men, particularly after his experience on the hunt.



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

When Edgar gets off the ship at Mandalay he is greeted by Captain Nash-Burnham and taken to a small cottage which is to be his temporary residence while in the city. A servant called Khin Myo shows him the house, then accompanies him as he walks around the city. Edgar attempts to speak Burmese to her and she is impressed. He asks her to take him to her favorite place, so she leads him to the floating market on the river. She knows that he is here to tune the piano and she tells him that she has confidence in Carroll.

When they are back at the cottage, Nash-Burnham arrives to take Edgar to a special dinner at the residence of the Commissioner of the Northern Division, to celebrate the annexation of Mandalay. Nash-Burnham warns him that the guests will be civil but that they do not like Carroll. Unfortunately, Edgar cannot help mentioning Carroll when he is asked about his profession and what he is doing in Burma. Colonel West then rants about Carroll, blaming the transportation of the piano for the lack of reinforcements that West and his men desperately needed. Nash-Burnham decides to leave before things get too heated. As they are leaving, he tells Edgar that West is wrong and that the wait for reinforcements had nothing to do with the piano.

That evening Nash-Burnham decides to take Edgar to see a *pwè*, a Burmese street play. Khin Myo accompanies them. First they see a play about one of Buddha's previous lives, in which he was Prince Nemi. Nemi was so pious that the spirits decided to take him to see heaven. He saw heaven where the folk spirits dwell, and the underworld, *Nga-yè*, where serpents called Nagas dwell. At the end of his life, according to local tradition, Nemi wandered into the mountains to die as a hermit. They watch this play for awhile, then move on to find a puppet play called a *yôkthe pwè*. They find one and watch a scene in which the Princess puppet is singing a song of mourning for her lost husband Gautama. Gautama has given up everything he possesses, including his wife and children, to live in the forest.

Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

Edgar shows again that he is mindful of local cultures and wants to be respectful of them, despite their differences to what he is familiar with. He attempts to learn the Burmese language and tries to speak it with Khin Myo, despite having only been in Burma for two weeks. Although he cannot say much, Khin Myo is impressed that he has even tried. Edgar speaks to her with interest and asks questions about her. He is genuinely curious about this new world and its people. When she shows offence at being asked so many questions, he is immediately apologetic, and he is anxious not to cause offence. Khin Myo sees that he is different from the other officers and begins to let her guard down a little when she is around him. She thanks him for being polite and



kind, and agrees to take him to her favorite place in the city, showing him the floating market. Later, she accompanies Nash-Burnham and Edgar to the pwès and is happy that the men are showing interest in her culture and its stories. She is pleased when Nash-Burnham shows what he has learned about Burma and she encourages him to continue. Edgar has finally found a kindred spirit in Nash-Burnham, a man who is more interested in learning about the Burmese than in dominating them, and who holds culture, art and music over violence and guns. Khin Myo is friendly to both men and encourages them, showing that this attitude is appreciated by the local people.

Nash-Burnham compares his own experiences in Burma with the play they are watching. In it, Prince Nemi visits heaven and hell, then comes back to Earth to tell others what he saw. Burnham also feels as though he has seen heaven and hell, but unlike Prince Nemi, as he point outs, no-one back home would believe his stories. In other words, Burma is a beautiful place that is so incredible and enchanting it can capture a person's soul and feel like heaven. However, there are also terrible things here, partly caused by the British, which to Nash-Burnham seems like hell. Burma is a place of great beauty but also great sadness. Nash-Burnham is wistful about this. He loves Mandalay, but he has not yet become lost to the land, as he tells Edgar when Edgar asks if he also sympathizes with Gautama in the puppet play. Gautama gives up everything, including his wife and child, to live in the forest. This is meant to be an act of piety, giving up all possessions to become a hermit, to meditate and achieve enlightenment. However, this story can also be seen as an analogy for the affect Burma can have on a British soul. Some men, according to Nash-Burnham, become so enchanted with Burma that they also abandon everything they had to live in the forest, to stay in Burma and become one with it. Nash-Burnham seems to be talking about Doctor Carroll, but perhaps he has also recognized a similar feeling beginning to build in Edgar. Perhaps he can see that Edgar will also choose the forest over his home and his wife. This foreshadows Edgar's choice and feelings later in the story, but it also foreshadows and explains the startling conclusions the army jumps to at the end of the novel. Officers like Nash-Burnham have seen Carroll getting lost in the land and falling in love with it. They can see that he has already abandoned so much, and it is only a short leap to assume that he might abandon his duty and his British allegiances too, in order to 'go native.'

The Gautama story is also another example of a mythical story being attached to Edgar and Carroll's love affair with Burma. It is similar to the story of the Lotus Eaters in many ways, which will become a recurring idea later in the story. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus' men are enchanted by the Lotus Flower and forget everything else, their homes and families, and their journey home. All they want is to remain in the land of the Lotus Eaters forever. This story has sinister associations; the men are lost and need to be saved. The Gautama story looks at this idea slightly differently. In it, a man gives up his home and his family because of spiritual concerns, and in doing so finds a deeper connection to the world. For him, the change and the experience is a good thing, though it is tragic for his wife. The mourning song stays with Edgar long after he has seen the play, and he will play this particular song again when he is forced to leave Mae Lwin behind, signifying his feelings for Burma, as well as the fact that he now knows deep in his heart that he has finally chosen the forest as his home.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Edgar's departure for Mae Lwin is delayed. After four days of waiting he enquires why and is told by an army subaltern that Mae Lwin has been attacked. Carroll is safe, but some supplies were lost and some things damaged. They suspect the infamous bandit Twet Nga Lu of being the attacker, but no-one is sure.

Edgar returns to his cottage where there is a letter waiting for him from Carroll. It begs him to come to Mae Lwin without waiting for official escort, as the piano was shot and one of the strings was snapped during the attack. Khin Myo will accompany him if he does decide to come to Mae Lwin now.

The next day Edgar and Khin Myo set off. They head to the Mahamuni Pagoda with a cart-load of pilgrims. Here they meet Nok Lek, one of Carroll's men. He gives Edgar a pony, and shares his own pony with Khin Myo. They ride into the mountains, stopping at villages on the way to sleep and buy supplies. In the mountains Edgar sees farmers in paddy fields. Khin Myo tells him that each hill is like an island with a separate culture on it, all unique from the others. She tells him that Carroll is interested in this and has written to England about it. Carroll also gets scientific papers sent to him here.

The next day they reach the plateau and ride over it, but Edgar dozes most of the way. That night they stop when it gets dark, but they are attacked by bandits. They overwhelm Nok Lek and Khin Myo, but Edgar manages to grab a pistol. He shoots and misses, but it makes the pony bolt, which distracts the bandits enough for Nok Lek to attack back. The bandits run away. Edgar, Khin Myo and Nok Lek continue on through the night in case the bandits decide to come back. Eventually they reach the Salween River and travel the last little bit by boat. They arrive at Mae Lwin.

Chapter 11 Analysis

This chapter ends the first section of the novel, which deals with Edgar's journey to Mae Lwin. The second half of the story will be about the time he spends at Mae Lwin and how it changes him. However, although Edgar does not think himself changed yet, he has been affected by everything he has seen on his journey. He has encountered new cultures and tried to interact with them. He has learned about the dangers of an imperialistic attitude, even when interference is meant as a kindness. He has seen real people in Burma and sympathized with them. He has listened to their music and watched their plays, and now has a sense of connection with this land. He wants to learn more about it, and he wants to meet the man he hopes can establish peace through culture, art and music rather than violence. He writes to Katherine that he would be disappointed if he now never got to visit Mae Lwin, as his journey is still not quite at its end. He feels as though he still has things to accomplish and things to learn. He is



now beginning to feel as though the trip to Burma is a character-building journey for him, that he is learning something about himself and about the world, but that he has not quite put his finger on what yet. He feels that his story is not yet done. This makes him anxious, as it is now possible that he will not be allowed to go to Mae Lwin. When Carroll's letter comes and he has the chance to go, Edgar does not question whether it is really a good idea to travel to Mae Lwin against the army's wishes. Edgar is a civilian, so he is technically allowed to go if he wants to, but it does not seem like a good idea to aggravate armed officers in a country at war. Edgar is too intent on his own mission and the sense of importance he has attached to it, to worry about this.

In this chapter, the idea of the line between dream and reality is brought up again. This has been a recurring motif running through the story so far. For Edgar, most of the journey has felt like a dream. On the ship in the Red Sea he met the Man with One Story, who may or may not have dreamed what happened to him. On the train through India Edgar was offered a poem by a boy who could not possibly have known who he was or where he was going, and yet he did seem to know this. The boy told Edgar that stories have prophetic powers, merging the idea of reality and magic. It is even possible that Edgar dreamed this boy, as he was sleeping in his compartment when the train pulled into the station. Other parts of his trip have seemed dreamy and hazy, as if not quite real. Edgar can hardly believe the beautiful scenery and the difference between Burma and England, and he seems to let himself be carried along by it all, observing but rarely interacting to a great extent. He is so quiet and passive that it is easy to believe he is half asleep most of the time. When his boat pulls into Mandalay he dreams the arrival before it happens, so that he seems to arrive there 'twice.' On the journey to Mae Lwin he spends most of the ride over the plateau gently dozing, so that he is not sure what parts of the journey really happened and what was in his dreams.

Edgar tells Katherine in his letter that dreams and reality are becoming blurred for him, and that he feels himself melting away. This is the affect Burma is having on him; it is so fantastical and magical that it does not seem real, and he is affected by the superstitions of the culture around him. In the East everything seems more connected to the spiritual and the magical than in England, where everything was solid and practical. If London is a place of cold and dreary fog that brings a person down to earth, then Burma is a place of heat and mirages and strangeness, that lifts Edgar up and makes him feel part of a story or a dream. This atmosphere is reflected in the writing as the author slips into present tense, with fragmented sentences and more confused sentence structure whenever Edgar is feeling particularly dreamy.



Part Two: Chapters 12 and 13

Part Two: Chapters 12 and 13 Summary

Edgar wakes up in Mae Lwin, refreshed, with children peering down at him and giggling. He plays with them, and is then summoned to the beach by Doctor Carroll, who is drinking tea and watching birds by the river. Carroll invites him to come hunting with him. Edgar is reluctant, remembering the tiger hunt at Rangoon, but Carroll is insistent. However, on the ride it becomes immediately clear that Carroll has no interest in hunting. He shows Edgar the scenery and explains local myths and stories to him, and he picks flowers along the way. He tells Edgar that he is interested in chemical properties of local plants, as well as their potential medical benefits. He sometimes sends samples away to be analyzed by European chemists.

They stop at a village where people are dying of cholera. Carroll tells him that there is a terrible drought at the moment affecting the villagers. He is angry that so many people here die from cholera when people in England are vaccinated against it. They move on to a ravine and a waterfall, where Edgar can hear music created by the water when he puts his ear to the rock. They eat lunch here, then return to the fort.

The next day Edgar visits Carroll in his surgery and watches him diagnose patients. He helps hold the arm of a boy whose fingers need to be amputated. Edgar is then shown the room they use as a hospital, before Carroll takes him to the piano.

Part Two: Chapters 12 and 13 Analysis

In these chapters the reader gets their first impression of Doctor Carroll. At first Edgar is wary and unsure of him, especially when Carroll invites him on a hunting expedition. He still has not forgotten the tragedy that happened last time he went hunting in Burma. However, it quickly becomes apparent that Carroll has no interest in hunting, or in any kind of violence or destruction. They do not do any actual hunting on the trip, instead looking at the scenery and picking flowers while Carroll tells Edgar local myths and stories. It is obvious that Carroll cares a lot about this country and has dedicated a lot of time to learning everything he can about the local people's culture and customs. He is anxious to convey as much of this to Edgar as he can, wanting Edgar to connect with the area and its people as much as he has. He shows that he is not at all like the other officers Edgar has met, even Nash-Burnham. Carroll is far more dedicated to the people of Burma, but he is also much less interested in politics and war. When Edgar tries to talk to him about it he changes the subject. He seems far more interested in the day to day life at Mae Lwin than in solving the army's problems. When Edgar shows distaste at the idea that Britain is growing opium in northern Burma, Carroll is surprisingly unbothered. He does not seem to want to become involved in discussions of what is right or wrong for the Burmese, perhaps believing that it is simply better to let them decide that for themselves, and to live together in peace rather than cause trouble.



Carroll might not be interested in talking politics or war, but it is clear that he is dedicated to helping the Shan people. He has established a surgery and a hospital, and has trained a local girl called Miss Ma to be a nurse. He helps the people when he can, and laments the fact that he does not have the same resources as a doctor in England. He cannot vaccinate them against cholera, even though this is standard practice in England. He hates seeing people die needlessly when he knows he could have saved them. For him, this is the true tragedy, that the people here are not treated as important or equal by the British, and so bringing in medicine from England is far from a priority. Instead, the army focuses on war and killing. Perhaps if they focused on helping people, in interacting with the Shan people through culture and kindness such as medicine, then they would be more accepted and war would be unnecessary. Carroll's example shows that peace can be achieved easily with a simple change of attitude. Carroll treats the Shan people with respect, showing interest in their own remedies and culture rather than rejecting them out of hand, and spending time to get to know them and show them his own culture in return. The reader can already see how this is working. Carroll is loved, trusted and respected by the Shan people, and they all live together in peace. The fort is a vibrant, lively and happy place, where children laugh and play. For Edgar, after some of the other things he has seen in Burma, it seems like a sudden paradise.



