

The White Woman on the Green Bicycle Study Guide

**The White Woman on the Green Bicycle by Monique
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Plot Summary

Sabine and George Harwood arrive in Trinidad in 1956. They are a young couple and have yet to begin a family. They own a house in England, a gift from George's parents, but George is looking to escalate his career and knows he can do that in Trinidad. Most young couples who try to live in Trinidad don't manage to stay for the term of their initial contract and Sabine, from the beginning, is determined to remain for the full three years of George's contract. She doesn't however, plan to remain on the island forever and fears from the beginning that George is deeply in love with Trinidad. She is correct and George becomes determined to remain.

George finds that he is "someone" in Trinidad and says that he would be nothing more than a lowly clerk if he were to return to England. He uses that as the basis for remaining though he also loves the life he builds for himself outside work. He buys land without Sabine's knowledge, builds a house without her approval, and settles in to stay. Sabine, meanwhile, tries to find the courage to leave George but finds herself financially and emotionally dependent on him to that point that she never manages to go.

During the early days in Trinidad, Sabine sets out to make the best of her life. She often rides her green bicycle around town as a means of getting to know the area and combating her boredom. She doesn't realize until much later that people are talking about her on that bicycle. When she finally learns that, she feels self-conscious and eventually stops riding altogether. She sees that as a major loss of freedom and hates Trinidad even more for it.

Racial tensions in Trinidad seem near the surface from the time of Sabine's arrival. She admits to being afraid of many of the blacks, especially of black men. One day she finds herself in the middle of a rally with Eric Williams as the speaker. Williams' words touch Sabine and she genuinely hopes that he will create change for the poorest people of the island. Sabine begins writing letters to Williams in which she pours out her innermost feelings and fears. She treats the letters as something of a diary though she focuses a great deal of her thoughts toward Eric Williams and his political career. Years pass and George finds the letters one day. He sees them as a betrayal and is bitter toward Sabine for writing all those thoughts and feelings down. Ironically, George doesn't see his own affairs as a betrayal.

Sabine and George have two children. Sabine sends her son to boarding school in England in an effort to distance him from the island culture. Sabine and Sebastian are never again as close as Sabine hoped, making her decide to keep her daughter in school locally. Pascale becomes immersed in the culture, adopts the attitudes and speech, and marries locally.

George and Sabine remain in Trinidad for the rest of George's life. They spend fifty years and much of that time is a struggle to keep their marriage alive and for Sabine to find her way. In 2006, George takes a stand against the corrupt police department, hiring a lawyer and determined to make a difference. George dies before the process



comes to fruition. Sabine, frustrated with the corruption, goes to the police station and shoots the department head. The action is the final scene in the chronological events of the book and her fate is not revealed.



Chapters 1 - 2

Summary

The first chapter, "Hurricane" opens with a scene in which a young man named Talbot is being beaten by police. He is handcuffed and taken to the top of the hill in the back seat of a police car. When he argues, he's warned to stop talking or the police might return for Talbot's "sexy younger sister." It isn't the first time the police have brutalized those who get in their way. One of the police officers is named Johnny. Johnny stole Talbot's phone a week earlier and Talbot had sent word that he wanted his phone back. This is the reason for the beating. Other officers join in, helping Johnny beat Talbot. They continue even when Talbot is no longer able to stand. They leave him there, on the hill, with one officer stating that Talbot looks like he's already dead.

The section titled, "Trinidad, 2006," begins next. In "The Blimp," Sabine Harwood, the book's main character, is going about her business at home with her maid, Jennifer. Jennifer has been with Sabine for many years and is comfortable, pretty much doing what chores she wants, whenever she wants to do them. Everyday at four, Sabine takes a tea tray to the back porch where she and her husband, George, share the hot beverage. Jennifer believes the practice is "crazy."

The conversation between George and Sabine is stilted. George talks about the national football team, the Soca Warriors. Sabine can't keep her opinion to herself and berates the obsession with football. George leaves as soon as he finishes his tea so that he doesn't have to deal with Sabine.

They live in Trinidad, in the Port of Spain, in a village named Winderflet. When George leaves home, he sees the blimp. It is apparently used by the government in an effort to fight crime but everyone hates it and makes fun of it. George sees the blimp as he drives to the office of the newspaper, the Trinidad Guardian, where he occasionally works as a reporter. George focuses on features rather than hard news and has interviewed many people in Trinidad. At the office, he gets assignments for the coming days. He asks the other reporters about their current stories, most about police corruption.

Back at home, Sabine is inside with the air conditioner cooling her bedroom. Her attitude has changed in her years in Trinidad. She avoids news about politics and events, and tries not to think about the past. But her thoughts return to the letters she wrote to Trinidad's first Prime Minister, Eric Williams. Then she drifts off to sleep. When George arrives home, he is thinking about his marriage. He carries on a conversation with the mango tree in his yard. He doesn't know when their relationship changed and says it might be best to let Sabine go, but knows he would miss her. Inside, he is again amazed at how much she has changed in physical appearance. She also sometimes takes on the island dialect. She grows grouchy as he watches the news. In bed, he reaches out to touch her though he never knows what her reaction will be.



Chapter Two, "Fly Away," opens with Jennifer announcing that her son, Talbot, has been brutally beaten. He is at home. George and Sabine rush to take Talbot to the hospital. George questions Talbot who insists that no one saw the attack and that he doesn't want to file a complaint, knowing there will be more trouble for his family. Sabine takes photos that George believes might be used as evidence, then they carefully transport him to a private medical center. When they visit him later, the talk turns to the corruption. Jennifer says she doesn't understand why Sabine never left Trinidad. She has information about Sabine's early days in the country because Jennifer's Aunt Venus was Sabine's first maid. Jennifer asks if Sabine remained in Trinidad because of her love for George. Sabine says she honestly can't remember why she stayed.

Analysis

There's an interesting statement at the end of the first chapter, after the police brutally beat Talbot. The chapter ends with the statement, "They thought no one saw what happened." Later, George Harwood hires an attorney for Talbot, planning to bring a complaint against the police. However, no one ever comes forward claiming to have seen the beating. There's really no explanation for this statement except that the story ends abruptly and a witness might later come forward.

There is a humorous scene in which an iguana falls out of a tree every afternoon, right about the same time, apparently after falling asleep in the sun. The dogs go crazy and Sabine is irritated at the repetition. One day, Sabine tells Jennifer to have Talbot kill the lizard to put a stop to the daily event. Jennifer teases Sabine, saying she should cook the lizard. About the time the lizard falls out of the tree, the women put on the tea pot for their afternoon break. The scene goes something like this: The lizard falls from the tree, the dogs go crazy, Sabine puts on the tea pot.

Jennifer and Sabine have apparently come to a point in their relationship where they are more like friends than employer and servant. It's noted that Jennifer pretty much runs the house. In the first scene in the book with the two women, Sabine is complaining of the heat and fanning herself with her dress. The women talk about gaining weight and at one point Jennifer says she doesn't want to see Sabine's underwear.

Sabine's attitude about the heat is seen in the first scene in which she appears. She is overly hot and hates it. By now, she has been in Trinidad for half a century. If she was ever going to become acclimated, she would have done so long ago. The weather is just one of the many things Sabine hates about Trinidad. Her attitude about the country is an important theme in the book and is seen clearly in her early years on the island.

From the opening scenes, it's obvious that the marriage between Sabine and George has become rocky. George is uneasy with Sabine and doesn't really understand her. Sabine thinks about George and that it's been a long time since he even looked at her with physical longing. They are old by now, having been on the island for fifty years, but George is still interested in other women. One day George encounters a man he knows as La Pompey. George says Pompey is "simple" but they always talk. On this day,



Pompey tells George that Sabine is “plenty good woman” and urges George to “treat she sweet.”

Jennifer lives in a very poor part of town. When Sabine and George learn that Talbot has been brutally beaten and is still at home, they go to pick him up and take him to the hospital. When they arrive, Jennifer's nephews are across the street and make it clear that the Harwoods are not welcome in the neighborhood. This attitude is seen in the early days of Sabine's time in Trinidad and doesn't change over the fifty years of her life there.

Sabine is a champion of those she sees as powerless. When she arrives in Trinidad, she is captivated by the idea that Eric Williams might be able to change things for the poor people. In 2006, she wants to do something to help Talbot. She threatens to shoot down the blimp that is supposed to be a tool in the battle against crime though it's only used by a corrupt police force. She also threatens to shoot the head of the corrupt police department. When she and George go to the newspaper office, she is very vocal in her views about the corruption of the current government.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the relationship between Sabine and George based on what you know up to this point.

Discussion Question 2

What is the reaction of Sabine and George after Talbot is beaten? What does this suggest to readers?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the relationship between Sabine and Jennifer. Is their relationship what you would believe is typical of an employer and servant? What does their relationship tell you about each character?

Vocabulary

berserk, dominated, voluminous, prudish, ruinous, garish, farcical, conglomerate, dolorous, disdain, chattel, erudite



Chapters 3 - 4

Summary

Chapter Three, "The Affair," begins with George trying to find his file on a man he plans to interview. When he doesn't find the file on his desk, he goes searching in a storage space located in the ceiling above the office. The space is filled with old papers, magazines, and Sabine's old typewriter. George sees a stack of shoe boxes with the word "Eric Williams" written on the side. He looks closer and finds that each has a date on the lid. There are twenty-six boxes. The earliest is dated 1956, which is the year George and Sabine arrive in Trinidad. George empties the box and finds that it contains news articles about Eric Williams, who was Trinidad's first Prime Minister. The boxes are all similar up to the 1962 box.

George opens it to find it is filled with letters. He knows that it's Sabine's handwriting and he wonders if Williams ever wrote back. He spends the entire night reading the letters. He knows that it wasn't "as straightforward as a love affair" but she writes things that are deeply personal. She writes that she is "sick of George" and that she is "sick from loving him." She writes about her hatred of the fence and gates that surround their home. George continues to read the pleas, tirades, and personal thoughts about her life and her marriage, including George's infidelities. George is still in the office, surrounded by the letters, when Sabine enters the following morning. Sabine says the letters were private and that George shouldn't have read them. George asks why she wrote them. Sabine says it helped her "understand this stupid country." George apologizes for the affairs, saying none of the women meant anything to him. Sabine cuts him off.

George offers to sell the house, give Sabine half of their assets, and allow her to move to England to be near their son. Sabine responds that "It's too late." George continues to ask why Sabine wrote the letters and Sabine admits that she met Williams a couple of times, meetings that George knew nothing about. George's next comment indicates his concern that Sabine had an affair with Williams, but she says that isn't the case.

George leaves the house and drives around. He knows that he has always loved Trinidad more than England and that Sabine has never loved Trinidad. He also feels that he should, for once, do something right now that will make Sabine happy. Back at the house, Jennifer finds Sabine crying amid the boxes of letters. Jennifer has seen Sabine cry many times and says Sabine should leave Trinidad. Sabine says she has nowhere else to go.

George heads back to the village and encounters a young boy named Joshua Pierre. He is known as Clock, because his arm is deformed and it swings when he walks. George and Clock are friends and George gives Clock a ride.



Back home, George has a bath and then Sabine gives him a haircut. They talk briefly and George wishes he could regain Sabine's respect, or his own respect for himself. He leaves in his pickup, picks up a prostitute, but is unable to perform.

Chapter Four, "Nice Try," opens with Pascale's arrival. She is the daughter of George and Sabine, and lives nearby with her native Trinidadian husband and her children. Zack and Tabitha. Sabine watches and notes that George and Pascale have a close relationship. Sabine announces that her son, Sebastian, will be arriving soon for a two-week stay. It's obvious Pascale isn't that close to Sebastian. She refers to him as a snob. After Pascale leaves, George goes for a walk on a strip of beach he owns.

George continues to think about the letters and decides to go to the Winderflet Police Station. He finds Bobby Comacho, head of the department, and confronts him about Talbot's beating. Bobby shoves George against the wall and George urinates on himself. Bobby orders him out of the station. In his truck, George takes more aspirin for the headache that has been bothering him.

Analysis

The "green woman" is referred to in Chapter Two. She is sometimes called 'the hill' or 'mountain' as well. This refers to a large hill near the home of George and Sabine. Sabine believes it looks like a woman, lounging on her side, and this "woman" is a symbol of George's love for Trinidad as well as Sabine's hatred. The fact that George has a number of physical affairs furthers this symbol. Sabine feels she has always competed with George's love for Trinidad in the same way she has to compete with the other women in his life.

As George is reading Sabine's letters to Eric Williams, he recalls "his first wife," and "the wife he lost." This is an important look into George's character because only this section of the book goes into George's perspective. From these words, the reader sees that George believes he lost Sabine during this time period. It's later revealed that Sabine feels she lost George, mainly because of his love for Trinidad. George and Sabine are a tragic example of a love that became lost because of different ideas and goals, and the inability of either to give in to completely support the other.

George's reaction to Sabine's letters to Williams is that of confusion, hurt, and anger. He doesn't at all understand. It's later revealed how Sabine becomes interested in Williams and why she writes the letters. In a way, this is something of a diary. The situation begs the question of whether George would have been this angry if he had found a diary with the same words. It seems that he is angrier over the fact that Sabine was interested in Williams than the fact that she was disappointed in George. As he is thinking about the letters the day after finding them, he admits that he is angry because Williams reached Sabine in a way that George was never able to do.

Sabine at one point seems to compare George's affairs to Williams' failing as a politician. The two are similar in how they affect Sabine and in how they hurt her.



Failures become important to the story as everyone deals with the fallout of various failings.

George says he knows he cheated on Sabine from the moment of his arrival in Trinidad. He has had a series of physical affairs but it seems that he does realize that his love of Trinidad came between him and Sabine, hurting their marriage. In 2006, when this part of the story is taking place, George is 75 years old. There is so much wrong between George and Sabine that it probably can no longer be addressed. An example of this is seen when George offers to sell their assets and allow Sabine to return to England. George doesn't say that they would return to England as a couple, indicating that he has no intention of leaving Trinidad, even as a way of making Sabine happy this late in life. Both George and Sabine carry on conversations with the "green woman" and with the island in general. These are two-way conversations and the content of these talks indicate the relationships of each character to the island.

George's affairs are apparently well known in Trinidad. When he goes to confront the police about Talbot's beating, Bobby Comacho makes crude comments about George and the women he has been seen with. While it's later revealed that George plies his charms on women of his social standing and from his group of friends, it's also clear that he is willing to turn to prostitutes.

Discussion Question 1

Who is the "green woman?" What is Sabine's attitude toward this "woman?"

Discussion Question 2

What is George's reaction to the discovery of Sabine's letters to Eric Williams? Is his reaction justified?

Discussion Question 3

George goes to the police station partly as a means of making Sabine proud of him. What does this indicate about Sabine's character?