Chapters 14 and 15

Chapters 14 and 15 Summary

Carroll takes Edgar to the building where the piano is being kept. Carroll asks about the Erard and Edgar tells him a little about the technicalities of how it works. Carroll says that Edgar can now open the letter he was given before setting off from London, which he was told not to read until reaching Mae Lwin. Carroll explains that the letter details how the piano was brought to Mae Lwin, and he was worried that it might anger Edgar if he read it before seeing for himself that the piano is safe.

Edgar examines the piano and removes the bullet that lodged there during the attack on Mae Lwin. He tells Carroll the damage is not too bad, and Carroll leaves him to it. Edgar begins by fixing the cracks in the piano with bamboo from the fort walls. He then begins tuning the piano. When he is done for the day he goes to Carroll and asks if there is anyone who would know how to waterproof the piano. Carroll says he will send for a local man who plays a lute and might know how to waterproof wooden instruments, to stop them from being damaged during the wet season. Edgar says he would like to remain in Mae Lwin for a while after the piano is fixed, to ensure that it does not break again when the rains come.

That night Edgar reads Carroll's letter about how the piano was moved to Mae Lwin. It was brought by boat to Mandalay, then by elephant, then finally carried through the steep, narrow paths. One man died of a snake bite on the way, but the piano made it in one piece.

The next day Edgar finishes tuning the piano and then goes to sit by the river. Carroll is away from the fort. Khin Myo comes to sit by Edgar and they talk about themselves. She reveals she is in some kind of romantic relationship with Carroll. He talks about Katherine. He then asks her to tell him her story:

Khin Myo is a second cousin of King Mindon, which means she could have been in danger from Thibaw, but then the British took over. She was sent to a private school in Mandalay for the Burmese elite where she learnt to speak English. She became an English teacher and began a relationship with the schoolmaster, a sergeant in the British army. He died when his amputation wound became gangrenous. The new schoolmaster made advances and then dismissed her when she refused. Captain Nash-Burnham was a close friend of her father's, so he offered her a role as a servant in the guest quarters. These were rarely used, so most of the time she could continue to teach English. She met Carroll when he was a guest in Mandalay, the same way she met Edgar.

That night Edgar wakes up with fever. The next day Carroll returns and says Edgar has malaria. Through the following days and nights, Edgar has a fever and delirious visions. He wakes up to find Khin Myo toweling his forehead and looking after him.



Chapters 14 and 15 Analysis

When Edgar fixes the piano he uses bamboo from the fort walls to patch up the cracks. He is taking a product of war, the fort walls, and literally turning it into music, as the bamboo will help to produce sound in the piano when the notes are hit. This reflects Carroll's goals, as well as the reason he so desperately wanted a piano in the first place. Carroll wants to end the war and violence through music, turning hatred into understanding and acceptance by sharing culture and art. By turning a symbol of violence into an instrument for creating music, Edgar is reinforcing this message. The symbolism behind Edgar's actions here runs even deeper than this. Edgar is using material, the bamboo, that is uniquely Oriental, to fix the very European symbol of the piano. He is merging the two cultures into a new, beautiful thing. The piano will never be the same again, but it will no longer be broken, and it may even be better for the fixes he has made to it. The bamboo might produce a sound that is even more pleasing. The out-of-tune piano can be seen to represent the out-of-touch army officers who do not understand the land they are trying to rule. Fixing the piano with bamboo therefore symbolizes how peace could be achieved through working with the Burmese and accepting and respecting their culture. By understanding the Shan people better, the British would not only fix their problems, but might even end up being better and stronger for the things they learn while taking the time to try to understand the Burmese culture.

Through the above analogy, the reader can begin to see why the piano is so important to Carroll. Carroll has achieved some success with the local people by learning about their culture and showing his acceptance of it, but it is not enough. The process needs to work both ways. Carroll has showed them what the British can give them in terms of medicine, but he also wants to show them that the British are also ordinary people with music that is like their own, and at the same time different from it. He wants to share something of his own people with them, so they can accept his culture in return. This is how peace and true understanding can be achieved. This is such an important goal that Carroll is willing to risk a lot in its pursuit. One man was bitten by a snake and died while transporting the piano. The piano has already caused the resentment of many of the other British officers. Edgar has been brought all the way from England to fix it and has had his life turned upside down. Can one piano really be worth so much trouble, including the life of one man?

When Edgar catches malaria the writing emphasizes the effects of the disease by emulating how Edgar is feeling. While he is dizzy and confused, the writing also becomes more confusing as the sentence structure begins to become more broken. The language is feverish and the pace quickens as Edgar also becomes feverish. The choppy, confused descriptions emphasize Edgar's delirium as the reader is not quite sure what is really happening and what is only in Edgar's head. This draws attention to how bad the malaria is, reminding the reader how much danger Edgar is in right now.



Chapters 16 and 17

Chapters 16 and 17 Summary

Edgar's fever breaks and he begins to recover. Carroll once again leaves the fort for a while on some unknown business. Edgar decides to explore the village behind the fort. As he is wandering, Khin Myo joins him and suggests going to look at a field of newly bloomed flowers. They do so, chatting and teasing each other as they walk. As they look at the flowers, a young Shan girl passes and stares at them. Edgar is suddenly worried that it might look inappropriate for him and Khin Myo to be alone together, but Khin Myo does not seem to mind.

As they walk home it finally starts raining and they are caught in the downpour. Edgar and Khin Myo are both happy that this means the drought is over, and they laugh as they are soaked. They take shelter under the entrance to Khin Myo's room, and for a moment Edgar considers asking to come in. He does not do this, however, instead leaving to dry off and change clothes.

Carroll arrives the next day, having ridden all night through the rain, bringing an emissary of the Shan Prince of Mongnai. The sawbwa of Mongnai will visit the next day, and Carroll wants to try to persuade him to arrange a meeting of the Limbin Confederacy in order to sign a peace treaty. He asks Edgar to select and play a piece of music on the piano for the sawbwa, something that will encourage feelings of friendship and co-operation. Edgar spends the rest of the night playing music in the piano room, trying to select something appropriate.

The next night the headquarters room is transformed into a dining hall, beautifully decorated and filled with incense. Edgar is seated in a place of honor near Carroll and next to Khin Myo. The sawbwa enters and everyone bows. He is accompanied by a monk dressed in blue, who Carroll calls the Blue Monk and explains to Edgar that he is the sawbwa's advisor. Edgar's music will have to impress this monk too.

After a large meal, Edgar and the guests move to the piano room where Edgar plays Bach's 'The Well Tempered Clavier' for them. The sawbwa and the Blue Monk appear to love the music, and the sawbwa asks Edgar to play again.

Chapters 16 and 17 Analysis

Carroll tells Edgar that he is translating the Odyssey into Shan. He says that he finds 'personal significance' in this story. The Odyssey is an ancient Greek epic in which the hero Odysseus is away at war for ten years. He then journeys home, but is blown to many strange and exotic places on the way. He sees fantastic things that he could never have dreamed of. He sees terrifying monsters and evil, but he also encounters wonderful paradises. On the island of the Lotus Eaters his men eat the magical Lotus fruit and immediately forget all about their homes and families. Odysseus is forced to



literally tear his men away and drag them back to the boats. Later, the whole crew stays for a year on the island of a witch called Circe, who, although she is hostile at first, gives them a very beautiful and comfortable place to live. After losing all his men, Odysseus is washed up on the island of Calypso, a beautiful nymph who attends to his every need. After this, he lands in a paradisiacal country in which life is easy, peaceful, enjoyable and beautiful. The local culture is appealing and Odysseus is treated as a valued guest. There is even a beautiful young girl who would happily marry him, the Princess Nausicaa. Odysseus can see that he could be very happy here.

It is easy to see how Carroll feels as though he has experienced similar things. He has been sent away to war in a far off place, and he has faced terrifying and sad things as well as much beauty. Like Odysseus he has been thrown into exotic new places that are very different from what he is used to. Like Odysseus, he can appreciate and enjoy life here. However, there is a huge difference between Carroll and Odysseus. Odysseus may have enjoyed the places he visited, but above everything else he always longed to go home. He never forgot his family and his duty, and part of his mind was always on those who were waiting for him at home. If Carroll finds personal significance in this story, is he trying to say that he, too, secretly longs for home? Is he saying that Mae Lwin is his home now? Perhaps he sympathizes more with Odysseus' men than with the hero himself. Later in the book, when Carroll compares himself and Edgar to the Lotus Eaters, the latter certainly seems to be true. Carroll has been lost at the first stage of Odysseus' journey. He has seen a beautiful exotic new land and fallen in love with it, and he now never wants to return home.

It is ironic that Carroll compares himself to Odysseus because it is actually Edgar who bears more similarities with the Greek hero. Edgar has travelled to a far off country, leaving his wife and home behind. Edgar's wife is a sensible, friendly and sympathetic character, and she comes across as more practical than her husband. She is comparable to Odysseus' wife Penelope, who is also a sensible, practical and clever woman. Like Odysseus, Edgar still feels a deep friendship and connection with his wife even after being married for so long. Like Odysseus, although he is enjoying his time in Burma and wishes to remain longer, he knows he will one day return to his wife and is determined not to forget her. This is comparable to Odysseus' stay with the witch Circe. He remained there for a whole year, but it was always his intention to leave eventually. Like Odysseus, Edgar now finds himself tempted by a beautiful local woman. For Odysseus it was Nausicaa; for Edgar it is Khin Myo. Edgar is developing feelings for Khin Myo, who is like Nausicaa in her beauty, her innocence mixed with perceptiveness, and in her connection to an idyllic land that Edgar could be happy to live in. Even the scene in which Edgar and Khin Myo talk among the flowers reflects similar scenes and ideas in the Odyssey. It is therefore Edgar, not Carroll, who is most like Odysseus. At the moment, Edgar still finds himself in the position of being torn between this perfect place and his wife and home. He has not yet become one of the Lotus Eaters as Carroll has, giving everything up for a new life in Burma. However, as Edgar becomes more and more at peace here, the reader begins to suspect that he may never return home after all.



When Edgar is asked to choose a piece of music to play for the Prince of Mongnai, he chooses Bach's 'The Well Tempered Clavier.' He explains that this is a very mathematical piece of music, and so can be easily appreciated and understood by a different culture. It also conveys a sense of rules and order. This, he thinks, signifies that beauty and peace are achieved through order, through things such as the treaty that Carroll hopes the Princes will sign. This is Edgar's own view, that order helps to bring out beauty and creativeness, rather than stifling it. He believes in rules, which is why it is so hard for him to break decorum to be with Khin Myo. Not only would he be breaking promises to his wife, he would also be breaking rules of etiquette concerning another man's girlfriend. Edgar's choice of music therefore says a lot about Edgar; he is a person who follows rules and is perhaps a little afraid of taking risks and of adventure. Already being in Burma is starting to change this, as he went behind the army's back to travel to Mae Lwin. He has seen how the rule and order of the British has not necessarily helped the Burmese. In Mae Lwin he feels freer than in London because he is free of the strict rules and order of society there. This has made him happier. Edgar does not yet see this. Perhaps this is the real reason he has come to Mae Lwin, and this is the real lesson he needs to learn, that sometimes rules have to be broken in order to be free and happy.



Chapters 18 and 19

Chapters 18 and 19 Summary

Edgar writes a letter to Katherine telling her about playing for the sawbwa. He says that he needs to remain in Mae Lwin to find something in himself, or to fill a sense of emptiness, but after that he promises to return.

Carroll sends for Edgar and asks him to ride with him to Mong Pu, half a day's ride north. Carroll is going for political reasons but says he wants Edgar just for company. As they ride, Carroll tells Edgar that he once left to return to England, but turned back at Aden and returned to Burma. He missed it too much and could not face leaving. Edgar mentions the Man with One Story and Carroll says that he heard the story too, about the Greek War of Independence. Edgar is surprised that the Man with One Story's story was different for Carroll than it was for him. Edgar does not mention this to Carroll.

When they reach Mong Pu, Carroll confesses to Edgar that he is meeting with the Limbin Confederacy here. He needs Edgar to pretend to be Lieutenant-Colonel Daly, a representative of Hildebrand, the Superintendent of the Shan States, so that the Limbin Princes will think this meeting is official. The Prince of Mongnai has already met Edgar, and so will know he is lying, but he has agreed to stay quiet about this. Twet Nga Lu will also be there, as Carroll earned his respect when he cured his snake bite. Edgar is angry and reluctant, but he does not have much choice, so he agrees.

Inside the fort the negotiations last all night, but in the end they are successful. As Twet Nga Lu leaves, however, he reveals that he knows exactly who Edgar really is. On the ride home, Carroll tells Edgar that he received a conditional surrender from the Limbin Princes in return for limited autonomy from the British. He has achieved peace.

Chapters 18 and 19 Analysis

Carroll comes across as quite a reckless and less admirable character in these chapters, but is clearly a man who will do whatever it takes to get the desired result. He tells Edgar that he was happy to play the 'magician' with Twet Nga Lu, fooling him with a microscope into thinking he could perform some kind of magic and so was a man to be respected. He cured the man's snake bite, showing that he is not willing to distinguish between criminals and innocents while performing medicine. Later he used the man's loyalty and trust in order to try to gain peace. This shows that Carroll is always determined to establish peace between the Shan and the British, and that he understands he may have to work with criminals to do this. He has been visited by Twet Nga Lu several times but has never given him over to the British, despite him being a murderer, because he hopes to use him for a greater goal in the future. Now Carroll has gone behind the British army's back to establish a treaty that they have had no part in drawing up the terms for. Carroll is just hoping that they will accept it once it is signed.



He has lied to Edgar to force him to help him, and has manipulated everyone involved. For Carroll, the ends justify the means. However, there is a sense of danger on the horizon. What will the British army think of Carroll's meddling and Edgar's involvement? Will the Shan Princes and Twet Nga Lu stick to their word? Is Carroll playing with forces beyond his control, and getting in too deep in matters he cannot handle?

There are more allusions to dreams in these chapters. When Edgar is at the meeting in Mong Pu, he is so tired that he begins to nod off. The voices around him, which he cannot understand, are hypnotic, and he begins to drift in and out of dream and reality. This creates a sense of confusion as to exactly what has happened. Edgar only has Carroll's word for it that a peace treaty has been signed and the whole thing is still very mysterious. This fact will come up later in the story when the British question Edgar. Edgar is also confused by the Man with One Story's tale. He appears to have told a different story to Carroll than he did to Edgar. Carroll speaks of the story as if it is the same one everyone else hears, and so it seems as though Edgar might have been the only recipient of the stranger, more ghostly story of the desert and the woman in red. This disconcerts Edgar. Did he dream up the story that was told to him on the ship? Has he been dreaming this whole time? Perhaps he is still on the boat to India right now. Edgar does not really believe this, but it only emphasizes the strange disconnected feeling he has from reality. He feels as though he has wandered into a dream when he came to Burma, and that everything that has happened since is so surreal that he is not ever quite sure if it has really happened to him.



Chapters 20 and 21

Chapters 20 and 21 Summary

Back in Mae Lwin, Edgar sleeps in, and then goes to the river at night. He swims, and then lies on a warm rock by the water. He hears a splash and looks up to see Khin Myo bathing. She sees him and runs away in embarrassment, leaving her ivory comb behind. Edgar picks it up and keeps it with him over the next few days, feeling too awkward to give it back.

Carroll leaves again on another diplomatic mission. Edgar is playing and tuning the piano one night when Khin Myo comes in. She sits next to him on the piano bench and he shows her how to play a little. He puts her hands over his while he plays so that she can feel the movement on the keys. He then kisses the back of her neck and she entwines her fingers in his. They do not go any further than this, however, and eventually she leaves.

Edgar falls asleep at the piano. Early the next day he is called to see Carroll, who tells him that Mae Lwin is going to be attacked. A Shan boy overheard a large group of men with British rifles discussing their plans to attack Mongpan and then Mae Lwin. The men were not Limbin Confederacy or Twet Nga Lu, and no-one knows who they are or how they got hold of British weapons. Carroll and the villagers are now preparing to defend Mae Lwin, but Carroll wants Edgar to leave with the piano, taking it by boat to Rangoon. Edgar does not want to leave but Carroll insists. As he gets ready to leave, Edgar tries to persuade Khin Myo to come with him, but she refuses to leave Carroll. Edgar says an emotional goodbye to her.

Chapters 20 and 21 Analysis

In the piano room, Edgar's feelings for Khin Myo finally come out. Once again, the scene feels a little like a dream as Edgar is caught up in the love he has for this country, this village, and this woman. This scene also emphasizes the importance of music for Edgar, as his feelings for Khin Myo lay hidden and unspoken until they were brought out by music. Through music he communicates how he feels, as he places her hands on his and moves the keys with them. Music makes him more confident and bolder. Now he thinks that perhaps the reason he came to Mae Lwin was for her, but she says it is for something else. What does she mean? Perhaps Khin Myo is trying to tell Edgar that it is the country he loves, and the freedom and the sense of peace he has while he is there. In his mind, he has connected these with Khin Myo, but he is wrong. Perhaps it is not Khin Myo he has feelings for, but what she represents.

When Edgar is told to leave Mae Lwin and Khin Myo he is devastated. He can take neither with him, and in the end he will only leave with the piano. He came with music, and he will leave with music. Is this symbolic of him finding the answers he came for,



that the person he was meant to be all along is a man of music? Or is this symbolic of Edgar leaving without answers, the same as he was when he arrived and still somehow empty? Is music now no longer enough for Edgar? It is ultimately up to the reader to decide this.

The beauty, peace and romance of the scene in the music room is strongly contrasted with the threat of war and danger. Now that Edgar is forced to leave he is panicky; he wants to stay and defend what he has come to think of as a home. Despite all their efforts, music has not been enough to keep the guns and the violence away.



Chapters 22, 23 and 24

Chapters 22, 23 and 24 Summary

The piano is strapped to a raft and sent down the river with Edgar and two boys called Seing To and Tint Naing. Nok Lek goes ahead in a dugout to scout the way. At first the trip is peaceful, then they hit rapids. Afterwards they stop at an abandoned and half-burnt village. Edgar asks the boys what they will do, and they say they will return to Mae Lwin to help the others rebuild or move on. This is the Shan way. Tint Naing thinks Edgar will also return to Mae Lwin because Khin Myo is his sweetheart. Edgar protests, and tells them about his wife Katherine back in London. Seing To, through Nok Lek's translation, tells Edgar about a Burman belief in which a person's soul, called a 'leip-bya', is like a moth; it flies around at night, making dreams, then returns to the person at daybreak. If it does not return, or is eaten by an evil spirit, then the person will not wake up. This story makes Edgar think of the poet boy at the station in India, who also wanted to tell him about the leip-bya.

They continue their journey. As they are floating down the river, the boys are suddenly all shot and killed. Edgar is captured by the British and taken to an outpost where he is questioned by a British Lieutenant. The Lieutenant tells him that he has been arrested on suspicion of being a traitor. Nash-Burnham then comes in and explains:

Colonel Fitzgerald, an officer back in London, was found to have corresponded with Russians and was arrested as a traitor. They investigated everyone he contacted, including Carroll. Carroll sent letters containing chemical formulae, which looked like code to the British officers, to a Russian chemist. Unfortunately, this is the same Russian chemist that met with the Honorary Consul of Burma in Paris. This looks very suspicious to the British. They investigated Carroll further and found that he had requested music sheets to be sent to him, some of which were incomprehensible and looked like code. Edgar tries to explain that this was actually Shan music, but the others do not listen. Things looked really bad when Edgar and Carroll secretly met with the Limbin Princes and Twet Nga Lu. The British think Carroll was conspiring with them to overthrow the British troops and restore Shan autonomy. Nash-Burnham points out that Edgar did not understand anything being said at the meeting, and so only has Carroll's word for it that he was forming a peace treaty. Nash-Burnham then tells Edgar that Limbin forces attacked the British two days after the meeting, reinforcing the idea that it was not a peace treaty they were signing. The British have responded by attacking back, and they have destroyed Mae Lwin.

Edgar is locked in one of the buildings. That night Nash-Burnham visits him. He tells Edgar that Carroll and Khin Myo made it safely out of Mae Lwin. He tries to make Edgar see that it is possible Carroll has been lying to him, and that he really is a traitor. Edgar will not believe it. Nash-Burnham unlocks the door and tells Edgar to run away.



Edgar escapes, but then he remembers the piano and turns back. He cuts the raft loose so that it floats downstream with the piano. He then runs north, trying to head back towards Mae Lwin. He crosses the river, finds a road, and follows it. He remembers a note that Carroll gave him before he left, and now he reads it. It is an extract from the *Odyssey* that Carroll has been translating, about the Lotus Eaters. Edgar leaves this in a shrine by the road and continues on. He sees a woman with a parasol in the distance and thinks of Katherine. He runs towards the figure, but he is shot from behind.

Chapters 22, 23 and 24 Analysis

Edgar has now become a Lotus Eater, just like Carroll. The note that Carroll gives Edgar to read after leaving Mae Lwin confirms what the reader has suspected for awhile, that Carroll is an example of what Edgar will become. Edgar was quickly falling more in love with Mae Lwin and with Burma. Now, like Carroll, he has lost his way home, only wanting to stay forever in the exotic beauty around him. He has even developed feelings for the same woman. This is presented as an inevitable but slightly sad thing. Ever since Edgar first heard about the piano in Burma, he was destined to become lost like this, to give himself up to another land and another way of life. This could be looked at in two ways; either Edgar has lost himself and forgotten what is important, drawn in like a drug or a magic spell, or he has found himself at last and realized where he was always meant to be.

Earlier, two different stories were given about people who gave up everything to live a new life in a beautiful place. In the story of Gautama, which was conveyed earlier through a puppet play, this decision was ultimately a triumphant one as it allowed Gautama to be more spiritual and to seek enlightenment. This was what Gautama was meant to do. In the other story, the Lotus Eaters, the men are tricked into staying on the island of the Lotus Eaters by a kind of enchantment or drug. This is presented as being sinister and upsetting, and Odysseus is a hero for dragging his men away. Without Odysseus' help they would have forgotten their homes and their families and become lost in a foreign land. Unlike the previous story, this presents the decision to forget one's old life and start a new one somewhere else as an ultimately tragic event. It is interesting that this is the story that is given to Edgar at the end. This is the story that sums up Edgar's and Carroll's experiences, not the Gautama story. Edgar and Carroll have not given up everything out of spiritual or religious need, but have been lured and enchanted by the foreign land until they cannot abide the thought of leaving. By drawing attention to the Lotus Eaters story at the end, a hint of something very sad and slightly sinister is introduced. Edgar and Carroll might feel that they are happier here, but they have also lost so much. Their choice is bittersweet.

Edgar is in trouble in these chapters as the British have come to the conclusion that Carroll is a traitor. They suspect Edgar too. The reader knows that Edgar is not a traitor, but Carroll's intentions are less clear. It is possible that Carroll was playing a clever game all along. It is true that Carroll has found ingenious ways to send information out of Burma and to bring it in, without the British having any idea what the notes mean. Whether or not these notes contain code or anything more than what Carroll says they



are, is much less obvious. The chemical formulae and Shan music could indeed be code. However, they could also simply be chemical formulae and Shan music. Carroll's urgent need for a piano and then a piano tuner do seem strange, but as the reader sees events through Edgar's eyes, it quickly becomes clear just how important music can be for a person. Carroll's methods are certainly unconventional and he shows no qualms about disobeying the British officers. It is obvious that he cares about the Shan people a great deal and that he sympathizes with them more than with the British. It is actually very easy to believe that he would switch loyalties and 'go native' as the British worry that he has done. The reader can see a similar process happening to Edgar, as he quickly builds a deeper connection with the Shan people he lives amongst. It is true that Edgar has no idea what was really discussed at the meeting of the Limbin Princes and that he only has Carroll's word for it that a peace treaty was signed. In fact, it is a little suspicious that Twet Nga Lu knew who Edgar was. Perhaps Carroll was lying about Edgar's actual purpose in being there. Carroll was very insistent that Edgar should take the piano out of Mae Lwin, and even gave him a note to carry with him. This has symbols in the margins where Carroll is translating the *Odyssey* into Shan. This could also be code, or it could simply be translations. It is impossible for the reader to say who is correct and whether or not Carroll is a traitor. This has the effect of creating an overwhelming air of sadness about the whole affair. Three boys have been murdered, whole towns and villages destroyed, and even the reader does not know whether this was all a huge misunderstanding or not.

Edgar is determined not to think of Carroll as a traitor, but perhaps he is fooling himself a little as he has invested so much of himself and his emotions in Carroll's mission. Edgar also does not want to believe that Khin Myo may have seduced him and played him at Carroll's request. He wants to believe that her feelings for him and friendship with him were genuine. The reader does not share his bias and might be a little more suspicious of Khin Myo. She deliberately pursued a friendship with Edgar and lured him to Mae Lwin in just the right way to make him come. She accompanied him on the journey and then remained in Mae Lwin despite having a job in Mandalay. If she has been in a relationship with Carroll all this time, why has she remained in Mandalay instead of living in Mae Lwin? Perhaps the answer is that she was waiting for Edgar. All this forces the reader to question the reality of everything that has happened in the story, once again giving events an odd feeling of being disconnected from reality. However, perhaps the real reason Edgar does not want to entertain these thoughts is that questions like this are no longer important to him. The British believe Carroll is a traitor, but for Edgar, this actually does not matter anymore. Edgar has lost himself to the Shan people as Carroll has; whatever Carroll's intentions really were, Edgar now has a greater connection to him than to anyone else. All Edgar wants to do is remain here and live in peace. He no longer wants anything to do with the British. This event is simply a sad conclusion to the British suspicion and imperialism that permeate the story, and a reminder to Edgar that he can never now go home.