Vocabulary

precarious, compendium, nonchalant, evoking, quailed, riotous, prudish, lambasted, gargantuan, copiously



Chapters 5 - 6

Summary

Chapter Five is titled "Sebastian." George and Sabine meet their son at the airport. George is resolved not to argue with Sebastian during this visit. Sabine fawns over Sebastian from the moment of his arrival. George and Sebastian are awkward and he blames Sabine for the tension. In the car, Sebastian struggles for something to talk about with his father. George continues to think about the letters, reciting passages in his head. Their friend Irit arrives, and George is pleased that she can help them get through the evening.

The following day, Sabine and Sebastian go into town together. There are youngsters rallying in the streets, calling for an end to the crime in Trinidad. Sabine goes to the Republic Bank of Trinidad to conduct some business. She and the other white customers are kept waiting a long time. Sabine knows it's a way the natives have to make white customers pay "for the sins of all the white people who ever lived in the Caribbean."

George is assigned to do a story on a calypso singer called "Sparrow." The singer had once been a supporter of Williams' political party, the PNM, but later became an outspoken critic.

When Sabine and Sebastian get home, La Pompey is riding Sabine's green bicycle. He is a household servant who takes care of outside chores. George asked that he clean up the bike. Pompey urges Sabine to ride it but she refuses, insisting that she wants to give it away. That evening, Pascale and her family arrives for a family dinner. Sabine is in a "black mood" since she saw the bicycle. Pascale's husband, Jacques, is short and Sabine makes fun of him aloud. Pascale is furious and demands an apology. Sabine refuses, saying she hates "that midget." When Pascale begins to leave, Sabine issues a halfhearted apology but they leave anyway. Sebastian later tells Sabine she was wrong.

Chapter Six is "The Mighty Sparrow's Advice." George goes to Jennifer's house to check up on Talbot. He says he wants to pay for a lawyer to bring the men who beat Talbot to justice. He warns that it will be difficult and that Talbot might even have to leave the country for awhile. George says he'll pay for everything if Talbot will testify. Talbot agrees and George pledges to protect him.

George then goes to the home of Slinger Francisco, known as the Mighty Sparrow to conduct the interview. George says Sparrow is known as the "Father of the Nation," just as Eric Williams was known by that same title. Sparrow asks if George ever met Williams. George says that he did, then adds that Sabine has written to Williams and that she "developed feelings" for Williams. Sparrow says that many people were enamored with Williams' early politics, and that he let them all down. Sparrow urges George to win Sabine's heart again, and suggests he do that with music. George turns



the talk to the blimp, and Sparrow reveals that he's written a calypso about it. It's titled "Shoot Dong de Blimp," meaning "Shoot Down the Blimp," and he sings it for George.

As he returns home, George gives Clock a ride. Clock presents George with a gift. It's a statue of the Virgin Mary, designed to attach to the dash of George's pickup. George is uncomfortable, remembering how many women he'd had sex with in the truck. Clock begins to sing and George is moved. Back at home, Sebastian urges George to be a better husband. Sabine overhears some of the argument and makes them stop. George thinks about Sparrow's advice that he should try to win Sabine's affections.

Analysis

It's obvious that George and Sebastian don't get along at all. There are several reasons for their issues. Sabine doesn't hide her hatred of Trinidad and Sebastian probably knows that. It also seems possible that he recognizes George's indifference toward Sabine. At one point, George asks why Sebastian doesn't bring a girl with him to visit. Sebastian says he won't repeat that mistake because George had "pawed" a girl he brought once. George responds that the girl had started the situation but Sebastian doesn't believe it. From George's perspective, Sebastian is judgmental. It seems that George has become so accustomed to having his own way that he doesn't believe anyone should hold him responsible for his misdeeds.

Sabine is unhappy and it seems that she has been for most of her life. Sabine should have been pleased when there is a family dinner with both her children and her grandchildren. However, she almost immediately makes fun of Jacques, Pascale's husband. She does it because she hates that Pascale has come to talk like the people of the island, loves living there, and embraces the culture. But Sabine, rather than making a point about what she wished for Pascale, breaks up the family gathering. It's not clear whether Sabine might have done something different if she had known it would be the final time her entire family would gather before George's death, but it seems unlikely, based on the fact that she is determined to make her unhappiness known.

Despite their problems, there is no doubt that George and Sabine are still in love. She can't imagine living without him and is devastated when she discovers he has a tumor. One morning, George wakes and watches Sabine as she sleeps. He notes that she continues to affect him, as she had for their entire marriage, and that he has never understood it. They know each other from more than fifty years of marriage. Even though they have grown apart, there is a connection that might be described as love.

George has heard the rumors that the young man known as Clock is the biological son of the Mighty Sparrow. When George is interviewing Sparrow, he looks for a resemblance. Clock sings in the church choir, which George sees as a clue that he is the son of the famous singer. George seems to want to ask directly and Sparrow picks up on the question. Sparrow says he has been accused of being the father to many children, and knows about this rumor. George later wonders if Clock might be the illegitimate son of Eric Williams. It's not clear why this matters to George.



When Sebastian and George are arguing about George's treatment of Sabine, Sebastian notes that women of his generation would not tolerate George. George responds that he has heard that marriage is a dying institution, and blames it on the attitudes of women. Sebastian doesn't seem to believe that his mother has been wrong, but points out that she only remained by George's side because she loves George more than she hates Trinidad. It might be assumed that Sabine also loves George more than she hates his affairs. The side of this that is not specifically stated is that their love is much different than it might have been if George had been more willing to work at their marriage.

Discussion Question 1

Pascale accuses her mother of being indifferent to the feelings of others. Do you believe this is true? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you believe George cares about the identity of Clock's father?

Discussion Question 3

What does Sebastian say is the difference between Sabine and women of Sebastian's generation?

Vocabulary

antagonistic, impeccable, curt, pretentious, prose, amassed, redress, emaciated, persona, charismatic



Chapters 7 - 8

Summary

Chapter Seven is “Brian Lara and His Strange Ideas.” Sabine and Sebastian attend services at Our Lady of Lourdes church on Easter. Sebastian says he never attends church, except here. He points out that he and Pascale were baptized here, Pascale was married here, and that Sebastian plans to be married and have his funeral at this church. As the service begins, Sabine notices Clock. She'd been surprised to learn that George and this young boy knew each other.

George's interview with Sparrow is prominently printed in the newspaper. His next assignment is a football star, Brian Lara. Their conversation turns immediately to the blimp. Lara says members of the government spend their days in the blimp and that he has been invited in. Lara says the blimp is really keeping an eye on the oil installations. They agree that it might be a product of the Americans, keeping an eye on the political leaders that might cause problems. Lara says the blimp is supposed to be helping crime in the poor areas, but says it is just a reminder of the crime. Lara points his finger at the blimp and pretends to shoot it.

George writes up the interview and it's printed. Sabine sees that something is wrong with George and she worries.

Chapter Eight, “Soca Warriors,” opens with George visiting a friend and attorney, Gabriel Chowdry. Gabriel says a legal battle against the police will be difficult but George insists they move forward. George says his main reason is to impress Sabine by doing the right thing. George says he's fortunate that Sabine didn't leave him, and Gabriel agrees to file the lawsuit. George relates this to Talbot and asks if he's certain there were no witnesses. Talbot says anyone who heard or saw anything wouldn't dare come forward.

George and Clock attend a football game of the Soca Warriors. George has to explain the game to Clock. The blimp hovers over the stadium. It's very hot and George faints as they are leaving. He recovers and insists that he's capable of driving home. Someone calls Pascale and she notifies Sabine. George refuses to go to the doctor.