The idea of dreams is brought up again one final time in the last chapter, connecting the end of the story back to the beginning. At the beginning, the author mentioned the 'than hlat,' the Burmese term for a mirage-like image created by the heat. In this mirage Edgar sees a woman and a parasol. Here, at the end of the story, Edgar sees this



woman and parasol, and again experiences the strange dream-like mirage that is the 'than hlat.' The reader cannot be sure whether he is really seeing this woman, or whether he is imagining her in his desperation and in the illusions created by the heat. The woman seems to represent his last impression of Burma and his memories as he dies. It is an exotic image that is at the same time familiar. He has memories of both Katherine and Khin Myo with a parasol, and the parasol is an item that would be familiar in both the East and in Victorian London. It sums up his world; half of him belongs to Burma, and another half to Katherine and England. The woman and the parasol represent everything Edgar loves, which is the lasting emotion that he draws from his time in Burma before he dies. At the beginning of the story the reader was told that the Bedin-Saya, who interpret dreams, claim that the sun that rises over Burma is different from the sun of other parts of the world. Again, this suggests that Burma is somehow different, somehow less real, and that everything that happens there takes on the element of a dream. Edgar feels as though he has passed into a different reality in Burma, and he does not know how, or even want, to find the way back. As he dies, the last words of the book echo the last words of the prologue at the very beginning of the story, bringing the whole thing full circle. This creates a sense of fatalism, that this was Edgar's story all along, and that events could never have happened any other way.



Characters

Edgar Drake

Edgar Drake is the main character of the story. He is a piano tuner living in Victorian London in the year 1886. He is recruited by the army to travel to Burma to repair the Erard Grand Piano of Surgeon-Major Carroll, who is stationed at a fort called Mae Lwin, in the Shan States in northern Burma. Edgar agrees to go, as he is fascinated by the idea of the piano in the jungle, and by the man who intends to use music to promote peace. However, Edgar is not the adventuring type. He is quite shy and quiet, and comes across as a little unsure of himself. He is daunted by the idea of travelling all the way to Burma, and of leaving his wife behind, but his wife encourages him to go. She thinks that it is important and that he will have a chance to achieve something very worthwhile, but she also seems to think that the journey will help Edgar find more confidence and self-belief.

Edgar is a very friendly and polite man who is anxious to always be respectful of others. He gets upset when he thinks he has insulted someone, such as when Khin Myo objects to all his questions. He is also very curious and genuinely interested in the new cultures and people he sees in the East. He doesn't ask questions to pry or feel superior, but because he really does want to get to know and understand the Burmese people. When Khin Myo sees this she instantly warms to Edgar and tells him that he is different from most of the other British people in Burma. Edgar does not share the common imperialistic British attitude. He does not consider himself superior to everyone else, and he does not believe that the British should be in control of Burma just because they are more powerful. He supports the idea of home rule, as he believes the Burmese are capable of and have the right to look after themselves. This makes Edgar a likeable and sympathetic character. He is not aggressive or proud like other characters, particularly the officers, but instead treats everyone with the same respect, seeming to consider all humans as equals. He also does not care about class distinctions, as this makes him feel a little uncomfortable. It is therefore easy for the reader to be on Edgar's side and to approve of his interests and actions.

Edgar loves music and his whole life seems to be defined by it. When he explains his view of the typical Oriental person, he dismisses the traditional Victorian ideas of laziness and ineptitude because he knows that a Chinese man made significant innovations in the invention of the piano. When courting Katherine he explained his feelings for her in terms of music. When he reads a long report of the history of Burma, he decides that the British need to be given a report on the history of Erard Grand Pianos in exchange. For him, music is just as important as conquest and politics. He is happiest when he is thinking about music or listening to it. In Mae Lwin, he finds it hard to express his emotions for Khin Myo except through music, and when playing the piano he finally has the confidence to show her how he feels. When Carroll asks him to choose and play a piece for the sawbwa of Mongnai, Edgar is able to select a piece of music that conveys beauty through order and rules, hoping this will encourage the



signing of a peace treaty. Like Carroll, Edgar believes wholeheartedly in the power of music, and he is pleased to see what it can accomplish. Although others have trouble understanding why Carroll would go to the trouble of bringing a piano to Burma from England, Edgar understands perfectly. He shares Carroll's love for music and he knows that he would feel lost and empty without it too.

Edgar manages to gain a lot of confidence in himself as his trip progresses. He learns that he is capable of doing more than he thought, and that he can be brave enough to face strange new adventures. He is able to communicate with the locals and befriend them. When he is asked to play the piano he is at first very reluctant, but when he does, he realizes how much he loves doing this. The admiration he receives helps to build up his self-belief and he sees that he can be an important person, and that he can make a difference. By the end of the book he is much surer of himself and his own abilities than he was in the beginning. He has been changed by Burma, and in particular by Mae Lwin. He is happier and more at ease with who he is, and he realizes how much he does not fit into the superior atmosphere and class system of London. His heart is here in Burma, in a peaceful and idyllic life. He learns how important music is to him, but also how important he is to music, as he feels that he has a significant place here. Without him, the piano would never have been fixed and the sawbwa of Mongnai would never have been charmed by it. However, Edgar also realizes that there is more to life than music, that he can find joy, love and significance in other things too.

Edgar begins the story as a very dreamy person, and this does not change throughout the book. Edgar is constantly feeling as though he is in a dream, or has wandered into another world. He has an odd sense of being disconnected with the world around him, as if he is not quite really there. Things seem to happen to him, but he has little effect on the world. Things change at Mae Lwin, where he begins to feel more important. The dream-like feeling does not go away, but now Edgar is happy in his dream and knows that he would like to stay. His sense of emptiness is slowly being filled. Carroll compares him to one of the Lotus Eaters in the *Odyssey*. Like the Lotus Eaters, Edgar has fallen in love with a foreign land and been bewitched by it. Now he no longer wants to go home. For better or worse, he is trapped, and this is his true home now. Carroll sympathizes with this because the same thing has happened to him.

Edgar's love for Mae Lwin is deepened by his growing feelings for Khin Myo. Despite making his feelings for her known, he does nothing to pursue a relationship. He is married and still loves his wife Katherine, and he feels a sense of duty to her. He is torn between the two, and by his old life and his new one. In the end, Edgar knows he can never return to England. He flees the British when he is accused of being a traitor and tries to head back to Mae Lwin. As he is running towards a mirage-like image of a woman with a parasol, he is shot from behind. As he dies, the dream world seems to claim him again, showing him an image that represents everything he loves. The ending is very bittersweet, just like the experience of the Lotus Eaters. Edgar has found his home and his calling, but has paid the ultimate price for it. At the end it is hard to say whether he has finally filled the emptiness inside him, or whether Burma has bewitched and tricked him, and the emptiness has finally claimed him.



Surgeon-Major Anthony Carroll

Carroll is a Surgeon-Major with the British army, stationed in Burma. Carroll requested to be sent to the remote village of Mae Lwin. The army agreed, and Carroll was successful in persuading the local chief to let him build a fort there. Since then, Carroll has made friends with the locals and become a very respected figure. He is now extremely valuable to the army as he has made significant progress in promoting peace. Sometimes it seems as though Carroll is the only thing keeping the Shan States from erupting into full-blown war. This is why when Carroll requested a piano from the British, they felt as though they needed to fulfill his request to keep him happy and persuade him to remain in Burma. The piano was sent at great expense and trouble, and now many in the army disapprove of or resent Carroll. He has become famous in the army, praised for his ability to connect with the locals and keep the peace. The other officers resent the fact that he is so successful and treated as special. They are particularly unhappy because he is not one of the landed gentry, a class that all the highest ranked officers are part of. Carroll is therefore seen as pushing above his station. Many of the other officers are sick of him and would like to see him fail.

When Carroll asks for a piano tuner for his new piano, the army once again decides to grant his request. Edgar is sent to Burma to fix the Erard Grand. Edgar senses a connection between himself and Carroll, and believes that they are kindred spirits because of their love for music. Carroll believes he can use music to promote peace, something that Edgar is very sympathetic to. Other officers in the army believe that Carroll is attempting to 'civilize the savages' but this is not Carroll's intention at all. Instead, he wishes to share an aspect of his culture with them. He is trying to connect to them and understand them, and to show his respect for them. He also wants to prove that English people can do more than hold and fire guns. He explains to Edgar that this is one of the advantages of his surgery. Carroll's methods are unique because they are based on respect, understanding and a genuine care for the Burmese people. The other officers do not have the time for or interest in this, but Carroll sees that this method is the only real way to achieve lasting peace. He comes across as a very practical, caring and intelligent man.

Carroll does not just want to promote peace to help the British. He is also genuinely concerned about the local people too. He tries to help them however he can. He has established a surgery and a hospital, and he treats the local people for free whenever he can. He brings in medicines from England and laments the fact that he cannot vaccinate the Burmese against cholera, which would be considered standard practice in England. He is angry that the Burmese are not treated as important as the English people. He sees them all as human beings who deserve respect and care. He has developed a connection with them and they are now like his extended family. The only family Carroll ever had died, including his wife and child. It is likely that his love for the people of Mae Lwin is a substitute for the family he has lost. He now thinks of Mae Lwin as his home, and confesses to Edgar that he could never leave. He compares himself to one of the Lotus Eaters in the *Odyssey*. In other words, he has been enchanted by Burma and is now determined to stay here, even if this means forgetting his original



home. Carroll has also entered into some kind of romantic relationship with Khin Myo, though it is never exactly clear how deeply they are involved. When Edgar begins to develop feelings for Khin Myo, Carroll appears to notice but does not say anything to Edgar about it. He simply speaks a little more sternly or abruptly when Edgar shows too much interest in Khin Myo. Carroll seems determined to be a good friend and not to argue or fight with Edgar.

Carroll is also a very curious man who is interested in almost everything around him. He is passionate about Burma and all its customs, myths, plants and natural features. He shows interest in local medicine and even sends away some of the local plants to be examined by foreign scientists. He writes to England about various things he has observed. He feels that all of this is important and should be recorded. When he invites Edgar on a hunting trip, it is clear that he is much more interested in observing nature than attacking it. He picks flowers and shows Edgar the beauty of the land around Mae Lwin. He also sends off for scientific papers and journals, trying to always keep up with new knowledge. For him, learning and understanding are so much more important than violence and politics.

A lot of stories have built up around Carroll and he has become quite a famous figure. Most of the stories revolve around his unorthodox methods. The story of bringing a piano to the jungle is famous, but so are other anecdotes. The enlisted men on the boat to Mandalay tell Edgar that Carroll once stopped an attack simply by playing a local love song. Whether or not the story is true, it shows how much faith people have in Carroll. He has become a legend, a figure that symbolizes peace and friendship with the Burmese. He is associated with the idea of the power of music, and by extension the power of culture. Even Carroll's name sounds like music, as a carol is a kind of song. Carroll helps people to believe that some good can come out of British occupation of Burma. However, Edgar does find out that some of Carroll's unorthodox methods are more worrying than the stories suggest. He is not just an eccentric man hoping for peace, but a revolutionary who is determined to achieve peace no matter what. He lies to and manipulates Edgar to get him to help him in this goal, and he shows that he is very willing to go against the British army's commands. This is all quite dangerous and Edgar is sometimes angry about the way he is used.

Carroll seems to be a very earnest man who will do anything to promote peace. However, at the end of the story his intentions are called into question. The British believe that Carroll has been acting either as a foreign spy, or as a Burmese sympathizer who has switched sides. They believe that instead of creating a peace treaty, Carroll has sided with the Limbin Confederacy against British rule. They think that he is a traitor. Carroll's letters sending chemical formulae to foreign scientists, or requesting sheets of Shan music, are illegible to the British and so look a little like code. Carroll's sympathy for the Shan people is legendary, and his methods already show that he is willing to disobey his superiors. Just three days after he supposedly established a peace treaty, Limbin forces attacked the British again. Could Carroll have actually been forging an alliance with them against the British instead? Edgar only has Carroll's word for it that he was signing a peace treaty. When Mae Lwin is attacked, Edgar is sent out of Mae Lwin by Carroll, with the piano and a note. The note contains translations of the



Odyssey into Shan. Once again this is a set of incomprehensible symbols that could really be code. Has Carroll been using Edgar this whole time? Has he asked Khin Myo to seduce Edgar to make him more willing to help? The reader never finds out the truth of the situation, and so only has Edgar's experience of Carroll's actions to go on. At the end of the story, Carroll is still alive but has fled to an unknown place.

Khin Myo

Khin Myo is a beautiful Burmese woman who Edgar meets in Mandalay. She is the servant in charge of the guest quarters for visiting guests of the army. She is the daughter of a rich member of the Burmese elite and was sent to a good school. She learnt English and Math, and later taught English. She developed a relationship with the British schoolmaster, but he died when his amputation wound became gangrenous. The next schoolmaster made advances and then dismissed her when she refused him. That was when Captain Nash-Burnham took her in and gave her the job as a servant in the guest quarters. She still continues to teach English.