Jennifer begins avoiding George and he finally confronts her. She hands him a bag with a handgun inside. She says that she found it under Talbot's bed and that it had been there a long time. George can't imagine where he will hide the gun but then comes up with an idea and agrees to keep it.

Analysis

There is a situation in the church in which a “badjohn” enters. The term is the Trinidadian word for thug. The man stares at the collection plate and it seems he is



considering trying to steal it, despite the number of witnesses. He's faced down by the congregation, including an old woman. The scene has an impact on Sabine and makes her wonder about herself and her life. She wonders when she became so jaded and compares herself to this badjohn, saying he was as confused as she had been during her early days in Trinidad.

The blimp continues to be a minor theme throughout the first section of the book. The year is 2006. The people of Trinidad have been in racial and political upheaval for decades. Brian Lara and George discuss the blimp and their thoughts about its true purpose. Lara says that having the blimp stare down on the poor neighborhoods as a means of combating crime is a bad idea. He says it sends the wrong message to those people. There are some who believe the blimp is funded by the United States to keep an eye on the political situation, important because of Trinidad's oil production. There are other ideas, mainly focusing on political espionage and corruption. The blimp's true purpose is never revealed.

Pascale comes to visit George after his collapse at the football game. She says she needs his advice and asks him how to hold a marriage together. Pascale was apparently in love with someone before Jacques but that relationship ended. It's not clear what happened or why. It's also not clear whether Pascale is having trouble in her marriage to Jacques or if she's merely struggling with her emotions regarding this previous love. In answer to her question, George says that a person only has room in their heart for one or two true loves in a lifetime. His comments prompt Pascale to say that "love happens" to a person. George agrees and Pascale seems to accept this.

By the time of George's collapse at the game, he has been having headaches regularly and it's evident to the reader that something is seriously wrong. However, George refuses to go see Dr. Sebastian Baker, their family physician. He's jealous of Dr. Baker and refers to him as a "lady's man." He is also critical of the fact that Baker has kept Sabine supplied with pills. The truth of that is revealed much later when Sabine pleads with Dr. Baker for something to help with her depression.

The bicycle becomes an issue again after George tells Pompey to clean it up. George is trying to please Sabine but doesn't realize that the bicycle merely represents many of the things Sabine has lost in her lifetime. Pompey makes it road worthy and tries to get Sabine to ride it, though she refuses. In truth, Sabine is in her mid-seventies and may not be able to ride. Actually, the bicycle represents a time when she was free to do things she wanted and when she was brave enough to do those things. She hates that she has changed and longs for that earlier, simpler time in her life. The bicycle is soon shoved against a wall again, and ignored. When Jennifer asks George to take the gun, he believes he can put it in the basket of the bicycle and that it will be safe there.

Discussion Question 1

What is Sabine's attitude about the bicycle at this point in the story?



Discussion Question 2

Describe Pascale's relationship with George. Compare that to Sebastian's relationship to George.

Discussion Question 3

Describe the different characters' attitudes about the blimp.

Vocabulary

penitence, knack, sinewy, loitered, capricious, languid, gumption, reverberating, cacophony, ibis



Chapters 9 - 10

Summary

Chapter Nine, "Manning," opens with an invitation for George to interview Trinidad's Prime Minister, Patrick Augustus Mervyn Manning. George agrees but Sabine is angry, saying he is not healthy enough for the assignment. George knows that Manning believes George will do a light article because George usually writes only features as opposed to hard news. George is determined to ask the hard questions. From the beginning, he doesn't feel well and struggles to remain coherent. George has trouble but pulls out a quote from Manning's early years. He says that Trinidad needs good government and that Manning isn't supplying it. George calls Manning a dictator. Manning responds that George is like many who arrive in Trinidad to take what the country has to offer without giving anything back. He points out the rum smell on George's breath and says George would never have amounted to anything in England, but is a "hotshot" in Trinidad. As George leaves, his headache becomes more pronounced and he faints.

Pascale and Sabine are in the hospital, waiting for results of George's tests. There is a large tumor. The surgeon says the tumor has been present for years and urges them to make a decision about treatment quickly. Back at home, Sabine realizes that George doesn't want to talk about the tumor. She assures Pascale that she'll talk to him about it later and Pascale leaves.

Chapter Ten is "Departure." George and Sabine are home when George heads out for a swim in their pool. The doctors have said George can swim but that he shouldn't die. George has mentioned that they might take a holiday after his recovery. Sabine hears George dive in, then silence, and she knows something is wrong. She rushes outside where she sees George's body at the bottom of the pool. She screams for help and jumps in but can't bring his body up. Neighbors arrive and pull the body from the pool. Sabine sits beside the pool, rocking George's body and crying. Dr. Baker arrives and pronounces George dead. Pascale arrives and she and Sabine fall together, crying.

Sebastian returns home and George's funeral is held at Our Lady of Lourdes church. Clock is among those singing.

The following morning, Jennifer is crying and finally admits that the police have threatened Talbot. Sabine learns for the first time that George had hired a lawyer to help Talbot. Now that George is gone, the police are again threatening Talbot. Jennifer believes that Talbot is in danger without George's protection.

Sabine's eyes are drawn to the bicycle and she can see that the items in the basket have been disturbed. She examines closer and finds the gun in the bag. Sabine tells Jennifer she's going to the police station. Jennifer pleads with her but Sabine leaves on the bicycle. She enters the police station and confronts Bobby Comacho. She pulls the



gun from the paper bag and fires three shots into his chest. She walks outside and sees that the blimp is staring straight down at her.

Analysis

Manning is very unpopular with the people and makes the announcement that he's going to postpone the upcoming elections, probably to give his party more time to gain some control over the government. Manning chooses to have George conduct his interview because he believes George will be nice, asking only the easy questions and writing a positive article. George and Manning actually end up in a name-calling contest, each berating the other. George talks about Manning's political failures and Manning talks about George's willingness to take advantage of Trinidad. In some ways, Manning is very correct about George though George has gone so far as to renounce his English citizenship in order to own land in Trinidad.

As Sabine is forced to confront the idea that George might die from the tumor, she is also forced to think about her love for him. She wonders if it's too late for them to get past the secrets of their past and change their relationship. It actually is too late because George's days are more numbered than Sabine realizes, but even if that hadn't been the case, it seems impossible that their relationship could significantly change after 50 years together.

George and Sabine wake one morning to an earthquake. They are still in bed and remain there through the tremor. After it's over, George holds Sabine, telling her that he loves her and assuring her that "everything would be all right." Sabine asks George to reassure her that he isn't dying and he does. This might seem like a new beginning for them but it isn't. In the very next thought, Sabine realizes that George loves Trinidad more than he loves Sabine, and that his affection will never change.

One day, Sabine goes into town with George. It is a rarity and they are driving his truck. When George stops and picks up Clock, Sabine is surprised. She is even more so when the two start talking like old friends. At that point, Sabine realizes there is more about George's life that she doesn't know. It seems that she might have distanced herself in order to keep from facing his many affairs, but she has also missed out on the everyday aspects of his life. The problems in their marriage seem insurmountable but it's obvious that George and Sabine love each other, even through their inability to show it.

When Jennifer reveals that George had hired a lawyer for Talbot, Sabine is surprised. She doesn't know anything about it until after George's death. When she and Jennifer continue talking about it, Sabine learns that Jennifer believes she knows George's motivation. Jennifer says George was doing it because he knew Sabine would want him to do it. Ironically, Sabine and George might have found common ground for this crusade against the corrupt police department, but George keeps his actions a secret.