When Edgar meets Khin Myo she is at first deferential, and then surprised by Edgar's curiosity. She is a little unfriendly, as she is used to dealing with disrespectful English men. When she realizes that Edgar is not like this at all, and is genuinely interested in her and her culture, she apologizes and instantly becomes friends with him. As they spend more time together, they grow to like each other more. When Edgar receives a letter asking him to come to Mae Lwin, Khin Myo comes too. She seems to have some kind of connection with Carroll and Mae Lwin. Later Edgar learns that she is in a romantic relationship with Carroll.

Despite Khin Myo's attachment to Carroll, Edgar soon finds himself developing feelings for her. He likes to sit and talk with her while in Mae Lwin, and finds her gentleness soothing as well as her obvious intelligence stimulating. She appears to feel something for Edgar too, and though at first she does not encourage anything, later she comes to him and shows her own feelings. They do not pursue a relationship, however, as neither wants to cheat on their other partner. At the end of the story Edgar begs Khin Myo to come with him, as he cannot bear to leave her, but she insists on staying with Carroll. She does not think that Edgar really loves her, but that he perhaps loves the idea of her more. It is possible that she loves Carroll more than Edgar, or that she feels a sense of duty to stay with him. It is also possible that she respects Carroll too much and strongly believes in what he is trying to accomplish. Leaving with Edgar would seem like abandoning this mission. In the end, Khin Myo's true feelings remain mysterious, as they have always been.

Nok Lek

Nok Lek is one of Carroll's men, a Shan boy of around fifteen years of age. He believes strongly in Carroll and has a huge amount of respect and loyalty for him. He will do anything Carroll asks. He is friendly towards Edgar and seems to accept him as a friend



because Carroll likes him. Nok Lek is also a skilled fighter despite his young age. He accompanies Edgar and Khin Myo to Mae Lwin, and then goes with Edgar when he leaves. He is shot by the British, who now think that Carroll and Edgar are traitors.

Captain Trevor Nash-Burnham

Nash-Burnham is the officer who meets Edgar in Mandalay and shows him around the city. Nash-Burnham is friends with Khin Myo and seems to feel a similar respect and curiosity for the local culture that Edgar feels. He has clearly dedicated time to learning about the Burmese people and their legends, as he recites the myths behind the street plays they are watching. He enjoys Edgar's company and seems to be pleased that he has a more sympathetic person to spend time with. He is sick of the other British officers who do not care anything about the Burmese or their culture. He comes across as a very likeable character.

Nash-Burnham appears to love Burma, but he has not been enchanted by it to the extent that Carroll and Edgar have. He would not choose to stay here when the time comes to go home, and he still remembers England fondly. He is also more concerned with obeying orders than Carroll, and though he admires the man, he disapproves of Carroll's unorthodox methods. When Edgar is captured at the end of the novel, it is Nash-Burnham who explains to him what is happening. He seems genuinely sorry that this has happened to Edgar, and he believes that he is not a traitor. However, his hands are tied and he cannot officially let Edgar go. Instead, he leaves the doors unlocked and encourages Edgar to run. It is unclear whether he is doing this out of friendship, or whether he hopes Edgar will lead them to Carroll.

Twet Nga Lu

Twet Nga Lu is an infamous bandit in the Shan States. He attacks towns and villages, as well as travelers. Everyone fears him, and the land is not safe until he is subdued. He began his banditry when the local sawbwas left their thrones empty to form the Limbin Confederacy. He moved in, seizing the throne of Mongnai. The Limbin Princes have since repelled the bandits and Twet Nga Lu has fled back to his local village, but he continues to prey on the Shan villages and people. There are a lot of stories about Twet Nga Lu, particularly concerning his many fearsome tattoos.

Edgar meets Twet Nga Lu later in the story. Carroll knows him because he once cured him of a snake bite, and has met with him a few times since. Twet Nga Lu agrees to meet with him and the other Limbin Princes to sign a peace treaty. Edgar is interested to see the infamous man in person, who is not quite as threatening as his stories might suggest.



Katherine

Katherine is Edgar's wife. They have been married for a very long time, but they are still in love. They share a deep friendship and understanding this has helped to keep their marriage strong despite them not being able to have children. Katherine is a very sensible, intelligent and practical woman who indulges Edgar's eccentricities and encourages him to be more confident in himself. She could be compared to Penelope, the wife of the hero Odysseus who sailed to exotic places. Penelope was also sensible, intelligent and practical, and their relationship of deep friendship and respect was similar to Katherine and Edgar's. Like Odysseus, Edgar thinks of his wife often and knows that no matter how much he is tempted by local beauty, he must one day return home. Unfortunately, this does not happen, as Edgar is killed in Burma. After the first two chapters Katherine is only present in the story in Edgar's thoughts, and the reader never finds out what she thinks of his letters, or how she copes with her husband's disappearance and death.

Seing To and Tint Naing

Seing To and Tint Naing are two Burman brothers who accompany Edgar as he flees Mae Lwin with the piano at the end of the novel. They help to steer the raft on which the piano has been tied. They are curious and lively boys who ask Edgar a lot of questions about his home and his wife. Seing To tells him a Burmese belief about how people's souls are like moths; they fly around at night and return to the person at daybreak. He seems to sense that Edgar's soul now belongs to Burma. Both Seing To and Tint Naing are killed by the British as the raft floats past a British outpost.

The Sawbwa of Mongnai

The sawbwa of Mongnai comes to visit Mae Lwin in order to discuss a potential peace treaty with Carroll. Carroll asks Edgar to select and play a piece of music that will enchant the sawbwa and make him more inclined to feel friendly towards Carroll and the British. Edgar chooses to play Bach's 'The Well Tempered Clavier' which the sawbwa enjoys. The sawbwa likes the music so much that he asks Edgar to play again. This does eventually lead to the establishment of a peace treaty. The sawbwa of Mongnai is one of the more important Shan Princes and members of the Limbin Confederacy. Edgar notes how extravagant his sequined robe is, and the respect that everyone shows to him. Even Edgar and Carroll are expected to bow to him.

The Blue Monk

The Blue Monk is a monk dressed in a blue robe who accompanies the sawbwa of Mongnai to Mae Lwin. He is the sawbwa's advisor, so Carroll tells Edgar that his music will also have to please the monk. Thankfully, it does.



Thibaw

Thibaw was the King of Burma until very recently in the story, when the city of Mandalay was annexed and British forces took over northern Burma. Thibaw was deposed and exiled to India.

Captain Dalton

Captain Dalton meets Edgar at Rangoon and takes him to the military outpost near the Shwedagon Pagoda. He invites Edgar on a tiger hunting trip, but the expedition goes badly wrong when Witherspoon shoots a child by mistake. Dalton is calmer and more sensible than Witherspoon, but still a little too gun-happy for Edgar's comfort. Like Edgar, he seems genuinely distressed by what happened.

Captain Witherspoon

Witherspoon is one of the officers on the hunting trip near Rangoon. He insists on shooting a baby monkey despite Dalton's annoyance that this might scare the tiger away. Later, he accidentally shoots a young Burman boy, thinking the rustling in the bushes is made by a tiger. Witherspoon comes across as a trigger-happy, rather reckless man, who is far too intent on procuring attractive animal skins as hunting trophies. He does not appear to care much about the local people.

Captain Fogg

Fogg is one of the officers on the hunting trip with Witherspoon, Dalton and Edgar.

Colonel West

Colonel West is one of the officers at the dinner Edgar attends in Mandalay, at the residence of the Commissioner of the Northern Division. Colonel West hates Doctor Carroll because he believes Carroll's piano is responsible for the death of his men. He angrily tells Edgar that reinforcements to his position were delayed because they were helping take the piano to Mae Lwin instead. After the dinner Captain Nash-Burnham tells Edgar that this is not true, that the reinforcements were not due for another week anyway and the transportation of the piano had nothing to do with it.

Colonel Killian

Colonel Killian is the officer who recruits Edgar to travel to Burma to fix the piano. He is anxious to procure Edgar's help in order to keep Carroll happy, because Carroll is tactically too useful for the army to lose. However, it is obvious that the Colonel disapproves of Carroll's methods and of his desire to bring piano music to the East.



Colonel Killian does not believe in civilizing other countries, only in conquering them and taking their land and taxes. He is not ashamed of this view and declares it openly to Edgar.

Captain Tideworth

Captain Tideworth is the captain of the ship that takes Edgar from France to India. He knows Carroll, and tells Edgar that he is a good man. He also encourages Edgar to speak to the Man with One Story.

The Man with One Story

The Man with One Story is a man called Ibrahim who once worked as a deckhand on a ship travelling in the Red Sea. The ship was wrecked and Ibrahim was washed up on the African shore. He followed two goatherds to a huge encampment in the desert, where he encountered a strange vision of a woman in red. The woman lifted her veil and appeared to have a deer's nose and mouth, with soft fur covering them, but a normal woman's eyes. She sang for him, and the music was so enchanting that it made him deaf. He woke up by the Red Sea and was taken aboard an Alexandrian merchant vessel. He does not believe he dreamt the whole thing, as twenty days had passed since the storm in which he was washed ashore.

Now he travels on this same ship, always disembarking at Aden, as if waiting to see the woman or hear the music again. He says that this is his One Story, as it is the only important thing in his life now. Later, Edgar finds out that he has told a different story to others, this time about the Greek War of Independence. Edgar does not know if he is the only one who Ibrahim told the desert story to, and whether this is the true story of his deafness or not.



Objects/Places

The Erard Grand Piano

Erard Grands are a type of grand piano created by Sebastien Erard, a French instrument maker living in Paris. He built his first piano in Paris in 1777 and soon became known for the quality of his instruments. He was forced to move to London during the French Revolution, as his fame led him to be commissioned to produce pianos for some very important people, even royalty. When Carroll requests a grand piano to be sent to Burma, he is given an Erard. Edgar is a piano tuner who specializes in Erards, and so when Carroll needs a tuner Edgar is commissioned. Edgar thinks the Erard is a particularly fine kind of piano and he admires the model that Carroll has procured.

The piano is incredibly important for Carroll, as he means to use it to share his culture with the local people. He hopes to promote peace by showing them that English people are cultured and not just violent, and that they know how to do more than hold a gun. Unfortunately, the piano has been broken in an attack on Mae Lwin, and is also incredibly out of tune. Edgar manages to fix it, using bamboo from the fort walls. This is symbolic of Carroll's mission and his intentions with the piano. The out-of-tune piano can be seen to represent the out-of-touch British attitude, which does not understand the Burmese people and so will never be able to achieve peace. When Edgar fixes it with bamboo, a symbol that is uniquely Oriental, this represents how working together and taking the time to understand and respect each other is a better route to peace. Edgar has combined two cultures to fix a problem, and in the process has created a wonderful new sound. Working together has produced something beautiful.

Music

Music is very important in this story. Carroll believes that music can bridge a cultural gap and allow different people to understand and appreciate each other. He proves that this is possible when music is used to convince a local Prince that peace would be better than war. Edgar also believes in the power of music. To him music is something beautiful as well as something ordered. At first he cannot understand the strangely unordered music of the East, but he comes to appreciate it as he hears more. He realizes that bringing western music to Burma is more complicated than simply showing them what they have been missing. They have their own music. Bringing music here must be done with more humility then, by sharing cultures and using music to understand each other.

There are other points in the story where the power of music is emphasized, such as in the Man with One Story's tale, in which he hears music so wonderful that he goes deaf. This emphasizes that music is beautiful but also mysterious and powerful, like a force of nature. Another story involves Carroll using a Shan love song to prevent an attack. This



emphasizes that music can influence people and that, when combined with understanding and respect, it can be a powerful diplomatic tool.

There are many people in the story who do not appreciate music as Edgar and Carroll do. Many of the British officers do not understand Carroll's methods and think his request for a piano is madness. In the end, they attach ulterior motives to Carroll's actions, as they cannot accept that music could be so important.

Burma

Burma is a country in Southeast Asia. At this time it was bordered by India, China, Siam (now Thailand), and French Indo-China. At the time in which the novel is set (1886) Burma is under the rule of the British Empire, as is India. Britain and France are hostile to each other, and France controls areas further to the east in Siam and French Indo-China. Therefore, sitting between Siam and India, Burma is in a very strategic position. This is why Britain is anxious to control it. Not long before the events of the novel, northern Burma was independent and ruled by King Thibaw. The British attacked and took over, deposing Thibaw and exiling him to India, and annexing the city of Mandalay. There is still trouble in the Shan States to the north-east, however, in the form of the Limbin Confederacy, which is at war with the British in the name of Shan independence.

Burma is a very hot and sunny country, as well as being in the monsoon area of Asia. The latter means that very heavy rains falls almost constantly at a specific time of year, creating a dry season followed by a wet season. The country would seem very lush and exotic to a visiting British person, as the land contains tropical plants and animals, as well as rainforests.