The scene in the police station is described in detail. Sabine knows that Bobby Comacho is charged with providing protection for the people of Trinidad but that he, like



many others, is corrupt and self-serving. She hates the situation and the corruption. The reader who wants to know what happens to Sabine after she shoots Bobby will be disappointed. This is the chronological ending of the book and her fate is not revealed.

Discussion Question 1

What do you believe might have happened to Sabine after the final scene in the 2006 section of the book? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Describe Sabine's reaction to George's tumor and then his death. Considering their relationship, is this the reaction you expected?

Discussion Question 3

Describe George's interview with Manning. What does Manning expect and why does George begin asking the difficult questions?

Vocabulary

bulbous, vestibule, astringent, macabre, officious, evoked, flamboyant, vulgar, tenacity, baleful



Chapters 11 - 12

Summary

The second section is titled "Trinidad, 1956." Chapter Eleven, "Arrival," details the day Sabine and George arrive in Trinidad. They are aboard the "banana boat, the Cavina," and George has already researched the island to the point that he can point out local landmarks. George will be working for Forbes-Mason as a clerk and Sabine accepts the move as a means of supporting her husband. There are other passengers on the ship, also arriving for the first time in Trinidad. There are many rumors about the country and most are anxious. George is the only one of the arriving passengers who seems completely unconcerned. They have a couple of suitcases, a few "favorite bits," and Sabine's green Raleigh bicycle. When the crew members wheel the bicycle off the ship, people stare and comment.

George and Sabine arrive at the hotel where they'll be staying while the company completes their house. Sabine and George are invited to meet George's bosses and their families. Many other wives have demanded to return him and Sabine becomes determined to remain for George's full contract, mainly because so many people expect her to leave. They learn that the house they were promised hasn't even been started. They are provided a small flat to live in. Sabine insists that it be cleaned and repainted, and the company meets that demand. Sabine tries to stay busy but there is little housework to take up her time. She tries to shop for food but finds she is unfamiliar with many of the items available.

Chapter Twelve, "The Hiding Club," opens with Sabine waiting daily for the postman. She meets a neighbor named Helena Chowdry and tries to strike up a conversation, but Helena isn't interested. She meets another named Irit, "a Hungarian Jewess," who despairs that George doesn't seem to make time to help Sabine find activities to fill her time.

Sabine spends a great deal of time on her bicycle to avoid the boredom. She begins to mix with the other wives who have husbands working in Trinidad. They often meet at the Country Club near Sabine's apartment. Sabine also learns about some local attitudes. She wants to be introduced to a young woman named Cristobel, who is the wife of Dr. Sebastian Baker. Another of the wives says that Cristobel, as a permanent resident, is unfriendly to those living on the island temporarily.

George becomes more at home and Sabine acknowledges that he's "dashing" as he rides his scooter around town. Sabine learns that most of the wives have a maid who does their cleaning and cooking. A young native woman named Venus arrives at Sabine's door, referred by Irit's maid. Venus takes over most of the duties and creates tasty meals.



During their first conversation, Sabine learns that Venus already knows Sabine by reputation. She says that “everybody” knows Sabine because Sabine rides the bicycle. Venus begins working for Sabine and they talk a great deal about food and the house. Venus talks only occasionally about her own life and family. One day she reveals that she has to bathe by pouring buckets of water over her head outside. She says Granny Seraphina is too proud to bathe outside but goes to the sea or a river. Venus says Granny believes that a politician named Eric Williams is going to “save the country.”

George joins a cricket team and Sabine attends matches. She begins to learn the “rules” of the country. She invites Helena to dinner and learns that the woman is a lawyer and is very depressed because she can't find work in Trinidad. Sabine invites Helena to join her at the Country Club and Helena points out that she wouldn't be allowed inside because of her ethnicity. Sabine is angry but Helena points out that the racial divide exists everywhere and that it's not Sabine's problem. Sabine confides that she goes to the Country Club to hide, because it's one of the few places she feels safe from the hatred of the native people.

Analysis

The racial attitudes don't change a great deal in the 50 years Sabine lives in Trinidad. She talks about the way the natives look at the whites with disdain in 1956 but she describes a similar situation in 2006. When Sabine is in the bank, she and other whites in line are forced to wait for a long time for service. The clerks are indifferent and the whites don't make a fuss about the treatment. In 1956, Sabine tries to open a conversation with a server at the Country Club. She introduces herself and the server acknowledges her name but doesn't offer one in return. She asks questions and gets only “Yes, Miss” or “No, Miss” as answers. Sabine says the blacks are making the members “pay” for the rule that blacks aren't allowed as members of the club.

George and Sabine are to remain in Trinidad for a three-year employment contract. They are not the first couple to take on assignments in Trinidad but many of the women who arrive there can't stand the climate, the country, and the culture. They demand to leave even before the contract is complete. When George and Sabine are still on the boat, arriving in Trinidad, Sabine considers the possibility of returning home. She wonders if it's too late to demand that George stay on the boat, but she doesn't voice that thought. From the first moments, she hates the heat in Trinidad. But when they arrive at their hotel, she promises George she won't want to go before his contract is up. Sabine wants to prove that George has chosen a wife who will support him. This is typical of Sabine in the early years. She wants to support George but she wants to leave Trinidad. When he continues to refuse to even consider leaving, she remains, though the possibility of leaving is a constant dream.

Venus is important to Sabine's life for several reasons. She helps with the chores Sabine hates, such as ironing, and she teaches Sabine and George about the local food. But more importantly, Sabine and Venus talk about their lives. Sabine learns that Venus has a grandmother named Seraphina who taught Venus to cook. The fact that



Venus talks to Sabine is important to Sabine, who wants to begin to learn about the local culture. However, there is a division that remains intact for many years. Despite the fact that Sabine and Venus talk a great deal and that Venus knows about Sabine's life, Venus reveals little about her own life. It takes years for Sabine and Venus to become closer so that Sabine learns about the life Venus lives outside work.

One day soon after Sabine's arrival in Trinidad, she sees a white man and a black woman holding hands. Sabine is elated and sees this as an important step toward better race relations. She doesn't realize that change comes very slowly and that the racial lines will remain basically intact decades later.

Discussion Question 1

What are Sabine's attitudes about remaining in Trinidad? What shapes these feelings?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the racial attitudes present when Sabine arrives in Trinidad.

Discussion Question 3

How does Venus know about Sabine prior to their first meeting? What does this say about the area?

Vocabulary

armada, galleons, spectral, boisterously, beauteous, emancipation, rivulet, stupendous, writhing, tacitly, aloof, acclimatise



Chapters 13 - 14

Summary

Chapter Thirteen, "The University of Woodford Square," opens with Sabine recalling the day she met George. There was an instant attraction and they quickly became a couple. They remain deeply in love as they begin their lives in Trinidad. One day, Sabine is riding her bicycle when she realizes that Venus was correct about people staring at her. She is distracted by this and rides into a crowd of locals gathered at the park called Woodford Square.

Eric Williams is speaking and Sabine is quickly caught up in his message. He talks about his political party, the People's National Movement, and calls for an end of colonialism and racism. Someone notices Sabine and tells her to leave. She is shaken when she meets George and tells him about the encounter. She says the native people want the whites to leave the country. George assures her that the British are aware and that they do plan to leave, but that the change won't take place immediately. Sabine is afraid of an uprising and fears for her life. George assures her they are safe. He says they are fortunate that an educated man such as Williams is heading up the movement, which George sees as inevitable.