The Shan States

The Shan States are a group of small principalities in northern Burma that are populated by the Shan people, an ethnic group of Burma. Originally the Shan ruled Burma, from the period after the Burman capital of Pagan fell, to 1555 when the Burman state of Pegu eclipsed and took over from the Shan empire at Ava. After this the Shan split up into small principalities each ruled by a local prince or sawbwa. Not long ago, a group of these Shan Princes mobilized against the Burman King Thibaw, as they did not agree with an unfair land tax. This group is known as the Limbin Confederacy. As they were marching on him, the British attacked and took over northern Burma, deposing King Thibaw and exiling him to India. The Limbin Confederacy decided to switch targets to the British instead. Now, in the time that Edgar is visiting Burma, the Shan States are quite a dangerous place. Bandits are a problem, and the Limbin Princes still defy British rule. Mae Lwin, the village where Carroll is stationed and where Edgar is going to fix the piano, is situated in the Shan States.



Pagan

Pagan is the ancient (now abandoned) capital of the Burman empire, which ruled Burma until the Shan took over. Edgar visits the ancient city during the boat trip from Rangoon to Mandalay. Pagan is situated on the Irrawaddy River.

Ava

Ava was the capital of the Shan empire that ruled Burma from the fall of Pagan until 1555, when the Burmans once again took over.

The Shan Empire

The Shan once ruled over Burma. Their control lasted from the fall of the Burman capital Pagan, until 1555 when the Burman state of Pegu took over.

The Shan Mountains

The Shan States are separated from the rest of Burma by mountains, which then level off into a plateau on which the Shan villages and towns can be found. Edgar sees the Shan Mountains from Pagan, and later he travels through them with Nok Lek and Khin Myo.

Mae Lwin

Mae Lwin is a village in the Shan States where Carroll spoke with the local chief and was given permission to build a fort. The fort is situated by the Salween River, accessed from the river by narrow paths through the brush. It is built against a steep hillside and so is on many levels. Behind the hill is the village. Inside the fort are army buildings, dwellings, a headquarters, the piano room, a surgery and a hospital. This is also where Khin Myo lives when she is not in Mandalay. Edgar finds Mae Lwin beautiful, peaceful and idyllic. He soon falls in love with the place and does not want to leave.

The Doctor's Surgery

The doctor's surgery in Mae Lwin is a very basic room where the patients wait and where Carroll diagnoses them. Nothing is private, so the waiting patients can see Carroll administering medicine or aid to others. Edgar is a little shocked by this lack of privacy, but Carroll believes that it helps the locals to see Carroll as a force of good. It proves to them that Englishmen know how to do more than fire a gun. There is also a small hospital building near the surgery where very ill people are taken care of. Carroll has recruited and trained a local girl, Miss Ma, to be a nurse.



Mongnai

Mongnai is an important town in the Shan States. This is where the bandit Twet Nga Lu tried to take over when the Limbin Princes were away. He was forced out, and the local sawbwa returned. The sawbwa of Mongnai visits Carroll at Mae Lwin in this story, and Edgar plays music to try to move him towards a path of peace and friendship.

The Well Tempered Clavier

'The Well Tempered Clavier' is a piece of music by Bach. Edgar chooses to play this for the sawbwa of Mongnai when he visits Mae Lwin. Edgar chooses this particular piece of music because it is very ordered and mathematical. He hopes that this means that it can be understood by a very different culture, as complexity and mathematics are universal ideas that anyone can appreciate. Edgar also chooses this piece because he feels it suggests beauty through order. He hopes this will influence the sawbwa to sign a treaty to encourage peace. Both the sawbwa and his advisor, the Blue Monk, approve of the music and they ask Edgar to play again.

Mandalay

Mandalay is a city in northern Burma where King Thibaw once ruled from. When the British took over, they annexed Mandalay and exiled Thibaw. Mandalay is the last major city on Edgar's route to Mae Lwin. He stops here for a time as he is delayed in his journey to Mae Lwin. He is housed in a little cottage reserved for visitors and looked after by a servant called Khin Myo. Khin Myo quickly makes friends with Edgar and shows him around Mandalay, taking him to the most beautiful spots. Later, Captain Nash-Burnham takes Edgar to local street plays, including a puppet play. Mandalay is portrayed as a beautiful city where the Burmese culture is alive and fascinating. Mandalay is also where the Commissioner of the Northern Division of British troops in Burma is stationed.

Burmans

In this story, the word 'Burman' refers to an ethnic group of Burma. This should not be confused with 'Burmese' which refers to any person living in Burma, as well as to the government, kingdom and language of Burma. I.e. Nok Lek is a Shan boy living in Burma. He may be referred to as Burmese, but he is not a Burman.

Burmese

In this story, the word 'Burmese' refers to the kingdom and government of Burma, as well as the language. It should not be confused with 'Burman,' which is one of the ethnic groups of people living in Burma.



Shan

The Shan are an ethnic group living in the Shan States. They have a separate language and culture from the Burmans. It is mainly Shan who live in Mae Lwin.

Kachin and Karen

The Kachin and Karen are ethnic groups who live in Burma and the Shan States.

Sawbwa

A sawbwa is a ruler of a Principality in the Shan States. The sawbwas are very important people who dress extravagantly and are treated like mini-royalty. In this story they are often referred to as Shan Princes. If Carroll hopes for peace in the Shan States, it is the sawbwas he must persuade.

Dacoits

Dacoits are local bandits in the Shan Hills. They attack villages and travelers, targeting foreigners if they can because they are richer. They are a huge problem at the moment as the disruption in the Shan States caused by the Limbin Confederacy has made it a difficult area to police and control. On their way to Mae Lwin, Edgar, Khin Myo and Nok Lek are attacked by dacoits, only just managing to get away with their lives.

The Limbin Confederacy

The Limbin Confederacy is a group of Shan Princes (sawbwas) who rebelled against the rule of King Thibaw because they were unhappy about an unfair land tax. They planned to replace Thibaw with one of his relatives. However, while the Limbin Princes moved against Thibaw, the British attacked Upper Burma and conquered it, annexing the city of Mandalay. Thibaw was deposed and exiled to India. The Limbin Confederacy decided to switch targets and attacked the British in the name of Shan independence. As they were away, however, their own thrones were left empty and local warlords moved in. The Limbin Princes were forced to return to secure their own land. Now they have regained their land, and are once again a threat to the British in the Shan States.

Carroll meets with the sawbwas of the Limbin Confederacy later in the story. He manages to persuade one of the Princes to see his side, aided by Edgar's music. When he meets with the Limbin Princes he manages to get them to sign a peace treaty, surrendering to the British in return for limited autonomy. However, when Edgar is captured by the British they accuse him and Carroll of being traitors. They think that Carroll is actually working with the Limbin Confederacy to defeat the British and assert Shan authority again. Edgar cannot speak the language so he does not know what



really happened at the meeting, but he believes that Carroll was truly trying to establish peace.

Rangoon

Rangoon is a fort in south Burma where Edgar's ship comes in. Edgar stays here for a few days, engaging in a local hunt, before travelling up the Irrawaddy River to Mandalay.

The Salween River

The Salween River is the largest of the strong rivers that run through the Shan States. Carroll's fort at Mae Lwin is situated on the Salween, and Edgar likes to spend much of his time sitting by the river. At the end of the story, Edgar escapes Mae Lwin with the piano by floating down the Salween on a raft. It is here that he is picked up and arrested by British forces. When he runs away, he crosses the Salween to try to find Mae Lwin again.

The Irrawaddy River

The Irrawaddy is the river on which the cities of Rangoon, Pagan and Mandalay are situated. Edgar travels on a boat up this river when he journeys from Prome to Mandalay.

Pagodas

Pagodas are Burmese temples, used to follow the path of Buddha, to pray and to meditate, and to honor the Buddha's life. Pagodas are beautiful buildings with many eaves, creating the effect of a tiered tower. Guests to pagodas are required to remove their shoes before entering as a mark of respect. Edgar sees many pagodas along the roads and rivers as he travels in Burma. He visits the famous Shwedagon Pagoda near Rangoon, near which the British army has set up a base. The Shwedagon Pagoda is a particularly important one for Buddhists, containing many relics, and the building is gilded with gold.

Pwè

A pwè is a Burmese street play, performed to mark special occasions. A yôkthe pwè is a special kind of pwè told with puppets. Edgar is taken to see some local pwès by Nash-Burnham and Khin Myo while he is staying in Mandalay.



Leip-bya

The Burmans believe that a person's spirit, called a leip-bya, flies around at night, which is what creates dreams. The leip-bya returns to a person at sunrise. If it is eaten by a bad spirit before it can return, then the person never wakes up. The Burman people do not like to wake a sleeping man in case the leip-bya does not have time to return. This belief is explained to Edgar by Seing To, who seems to think it is somehow significant to Edgar's experiences. The poet boy who wanted to sell Edgar a poem at a station in India also mentioned the leip-bya, which was the subject of his poem.

Than Hlat

'Than hlat' is the Burmese term for a mirage-like image created by the extreme heat in Burma. The author describes it as a "ghost reflection of light and water" (p2 and p348).

Paddy Fields

Paddy fields are flooded pieces of land used for growing rice. They are often built into steep hillsides in terraces, to catch the rain, or situated next to rivers and marshes. The flooded conditions are ideal for growing rice, and help to keep weeds away.

The Tiger Hunt

Near Rangoon, Edgar is invited on a tiger hunt with Captains Dalton, Witherspoon and Fogg. At first the ride is pleasant and it is a chance for Edgar to see the local scenery. However, when Witherspoon shoots a baby monkey, things begin to go downhill. When they come to a village, Edgar interacts with the children and throws a coin to one of the boys. The boys then follow him as they ride out, before running off to play in the forest. When the hunters hear rustling in the bushes they think it is a tiger. Edgar and Dalton see screaming women running towards them from the village, but Witherspoon pays no attention and shoots into the bushes. He accidentally kills the little boy Edgar had given the coin to. Edgar is sickened, and cannot look at the other hunters again after this. Captain Witherspoon pays a fine and the mother of the boy is given compensation, but this is the only punishment received. Edgar is surprised that the incident was even reported at all, given how imperialistic the British are towards the Burmese. However, he concludes that it must be comforting for the British, as a way of assuaging their guilt.

The Woman in Red

In the Man with One Story's tale, a woman dressed in red appears to him in the desert. She pulls back her veil to reveal women's eyes, but a deer's nose and mouth covered in soft fur. She knows the man's name, Ibrahim, and appears to be able to control the sandstorm. She disappears, then sings such beautiful music that Ibrahim becomes

deaf. She appears to have been some kind of spirit or supernatural being. Ibrahim is convinced that he really saw her, but he may have been confused by the sandstorm, or even dreaming the whole thing.



Themes

The Power of Music

The power of music is an important theme in this novel as it is the main reason why the fates of Edgar and Carroll become entwined. Carroll's self-imposed mission in Burma seems to be to promote peace through music. At first, this is spoken of in terms of music's civilizing influence. Some of the British officers believe Carroll's aim is to bring European culture and civilization to the Burmese and so educate them and raise them up from being 'savages.' This will make them like and respect the British more. At first, Edgar perhaps feels a similar way. He loves music, in particular piano music, and has attached such a strong sense of importance to it that nothing else matters. He thinks in terms of music, and forms his opinions around it. For instance, he does not agree with the popular Victorian image of the savage as lazy and ineffectual because he knows the Chinese helped come up with some of the innovations that made the piano possible. He therefore approves of Carroll's mission to bring music to Burma. He sees music as a universal thing of beauty that every person can appreciate, and so it is an excellent starting point to communicate ideas of peace and friendship.

He soon comes to see that things are not this simple. The Burmese have their own music and it would be extremely patronizing to think that European music is somehow better or more civilized. Edgar listens to the music in the temples and at the plays and appreciates its beauty, as well as its strange mystery. Some of it is meaningless to him and confuses him, as it does not seem to be built on any of the principles he is familiar with. He realizes that just because music is universal, this does not mean that interpretations of it will not vary wildly according to cultural influences. This is why when he is asked to play for a Shan Prince, he picks a piece of music that is mathematically precise, as he hopes that admiration for its ordered rhythm and complexity will bridge the cultural gap.

Edgar now realizes that any exchange of music and culture must be undertaken with humility. He demonstrates this as he tunes the piano, using pieces of bamboo to fix the cracks. In doing so, he is merging something uniquely Oriental with something uniquely European to create a beautiful new sound. He is showing that the two cultures need to work together and exchange in friendship, rather than one attempt to dominate the other. Edgar sees that what Carroll is trying to do is not the same as 'civilizing the savages,' as other British people would like to believe. Instead, he is showing the Burmese that the British are ordinary people too, and that they can create beauty as well as hold guns and destroy things. Music is very powerful in communicating this message, and Edgar is delighted to see something he loves so much being put to such a wonderful use. When he is asked to play a piece of music for the sawbwa of Mongnai to promote friendship, he chooses a piece of music that to him represents beauty through order, showing that peace and diplomacy are more beautiful than violence. This works, and the sawbwa does indeed seem to be moved by the music. This



demonstrates that Carroll was correct, and music can be an extremely important tool in communicating with another culture.

Edgar also proves to himself how important music is to him. He realizes that he loves playing it as well as tuning, but he also understands the importance of the tuner. He remembers his old master telling him that every piano has a song inside it that the tuner needs to bring out. At the time Edgar thought he was being fanciful, but now he understands. He sees that music can truly accomplish immense and amazing things. He sees that the beauty of music is achieved through order and co-operation inside the instrument. In other words, his very role in life symbolizes the power of music that Carroll so firmly believes in. Edgar has always felt proud of his job, but now he can see it as more of a calling than a career, and can feel that he has contributed something incredible to the world. Music is helping him to feel more important and fulfilled.

This theme of the importance of music is picked up on in many of the mini-stories in the novel. Edgar hears many stories and myths as he travels in the East, the first being the Man with One Story's tale. In it, a vision of a woman in red begins to sing, and the singing has the power to stop a sandstorm as well as to turn a man deaf. The singing is so beautiful and incredible that he is glad he heard it, even given the consequences. He believes he is now deaf because he could never hear anything so perfect again, and so his ears simply stopped working. This story gives music a slightly sinister edge as well as emphasizing its beauty. In it, music is like nature or a supernatural creature; it is mysterious, powerful and a force to be reckoned with, but it is also something wonderful. Later, as Edgar is travelling in India, he sees a poet boy at a station who wants to give him a poem. He claims that his poems are prophetic and that he can see the direction of every person's story. Poems, like music, are rhythmical and beautiful. Again, the power of music is shown to be something amazing but also mysterious and inscrutable. In Burma Edgar hears local music at the temples and plays, and he realizes that the music of the East is extremely different and mysterious, just as these stories suggested it would be.

In another mini-story, this time about Carroll, music is used to literally halt an attack. Carroll's men are ambushed on their way to Mae Lwin, but Carroll plays a Shan love song and their attackers respond by escorting them safely to the village. This story shows how important cultural interpretations of music can be. A Shan man could never commit violence after being reminded of his first love, so by playing a well-known love song, Carroll has diverted their feelings of anger into feelings of warmth and friendship. He has combined the power of music with a deeper understanding of the Shan people, which is what Edgar realizes must be the true goal of their efforts in Burma. This story is told to Edgar by enlisted men on the boat to Mandalay, showing that other people are just as willing to believe in the power of music too, and that the ordinary soldiers want peace as much as Carroll.

Unfortunately, the British officers are not so sympathetic towards Carroll's mission. They are deeply suspicious of it, as they cannot understand what could be so important about one piano. They refuse to see the beauty of music, or the sense in trying to connect with the culture they wish to rule. To them, domination is the only way to control people, and



guns make more sense than music. They do not want to connect, and they certainly do not want to share cultures. In the end, the only way they can interpret Carroll's efforts is as treachery. They believe that he is a traitor working for Russia or for Shan independence, or perhaps even the French. They explain away his interest in music as a sham, as Carroll's method of passing coded messages back and forth. The power of music is lost on them, leading to Carroll and Edgar's downfall, and to the end of any hopes for peace with the Shan Princes.

War and Empire

As the story is set in British controlled Burma, issues of imperialism and war are brought up. When Edgar is commissioned for the tuning job, he is called into the office of a Colonel in the army. He is hired by the army for the job, and it is the army who are paying the expenses of his journey, as well as his fee. This is because Carroll, whose piano it is that needs fixing, is a Surgeon-Major in the army, stationed at the fort of Mae Lwin. Carroll requested a piano and this was granted by the army, and now they are sending Edgar at Carroll's request as well. This is all because Carroll is strategically extremely important to them. He is a major factor in keeping the peace in the volatile Shan States. Carroll has already achieved a lot and has a great deal of influence with the people in the area. If Carroll were to leave, there is a good chance open war might break out, which is something the people in charge wish to avoid. Although they are not happy about Carroll's bizarre requests, they are willing to go along with them for now. This is typical of the British attitude to Burma. They wish to control it and so are using every resource that they can in order to do so. As Colonel Killian tells Edgar when he hires him, the people of England might like to think that Britain has a civilizing influence in the East, but for the army it must simply be about dominance and power. It is his job to enforce this.

The officers who are actually stationed in Burma are another matter entirely. Many of them are bored and most of them do not feel any connections with or sympathy for the Burmese. They do not want to take the time to forge peace with the local people by trying to understand them or communicate properly with them. Instead, they are only interested in subjugating them. Some of them would welcome a war just for something to do. Others spend their time hunting, such as Captains Dalton, Witherspoon and Fogg, who take Edgar on a hunting expedition with them. They are interested in collecting trophies and demonstrating their power. For some, like Dalton, and even Edgar at first, the idea of the powerful and capable Englishman protecting the local people from things like tigers, is appealing. Edgar quickly comes to see how wrong-headed this idea is. It is the British people, not the local predators, that the Burmese need protection from. When Witherspoon kills the little boy by accident, Edgar is overcome with grief. It is hard to say what the officers are feeling, but Dalton at least seems to understand Edgar's feelings. Edgar is surprised when he is called to give evidence, and when he sees Witherspoon fined and compensation given to the mother. These are not enough to make up for the loss, but he is amazed that there has even been any attempt at justice. He thought the British, in true imperialistic fashion, would just ignore or bury the incident. He comes to the conclusion that this must be partly a



salve to cover up a sense of guilt, as these officers have to live with the Burmese people and see the affects the army's tactics have on them. They realize that they are conquerors in a strange land, and that they are probably not wanted. Most of the time they pretend not to feel or notice this, but their bureaucracy concerning the boy's death perhaps gives away their true feelings. This shows what a complicated mix of emotions surround the idea of subjugating a land.

Other officers do not even try to interact with the local people, instead keeping up appearances of 'Britishness.' When Edgar attends the party at the Commissioner's residence in Mandalay it is like he has stepped straight back into London society. He remarks that they have even imported the 'Atmosphere.' They are pretending they have never left their home, and are trying to ignore the country they have come to rule. None of these are particularly healthy or helpful attitudes. However, there are some rare officers who do take an interest in the country and its people. Nash-Burnham seems delighted with the local culture and happily takes Edgar to see some Burmese street theatre. He explains the myths behind the plays, showing that he has researched and made an attempt to learn about the Burmese people as much as possible. Carroll, too, makes a huge effort to show his respect for and interest in the lives and culture of the people of Burma. He even collects their medicines and studies them, not rejecting any of their beliefs out of hand for being too different from what he is used to. By the reactions of the locals, it is clear that this attitude makes a better impression on the people of Burma, and so goes further to encouraging peace, than any kind of violence or imperialism. Whereas others act as if they are superior, considering the Burmese little more than 'savages,' Carroll, Edgar and Nash-Burnham take the time to see the Burmese as people, like themselves in some ways and different in others, but worthy of care and respect.

Edgar sees that the enlisted men have a different attitude than the officers. The enlisted men do not like war and violence, and they believe in Carroll's ideas. They cling on to anything they can put their faith and belief in to hope for peace. This reminds the reader that it is the richer people in charge who make the foreign policies and start the wars, and it is the ordinary people on both sides who suffer for it. Imperialism and violence in Burma has clearly led to nothing good.

In the end, the imperialistic attitude of the officers destroys any hopes for peace as Carroll's actions are misinterpreted. The army cannot understand why Carroll would make efforts to share his culture with the people at Mae Lwin, and so read ulterior motives into what he is doing. Suspicion and distrust seem to be common amongst the officers of the British army. This can be strongly contrasted with the sense of trust, peace and friendship that permeates Mae Lwin. It is clear whose methods are having the more beneficial effect.

Dream and Reality

The idea of the confusion between dream and reality is a recurring theme in this novel. There are many points where Edgar feels as though he is not quite connected to reality,



or that he is somehow dreaming everything. Even Burma itself, with its strange, exotic beauty is more like a dream to him than a real place. This can be contrasted with the very real, solid, cold and down-to-earth atmosphere of London in the first two chapters of the story. The journey from London quickly becomes stranger until Edgar seems to almost be in a kind of trance, being pulled along by events and places that rush by, affecting him but also not affecting him, as if he is somehow both separate from them and part of them.

On the boat to India, Edgar speaks to the Man with One Story who tells him how he lost his hearing. This is a strange tale of being shipwrecked, wandering in the desert, and seeing a kind of apparition that appeared as a woman dressed in red with a deer's nose and mouth. The man woke up again on the shore, putting into question everything that he says happened to him. It seems likely that he dreamt the whole thing, but the fact that twenty days passed while he lay on the beach seems to negate this possibility. This is Edgar's first experience of strange magic and superstition in the East, and it begins his slide into a world that feels more like a dream than reality.

On the train travelling through India, Edgar wakes up at a station where the local traders are trying to sell things through the train windows. One quiet boy on the platform stares at him, so he asks him what he is selling. The boy explains that he is a poet and that he knows Edgar is going to Burma because his stories are prophetic. He wants to tell Edgar a Burmese story that is important to his trip, but the train pulls away before he can. This leaves Edgar with another sense of being disconnected with reality. How could the boy have known where he was going? Did Edgar dream the boy, or is something stranger happening? In these instances, Edgar always seems to be one step away from something magical happening. He does not see supernatural events himself, but the stories he hears and the things he experiences suggest that the East is filled with a kind of magic and mystery that does not exist in London. He feels as if he has travelled into a different reality. This is backed up by the beliefs of the Bedin-Saya, mentioned at the very beginning of the novel, who say that the sun over Burma is a different sun from the one that shines on the rest of the world.

As Edgar travels into Mandalay, he dreams that the boat pulls into the city moments before it actually does. Due to this, he has a sense of arriving in the city twice. This could be explained as simple anticipation, or as a kind of prophetic element that becomes attached to dreams when in the East. Later, Edgar dreams while on the journey to Mae Lwin, nodding in and out of sleep while on his horse, and he dreams while in the meeting of the Limbin Confederacy and Twet Nga Lu. While in Mae Lwin he suffers from malaria and has visions while delirious. In all these cases, Edgar is confused and half asleep, and is never quite sure what is really happening and what is dreamed. The writing is confusing to match Edgar's state of mind, and the sentence structure becomes broken. This puts the reader in a similar position of confusion, wondering what is really happening and what Edgar is only imagining.

At one point Edgar writes to his wife, Katherine, explaining to her that he is becoming lost in dreams and that he is not sure what is true anymore. He feels as though he is losing himself, and that Burma is a strange dream-like place that is drawing him in.



Edgar's disconcertion is made worse when he finds out that the Man with One Story told Carroll and others a different tale. Why did he choose to tell Edgar a strange story about visions and magic? Could Edgar have dreamt it, and if so, has he been dreaming since Aden? Edgar does not really seem to believe this, but it does emphasize his sense of disconnection with reality. Later, Seing To tells him a Burman belief about the leip-bya, the soul or spirit of a person. He says that the leip-bya flies around at night, visiting different places, and that this is what causes dreams. The leip-bya then returns to the sleeping person at sunrise, and if it does not, then the person never wakes up. He seems to think that this story is significant to Edgar's experiences, and Edgar is reminded of the poet boy who also wanted to tell him about the leip-bya. Clearly, the idea of dreaming is important to Edgar's journey. Is this Seing To and the poet boy's ways of saying that Edgar is destined to be in Burma, and that he has lost himself to it? Or is he like a leip-bya and only dreaming, and so needs to wake up and get back to reality?

Edgar's strange experiences with dreams and reality seem to emphasize the exotic, different new world he finds himself in. It is so alien to him that it does not seem quite real. At the same time, it is drawing him in and making him love it, and he feels himself becoming lost within, as if lost in a dream. It is as though he has entered another world or a different reality and now cannot find the way back. In fact, he does not even want to find the way home, as he now cannot bear the thought of leaving. His reality and his sense of what is normal has been shifted so dramatically that it is hard for him to know what is real anymore. On top of this is the sense that he is always searching for something to fill an emptiness inside him, that he is trying to connect with something that has been missing all his life. The story of the leip-bya perhaps shows that Edgar's spirit or soul has always belonged to Burma, and has always been searching for it. Now it has found its home. The leip-bya story also once again casts doubt on the reality of Edgar's experiences. Is Edgar really his own leip-bya, exploring Burma in the night as Edgar sleeps? Perhaps he is lost inside a dream, or perhaps the reality is so strange that it may as well be a dream.

At the end of the story Edgar falls into dreams completely. He sees a woman with a parasol in the distance, but it is unclear whether she is really there or only imagined. The parasol makes him think of both Katherine and Khin Myo, merging the things that he loves into one symbol that floats in the mirage before him. As he dies, everything else but the parasol and the sun disappear. This could be symbolic of him finally finding the place and the person he is meant to be. Edgar's story comes to an end with the same strange, disconnected feeling that the story began with.