Sabine begins to read the two local newspapers, the Trinidad Guardian and the Daily Telegraph. George offers additional insight, saying many powers are "keeping an eye on" Williams, fearing his political motivations. He also says Williams doesn't like anyone with white blood. Sabine begins to cut out the articles about Williams.

Chapter Fourteen, "The Robber Man," begins with Sabine attending a party at the Governor's residence. Irit is there with her husband, John. Irit is not pleased that so many of the whites treat the blacks poorly, making it more difficult for everyone. Irit becomes embroiled in an argument with another wife, Bonny, who condemns Williams' political stand.

Sabine continues to hate Trinidad but continues to reassure herself that she will remain for the duration of George's three-year contract. She hates the heat but she also hates that she doesn't understand the culture. She reveals to George that she's discovered that people stare at her while she's riding her bicycle. She says she had no idea Trinidad would be "so restrictive."

One day George and Sabine go to watch a parade. One of the characters marching in the parade is dressed as "the Body Snatcher." He demands offerings of the people along the parade route. George has wandered a short distance away when the robber man confronts Sabine. Sabine is frightened of the black man, who tells her she should leave the country. He then demands payment. Sabine tries to explain that she has no money. He demands that she hand over her fan, a prized possession that belonged to



Sabine's grandmother. She refuses but a child grabs the fan and hands it over. Sabine doesn't tell George about the encounter.

Sabine continues to clip articles about Williams but her attitude turns to one of fear. She believes that learning about Williams will help her conquer that fear. She wants things to change for the sake of Venus and others living in poverty like her, but she is still afraid.

The house promised to George and Sabine is not complete but Sabine complains and the company moves them into a small house. It's better than the apartment though. Sabine begins seeing the form of a woman in a nearby hill, and she begins to talk to that "woman."

Analysis

Someone comments that "massa" is in the crowd when Sabine is watching Williams speak. Sabine hears the comment and rushes away. She's shaken by the encounter. When she meets George, she is angry that he hasn't told her about the current political climate. In truth, Sabine is an adult with access to the news and has chosen to ignore the talk about Eric Williams, the PNM, and all other references to real news of the country. After hearing Williams for herself, she is suddenly caught up in his thoughts and career. She begins clipping out articles about Williams, which eventually turns into something of an obsession. She later begins writing letters to Williams as well, but never mails them. George finds the letters and articles years later, and feels betrayed.

The Racial tension and attitudes about race are a prevalent theme in this story. The majority of the wives have no patience for the racial tension directed at whites and are angry about the fact that Williams is touting change through political means. While they seem angry, most of them are also afraid. Sabine is afraid, but she is also a proponent of racial change. She expresses her shame that her ancestors were among the race that supported enslaving blacks. Irit's anger at the wives' attitude is also strong, but for a different reason. Irit is a Jewess and she compares slavery to the horrors of the Holocaust. She says the main difference is that slaves were killed off over hundreds of years while the Jews were killed much more quickly.

The point where Sabine begins to carry on conversations with the hill that looks like a lounging woman marks a bit of a change in Sabine's attitude. She begins to hear the "woman" talking back. Sabine says she hates the woman and the woman urges Sabine to relax. Sabine admits that the woman is beautiful and the woman responds that Sabine is also beautiful. The conversation goes on for some time and Sabine will return to talk to the "woman" for all the years of her life in Trinidad.

Discussion Question 1

Describe how Sabine feels about Eric Williams. Why does she say she's clipping articles about him and his political party?



Discussion Question 2

Describe Irit's attitude toward the racial tension on the island. Why do you believe she feels that way?

Discussion Question 3

What are the attitudes of the natives toward the whites that have settled on the island?

Vocabulary

rote, regurgitated, extrovert, eccentric, placidly, basked, mammoth, genteel, rapture, coquette

Chapters 15 - 17

Summary

Chapter Fifteen is titled, “He Wants to Be One of Us.” George grows more at home in Trinidad and spends more time in the countryside. Sabine realizes that George's love of the island is her competition. During this time, Sabine meets Dr. Sebastian Baker. Dr. Baker says he recognizes her as “the white woman on the green bicycle.” He says many people are talking about her and wonder who she is. Dr. Baker says Sabine is probably the only woman in the history of the island to ride a bicycle in public. Sabine also meets Cristobel, Dr. Baker's wife, and realizes that George is attracted to her.

Sabine turns the conversation to Eric Williams. Cristobel says Williams hates everyone with white blood but “wants to be one of us.” Sabine, silently noting that Cristobel has some black ancestry, responds that he is. Sabine briefly wonders if Cristobel and Williams are related, but doesn't voice it. She later berates George for displaying his attraction.

One day, Sabine is riding her bicycle when she encounters a traffic jam. She's forced to stop and realizes she's directly beside Eric Williams' car. Williams is staring at Sabine and “sizing up my backside.” Sabine tries to rush away but admits she enjoys having Williams stare.

Chapter Sixteen is “The House in Paramin.” Irit opens an exclusive boutique and Williams shops there, buying gifts for people. Irit predicts that Williams' party will soon gain control and that the British government will leave the island to the PNM. Sabine says she and George will leave as well, but Irit counters, asking Sabine why she wants to leave.

George is doing well at his job and a promotion is promised. Sabine gives birth to a son they name Sebastian, with Dr. Sebastian Baker overseeing the delivery. Two years later, Sabine and George welcome a daughter, Pascale. Sabine still imagines they'll return to England but George announces that he's purchased land and begins building a house. Sabine doesn't agree but he builds anyway.

Chapter seventeen is “Massa Day Done.” Williams takes his job as Prime Minister and Sabine continues to follow his career and his life. Sabine finds herself at another rally and this time she listens as Williams talks about the history of slavery. He declares that “massa day done,” meaning the “master's day is done,” and Sabine pledges to be a better person. One day Venus announces that there has been no water in their neighborhood for nearly a week. Granny is ill and Sabine drives her car to their house, bringing Granny, the children, and Venus all back to her house. Sabine is furious that the water company does nothing to rectify the situation. The British formally step out of Trinidad and Sabine writes her first letter to Williams, telling him that he has to stand up for himself and get started making things better for his people.



Analysis

It is never fully explained why Sabine's riding the bicycle is such a big deal in Trinidad. Several people tell her that she's causing a stir among the people. Dr. Baker says that cars following behind Sabine sometimes crash because they are so busy staring that they don't watch the road. That is likely an overstatement, meant to be teasing, but it is apparent that people are very curious about her because of the bicycle. It seems probable that the other white wives see themselves as too dignified to ride around on a bicycle. They seem to work hard at acting correctly, which comes across as snobby in some situations.

Irit understands George's situation better than Sabine. In Trinidad, George is an important person in his company. He has climbed the ladder quickly and is obviously successful in the eyes of his bosses. He has much less competition for those promotions and he loves the life. Irit knows that George would be a common man among many if he returned to England. She knows that he wouldn't be happy with that and predicts that George won't leave Trinidad, though Sabine continues to plan for the day they will return to England.

Sabine talks about the line between her family and Venus's family. Venus has two sons, Bernard and Clive. They are welcome at Sabine's home and sometimes visit. She is familiar with the boys and they sometimes play with Sebastian and Pascale. Venus cares for Sebastian and Pascale on a regular basis. The difference that Sabine notices is that her children are very attached to Venus but Sabine's relationship with Venus's children is very casual without that level of affection.