Style

Point of View

The story is recounted from the first-person perspective of Edgar Drake. Edgar is the main character of the story, so it makes sense that readers see events through his eyes. Edgar is a very reasonable, kind and quiet man, and so he is easily sympathetic to the reader. This means that many of his reactions are similar to what the reader's own reactions might be, such as fascination concerning different cultures, shock at the little boy's death, sympathy for Carroll's intentions, and sadness at the way the Burmese are treated by the British. Because the reader can share Edgar's views, this makes it easier for the author to draw messages about imperialism and war from the events of the book.

Edgar's thoughts and feelings are explored as well as his actions, meaning that the reader can see what motivates him and how he really feels about things that are happening. This allows greater insight into his character, helping the reader to understand why he is so attached to Burma, and why he wishes he could stay. Even slightly strange decisions, such as running back to cut loose the piano when he is being chased by the British, make sense when Edgar's feelings and personality are taken into account. Other characters such as Carroll and Khin Myo are more ambiguous and mysterious. The reader can only see them through Edgar's eyes, which are biased. Edgar shows us their actions through a kind and sensitive viewpoint, which makes it hard to believe that they are spies or traitors. However, Edgar's naivety and innocence also make the reader question whether he has been manipulated and tricked all along. Seeing events through Edgar's eyes, however, does convince the reader of the power of music, and how important it can be in a person's life. This immediately makes it clear why a man like Carroll might be so desperate for a piano. Edgar's own curiosity and fascination with Burma also help the reader to understand why Carroll would want to engage with the local people and their land so much, sending off samples of plants, noting down Shan music and translating the *Odyssey* into Shan. The reader can therefore see that the accusations against Carroll are probably false. If the reader did not see events through Edgar's eyes, it might have been harder to understand Carroll's own extreme love for Burma.

Setting

The story is set mainly in Burma, with the first two chapters taking place in London and the following chapters detailing Edgar's journey to Burma. London is contrasted sharply to the East. London is dreary, cold and solid. It feels very real, and slightly depressing. The houses are all very close together, people are packed together, the streets are dirty, the weather miserable, and there are rigid class divides and a strict class hierarchy to stick to. There does not seem to be much color or joy. The further east Edgar goes, however, the more beautiful the land becomes. It becomes hotter, and Edgar begins to see exotic scenery and people. The east is also more mysterious, with hints of magic



and superstition that would seem silly in London but that seem very real here. In fact, the east is so beautiful and mysterious that it seems more like a dream, like Edgar has stepped into another reality. Burma itself is incredible to Edgar. It is full of exotic plants and animals, and everything about the local culture fascinates him. He hears different music, sees temples, explores bazaars and street markets, watches street theatre and sees bright colors everywhere. This could not be more different from London.

The second half of the book is set in Mae Lwin, the fort that Carroll is stationed at in the Shan States in northern Burma. It is portrayed as an idyllic and peaceful place, like a paradise in the middle of danger. All around are bandits, rebels, the British army, the threat of war, and dangerous creatures such as poisonous snakes. It is far more dangerous than London, and yet Edgar loves it here. Here he feels accepted and at home. He feels like he can be himself, free of class distinctions and London's worries. He feels a greater connection with the gentle, music-loving Shan people than he ever did with English people like himself. He soon falls in love with Mae Lwin and wishes he could stay. Carroll compares this feeling to the episode in the *Odyssey* where the hero's men eat the Lotus Fruit and wish to remain in the land of the Lotus Eaters forever. This is a sinister event in the *Odyssey*, and so it gives Mae Lwin a subtly sinister edge too. Mae Lwin is a magical place that will enchant the visitor and make him forget his home. It is bittersweet, as Edgar has found the place he feels he is meant to be, but he still feels torn because of the things he has left behind.

The story is set in Victorian times, in the year 1886. At this time, Burma was under British rule, as was India. Burma was a strategic place to hold, as it was situated between British India and French controlled Indo-China. The British were therefore anxious to hold on to it. This is explored in this story as Edgar witnesses the imperialistic attitude of the British towards the Burmese. The British think that they are superior and that they have the right to do whatever they like in Burma because they are more powerful. This disgusts Edgar, who believes the Burmese should rule themselves. This question of home rule was an issue that was discussed and debated in Victorian England. In Burma, the officers seem to respond in three ways. Some hate Burma and try to pretend that they are still in England, recreating as much of British society here as possible. Some do not care about the Burmese and maintain a superior attitude at all times. These may be hiding feelings of guilt, however, as Edgar notes when he sees all the bureaucracy surrounding the little boy's death in the tiger hunt. The final group of officers actually do care about the Burmese and are interested in their culture. They want to establish peace and friendship through respect and understanding. There are only two examples of this kind of British officer in the story: Nash-Burnham and Carroll.

Language and Meaning

The author uses language that reflects the fact that Edgar is an educated Victorian gentleman. He uses few colloquialisms and abbreviations, and many of his sentences sound quite formal. Edgar's letters are even more formal, in Victorian style, but still reflect Edgar's dreamy, slightly wistful mood and personality. Descriptions of Burma tend



to be very precise and factual rather than poetic, but discussions of music tend to be longer and more descriptive. This reflects Edgar's interests.

Despite the fact that Burma is a strange and exotic place, some of the areas Edgar visits are hardly described at all, and if they are, it tends to be to detail what people look like or to describe one specific thing. In this way, much of the landscape and scenery of Burma is a mystery. There are hills and mountains, temples and houses, jungles and plants, but the reader does not really know what any of these specifically look like. This emphasizes the dreamy feeling that dominates the whole novel. Everything feels a little vague, as if hanging in a mirage or a 'than-hlat'. This also reflects the end of the novel, in which everything seems to fade until Edgar's only lasting memory of Burma is of the sun, and a parasol.

The author will often use language to emphasize how Edgar is feeling. When Edgar is confused or half-asleep, the language will reflect this by also using confusing terms, rushed sentences and broken sentence structure. When Edgar is drifting somewhere between dream and reality the sentences tend to flow together, creating one long jumble in which it is impossible to pick out what is really happening and what is only imagined. When Edgar is delirious with malaria in Mae Lwin, the language reflects this again with confused sentence structure and rapid descriptions of what is happening. In this way, the author can put the reader in Edgar's place, conveying some of his confusion and dreaminess, or demonstrating the urgency of the situation.

Structure

The book is split into two parts. Part one deals with Edgar's journey from London to Burma, and then his journey through Burma to Mae Lwin. The book maintains a chronological approach with no flashbacks within the narrative of the story, which helps to stop the journey from becoming too confusing. Additional information, such as historical details and context, is given in the form of letters, helping to separate these factual sections from Edgar's more dream-like experiences. As Edgar travels he comes across many strange things and has different adventures, such as the boy at the train station in India, the tiger hunt in Rangoon, the dinner in Mandalay, and the pwès in Mandalay afterwards. These are episodic, carrying the reader from one place to the next while keeping the story alive and interesting. Sometimes extra 'mini-stories' are given, like the tale of the Man with One Story and the enlisted men's stories about Carroll. These appear random at first, but each one connects to Edgar's journey in some way, teaching him more about the power of music, or emphasizing the strange dreamy atmosphere that hangs over the whole story.

Part two of the book is set in Mae Lwin, when Edgar finally reaches his destination and can begin his job. He fixes the piano, then becomes more involved in Carroll's politics. Interspersed with this are quiet, peaceful scenes in which Edgar falls deeper in love with Mae Lwin and begins to develop feelings for Khin Myo. This half of the book is much slower paced than the first half, allowing Edgar to finally rest and relax, and to reflect on who he really is and what it is he really wants from life. The story takes on an almost



lazy feeling, lulling Edgar as well as the reader into a sense of comfort. However, this does not last, as Mae Lwin is attacked and Edgar is forced to flee. The final three chapters of the book suddenly increase in pace again as Edgar is caught up in something confusing and terrible, and is forced to run for his life.

The end of the story mimics the beginning, in which Edgar reflects on the feelings of Burma that he holds on to. As he dies, he feels as though he is slipping into a mirage. The final words echo the final words of the prologue chapter, bringing the story full circle and giving the impression that this was Edgar's fate all along.



Quotes

"Let's just say that there are men who lose themselves in the rhetoric of our imperial destiny, that we conquer not to gain land and wealth, but to spread culture and civilization. I will not deny them this, but it is not the duty of the War Office" (Chapter 1, p. 17).

"Moreover, he was uncomfortable with the popular portrayal of the Oriental as lazy and ineffectual, one only had to know the history of the piano, he would tell Katherine, to know this wasn't true" (Chapter 2, p. 32).

"Part of my decision certainly rests in my confidence in Dr. Carroll, and a sense of shared mission with him and his desire to bring the music I find beautiful to places where others have only thought of bringing guns" (Chapter 3, p. 50).

"Once, in London, he tuned the Erard of a wealthy Indian banker, the son of a Maharaja, who showed him a shrine to an elephant with many arms, which he kept on a shelf above the piano. He listens to the songs, the man had said, and Edgar liked this religion, where gods enjoyed music, and a piano could be used to pray" (Chapter 5, p. 73).

"He did not tell Dalton of the image that still stayed with him, that it felt wrong to drink sherry over war gossip while he thought of the girl and her child." - Edgar remembering the beggar at the temple" (Chapter 6, p. 101).

"It has changed everything, he thinks, This is not part of my plan, my contract, my commission" (Chapter 7, p. 113).

"Or perhaps, he wrote a day later after signing his seventh statement, this is all merely a salve, a tried and effective method of dealing with such terror, to absolve something deeper" (Chapter 8, p. 116).

"...although the Commissioner proclaimed there was peace, for the soldiers there was only maintaining peace, which was very different, and with this came fear and the need for something to keep the fear away" (Chapter 8, p. 125).

"Perhaps more than any lonely soldier he needed to believe in the Surgeon-Major he had never met" (Chapter 8, p. 125).

"He was right, I am back in London, thought Edgar, They have even imported the Atmosphere" (Chapter 9, p. 141).

"But I have come to think that 'bringing music and culture here' is more subtle - there are art and music here already - their own art, their own music. This is not to say that we should not bring such things to Burma; perhaps only that it should be done with more humility" (Chapter 11, p. 164).



"Indeed, if we are to make these people our subjects, must we not present the best of European civilization? No one was ever harmed by Bach; songs are not like armies" (Chapter 11, p. 164).

"I have allowed dreams to melt into my realities, now realities threaten to melt to dreams, to disappear" (Chapter 11, p. 164).

"Although it is good that everyone can see that an English face can do more than look down a rifle" (Chapter 13, p. 214).

"He liked the idea that he could take the wall of the fort, a product of war, and transform it into the mechanics of sound" (Chapter 14, p. 226).

"But many people in England strongly believe that the colonies should have their own governments. In some ways I am inclined to agree. We have done some terrible things" (Chapter 15, p. 250).

"I think perhaps it is the error of the ruling to think that you can change the ruled" (Chapter 15, p. 250).

"This expects too much of a man whose life is defined by creating order so that others may make beauty. It is expecting too much of one who makes rules to ask that he break them" (Chapter 16, p. 268).

"To me this means beauty is found in order, in rules" (Chapter 17, p. 278).

"But if a Shan does not know the same songs, then just as I have been confused by their melodies, so might the Prince be confused by ours. So I chose something mathematical, for this is universal, all can appreciate complexity, the trance found in patterns of sound" (Chapter 17, p. 278).

"What this change means I don't know, just as I don't know if I am happier or sadder than I have ever been. At times I wonder if the reason I have lost track of time is that I will know when to return, not by a date, but when an emptiness is filled" (Chapter 18, p. 284).

"A dream within a dream, he told himself, as his eyelids fell slowly, For perhaps I have been dreaming since Aden" (Chapter 19, p. 299).



Topics for Discussion

What does this novel have to say about the power of music? What does music mean to different people? How does music help to bridge gaps or solve problems in this story? What do the characters in this story think about music?

Discuss the theme of war and imperialism in this story. What is imperialism and how is it a bad thing? What problems do the British create in Burma? Why have they not achieved peace yet?

What is the symbolism behind Edgar repairing the piano with bamboo from the fort walls? What message could be drawn from this?

Who are the Lotus Eaters and why are they significant to Edgar and Carroll's experiences in Burma? Who is Gautama and why is his story significant? What do these two different stories have to say about sacrifice, home and family?

Discuss the theme of dreams and reality in this story. Why does the story have such a dream-like atmosphere? Why does Edgar experience so much confusion about his own actions and dreams? What is the significance of the leip-bya story?

Discuss the idea of 'One Story' in this novel. Does everyone have 'one story' that defines their lives? How does this connect to the idea of every piano having 'one song' inside it? What do you think Edgar's 'one story' is?

Do you like the character of Edgar? How has the author made him a sympathetic character? Is there anything that you think he does wrong, or anything that you particularly admire about him?

Why do you think Edgar's lasting image of Burma was a parasol? What might the parasol represent? How does it connect both Katherine and Khin Myo?

Do you think Carroll is actually a traitor? Explain your reasons with examples from the text.

Edgar meets a variety of different kinds of officer on his journey to Mae Lwin. Discuss their different attitudes and how they are presented in the story. Whose attitude is most effective and why? Whose is most damaging and why?