Sabine meets Granny Seraphina only after Venus has been working for Sabine for several years. At that first meeting, Granny makes it clear that she is a fan of Eric Williams and that she supported his ideals. She believes Williams will make a big difference in her life. She asks if Sabine plans to join Williams' party. Sabine says she won't be staying on the island long enough to be involved, and she admits that she's a little afraid of Williams.

George's affairs are a problem in their marriage for their entire lives but because the majority of the book is written from Sabine's perspective, the reader doesn't see many details. At one point, Sabine is dancing at a party with Dr. Baker and there's an obvious attraction between them. When they leave the dance floor, Dr. Baker's wife is sad and shows that emotion. George, however, teases Sabine. He calls her a "minx" and is obviously physically attracted to her after her display.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Sabine's growing interest with Williams. How does her attitude grow and change as Williams takes office? Compare this to the attitudes of modern-day voters who elect officials on a platform of change.



Discussion Question 2

Describe Irit and her attitudes toward race.

Discussion Question 3

What are the general attitudes of the wives who are in Trinidad because of their husbands?

Vocabulary

benign, desultory, fraught, queues, euphoric, bombastic, omnipotent, piqued



Chapters 18 - 19

Summary

The next section is titled "Trinidad, 1963." Chapter Eighteen is "The Castle." Sabine initially refuses to consider the idea of a move, but George gets started building a huge house in a remote area. Sabine says she doesn't even realize at the time that this house is part of George's plan to remain in Trinidad and that her dream of returning to England will never be realized. Many of the British working in the area leave but Irit announces she's staying. George is promoted to Deputy Director at Forbes-Mason.

Both of Sabine's children, Pascale and Sebastian, are happy in Trinidad. They begin to sound like the islanders. One day Sabine drops by Venus's house. She and Granny talk for a moment and Granny makes it clear she doesn't expect anything to change for the poor of Trinidad.

When the house is finished, Sabine and her family move in. Venus joins them during the week, going home on weekends. George has urged Sabine to shop and she fills her time shopping, buying useless things to fill their huge home. One day a lady named Lucy arrives, looking for a job, and Sabine hires her to help with the cooking and cleaning, meaning Venus has only to look after the children. Lucy is sad and Sabine later learns that her daughter died at a young age.

Chapter Nineteen is "Valium." While the world becomes more open to sexual relationships outside marriage, the couples in Trinidad become more open to attractions. Sabine is aware that George has sex with other women.

One day Sabine encounters Eric Williams at a party. Irit introduces them. Sabine mentions her bicycle and Williams suddenly realizes who she is, apparently recalling the day he'd stared at her. He is a little off-balance and Sabine goes on, citing the lack of running water at Venus's home. Williams says there is a study being conducted on how to fix that problem. Sabine says she'll relay that message to those without water and walks away. George steps up to Williams and they are immediately involved in a conversation. Sabine is furious.

Sabine is dealing with increasing depression and appeals to Dr. Sebastian Baker for help. He prescribes Valium and she's relieved.

One day Sabine realizes Sebastian is missing. She finds him playing with some boys in the village. She's angry, wanting to keep him separate from the natives of Trinidad in the hope that he will not remain in the country.

Sabine comes down with dengue fever and is very ill for a time. George is often at work, leaving Venus and Lucy to care for Sabine. When she recovers, she is quieter and her relationship with George becomes even more strained.



Analysis

Sabine watches as Trinidad begins to change dramatically. As the British leave, the natives elected by the Trinidad people take over the government. Sabine describes it as a nation that becomes “self-aware.” There is little doubt that the people are holding out hope that there will be changes, but those changes are not really occurring under Williams' leadership. The fact that Venus and her family are without water for a long time is a sign of infrastructure breakdown. Though the natives of Trinidad would consider it racist to say so, they were no worse off under the British rule than under Williams'. There has been a great deal of talk about the need for change but Williams will increasingly seem unable or unwilling to deliver that change. It takes time, but the people eventually become aware that Williams is not going to deliver on his promises, and they call for yet another change.

The relationship between Sabine and George changes again around 1963. They have always had a strong sexual bond though George has apparently been involved in a series of affairs for most of their marriage. But around this time, Sabine notes that George becomes “more ardent” in his attention toward her. Sabine struggles to learn about herself and seems to often feel that she's drifting without a solid plan or purpose. At least part of this is because the country is in turmoil and Sabine seems to hold onto the idea that they will return willingly to England or will be forced to leave Trinidad at some point. She can never really settle into a life in Trinidad, but as she begins to lose hope of returning to England, she becomes angry at George. She says that George can't please her at all outside their bedroom.

At a party once, Sabine sees George with a young woman. She's very attractive and Sabine is naturally jealous. Sabine doesn't confront George on his actions at the time and she doesn't confront him about the affairs when they happen, though she is apparently aware. She does reference affairs several times and it may be that the confrontations happen apart from the events described in the story. One day George enters the room while Sabine is writing a letter to Eric Williams. When George asks her about it, she says she's writing to her lover. She then describes a scene very much like the scene she'd witnessed with George and the attractive young woman. Sabine then throws a paperweight at George. This seems to be the only time Sabine fights with George about the situation and nothing is resolved from the encounter.

Lucy's arrival into the household is important on several levels. She doesn't live with them, as Venus does, but goes home at the end of each workday. Lucy has a background in healing, but with a tendency toward magic of a sort. Sabine and George are really struggling in their marriage. One day Lucy gives Sabine a concoction to drink. Sabine drinks it without question and later believes that Lucy gave her a “love potion.” Later, when Sabine is dealing with depression, Lucy provides additional potions aimed at helping Sabine cope. The reader may not believe in these superstitions but Sabine is convinced.



Discussion Question 1

Compare the changes in Sabine's life to the changes that are taking place in Trinidad.

Discussion Question 2

There is a great deal of discussion about "colonialism" as Trinidad seeks to change the government. Define colonialism. Why would this concept make Sabine and others who have moved to Trinidad from British countries nervous?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Lucy. What is her role in the household and in Sabine's life?

Vocabulary

exodus, goaded, ardent, virile, lavished, uncanny, gravitas, accrued, promiscuity



Chapters 20 - 21

Summary

Chapter Twenty is “Qu'est-Ce Qu'il Dit?” Granny reveals that she is writing letters to Williams, always asking for change. Sabine says she believes Granny will eventually get those changes.

Sebastian turns eight and Sabine sends him to boarding school in England. He is quiet when he returns for his first break from class but breaks down and cries in Venus's arms. He never again expresses his need for Sabine and he quickly loses the island accent. Viewing the changes in Sebastian, Pascale attends school locally.

One day George announces that he's become a citizen of Trinidad because of the new law that only Trinidadians can own land. Sabine is furious that he didn't discuss the plan with her first. George buys additional land and sells their home in England. Sabine is again angry but George says it was his property, bought by his parents as a wedding present, and was his to do with as he pleased.

Sabine continues to write to Williams but her letters reflect her growing knowledge of Williams' failures as a leader. When she is writing about the rumors of corruption in his office, she says that “all men are born equally stupid and greedy.”

Chapter Twenty-one is “De Man Woh Bite.” Eric Williams becomes a frequent guest of the Country Club, along with his followers and others who are not fully white. One day Sabine is by the pool when a server named Martin approaches. He says Eric Williams is inside and has asked Sabine to join him. Sabine is surprised but Martin says she should join him, as requested. Sabine asks more questions and learns that Williams had asked if she was the woman who rode a bicycle around town years earlier. Sabine is flustered but gets dressed and joins him.

They chat at first, with Sabine commenting on Williams' daughter who is swimming in the pool. Sabine then tells him that she's disappointed in him. They talk about the lack of running water and the lack of social reform. Williams says Sabine should leave. She says that George has become Trinidadian and will die there. Williams says that white men, like George, “take, take, take.” Sabine responds that Williams had once been a “brilliant man,” much like George. She accuses Williams of giving up his ideals to make his own life easier. She then excuses herself and leaves.

For days, Sabine is worried and on edge. One day she and George have a huge fight. She realizes that he had planned to remain in Trinidad from the very beginning, but that he was never willing to reveal it all to her. The argument gets out of hand with George cursing at her. Sabine says she hates George and he responds that she once loved him, indicating that she no longer seems to. Sabine realizes that George is correct in that assumption, and that at that moment she doesn't even like him.



Analysis

Sabine's attitude about Pascale and Sebastian is deep and confusing. She wants to keep them apart from the culture of Trinidad, mainly because she still hates the country. While she wants Trinidad as a country to advance, she doesn't even consider that either of them might be able to help bring the changes to the country. She hates when they act like the islanders or mimic the island slang, but she leaves them often in the care of Venus and Lucy. Ironically, she sometimes fears Venus and Lucy, especially when there is a higher level of unrest in the region.

George's decisions about their lives are made with only his own happiness in mind. While it seems that Sabine should have, at some point, either accepted the life George wants in Trinidad or moved back to England on her own, she doesn't do either. Instead, she is angry and unhappy. At the same time, George refuses to return to England, even when Sabine makes her unhappiness known. He considers his life in Trinidad better than his life would have been in England, and he won't give that up. There is one point in time when he agrees that the family can leave the country but they miss the ship. There is another time, shortly before his death, when George says he will sell everything and let Sabine move back to England. By that time, she refuses the offer because she can't stand the thought of leaving George.

By this section of the book, everyone is angry with Eric Williams. He is seldom seen and there are rumors of corruption within his party and his office. It seems obvious that Williams has failed miserably and won't deliver on his promises to create a better life for the people of Trinidad. While Sabine doesn't want to remain in Trinidad, she views Williams' failure as a betrayal of sorts. She hates that Granny and Venus still live without running water and other basic amenities. In one of her letters, she writes that Williams should beware of the wrath of the people who put their faith in him because they are angry.

It's not clear what Eric Williams expects when he invites Sabine to join him at the Country Club. It could be that he is so accustomed to having people around him that he can't stand to be alone. Sabine hesitates before accepting the invitation and it's not clear what she plans to say to him. An important aspect of Sabine's character is seen in the moment she greets Williams. She doesn't shake his hand or give any impression that he's in a position of authority. She says she does this because of her devotion to Granny Seraphine, who has put all her faith in Williams and is still living in the squalor of the pre-Williams regime. That she feels that way toward Granny's plight is a statement of Sabine's character.

Discussion Question 1

What does Sabine believe happened to Williams' political promises?



Discussion Question 2

Why does Sabine send Sebastian to school in England, and why doesn't she send Pascale?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the changes in the relationship between George and Sabine between their arrival in Trinidad and this point.

Vocabulary

nonplussed, precocious, demagogue, subversive, surreptitiously, deference



Chapters 22 - 23

Summary

The final section is "Trinidad, 1970." Chapter Twenty-two is "Black Power." There is a new political movement called the National Joint Action Committee, urging people to turn from Williams and the PNM. The emerging leader is named Geddes Granger and Sabine sees a strong resemblance to Williams during his early days in politics. Williams and the PNM take a strong stand against Granger and even call for his arrest. Sabine sees strikes and escalating violence, and demands that they leave. George predicts the unrest will pass.

One day, Pascale's teacher calls Sabine, saying school is being canceled until the situation calms. George comes home and goes with Sabine to get Pascale. There are buildings on fire and someone breaks their windshield. Pascale is terrified and Sabine decides that she will leave the country, regardless of George's decision. She pledges to live near Sebastian's school and to get a job to support herself and her children.

By now, there are many houses in the neighborhood. Everyone is on lock down and one day someone throws burning bottles into Sabine's yard. It's clear that Venus knows the people who attack them but can't provide names. Sabine goes to Granny's house the following day to ask her for the identities. Granny tells Sabine she should leave Trinidad. A few days later, they find their dogs dead, apparently poisoned.

Chapter Twenty-three is "Emergency." The violence grows over the coming days and George's office is destroyed. His company announces that they won't rebuild. He agrees to leave the country with Sabine. They plan to catch a cruise ship that's already in the harbor. They will be leaving in two days.

Chapter twenty-four is "The Green Bicycle." The day before they are to leave, Sabine decides to go to Venus's house. Venus hasn't been to work in days and Sabine is worried. She plans to take some ice to Venus as a means of justifying her trip. At the gate, Sabine yells out to Granny. Granny appears but looks down the street. Sabine turns and discovers a group of people coming up the road. Sabine begs Granny to let her inside but Granny doesn't move. Clive, Venus's son, is among the group and they are soon all throwing rocks at Sabine. Granny eventually intervenes, telling them to leave Sabine alone.

That day, Sabine goes to Williams' home. She identifies herself and is invited inside. It's obvious he's upset. Sabine repeats George's thought, that the violence will pass. She suggests Williams can begin a new campaign but knows it won't happen. As she prepares to leave, Williams says he occasionally thinks about Sabine riding her bicycle. She promises to think of him as well. She sees that he is deeply grieving.



Venus arrives, apologizing for Clive's action. Sabine urges her not to worry, saying Clive was "caught up" in the mob and the moment. That night, the violence is less and it's evident that the riots are coming to an end.

Sabine writes a final letter to Williams, urging him to remember that he was never really destined to solve all Trinidad's problems, as he had hoped. Sabine says farewell to friends, then to Venus, Lucy, and the hill she refers to as a woman.

They head for the ship but find their way blocked several times. Then Pascale insists she has to use the restroom and they stop at the Country Club. When they reach the dock, they can see the ship, already well away from land. They pick up their lives with George developing the land he'd purchased. One day, Sabine is talking to the hill woman. She pledges to keep trying to learn about the people and culture of Trinidad but says she will never become accustomed to the heat.

Analysis

Lucy is harassed by those who realize she is working for white people. She refuses to skip work and is apparently not afraid that the anger of those people might turn into violence against her. When the violence is at its peak, one of the neighbors points out that Sabine and George should be careful about having Lucy and Venus in the house. They warn that Lucy and Venus are, after all, Trinidadian, and could turn against George and Sabine. It's not unheard of but Venus and Lucy aren't like the angry people who see violence as the answer to social and political change.

There's a comment about the attitudes of middle age. It's pointed out that the very old and the very young seek change and fight for it, more so than those in middle age.

The relationship between George and Sabine changes yet again during this time in the story. Sabine notes that they have sex often, still seeing that as their only means of communication. When they miss the boat, there is no more talk of leaving Trinidad. George unpacks their belongings while Sabine falls into a deep depression for awhile. Then George goes on about his life, believing that Sabine will simply fall back into line, living in Trinidad even though it's not what she wants.

Sabine's final meeting with Williams is meant to bring some closure. It's not clear why he accepts her visit other than the brief connection they've shared in the past. It does seem that he values her advice and her opinion, despite the fact that she's tough. It may be that he likes her more because of her willingness to say what she believes. It seems they should have been more tense with each other, as Williams says that George has taken much from Trinidad. He is referring to the fact that so many whites have used Trinidad's resources and made their livings in Trinidad without giving anything of substance back to the country and its people. Sabine counters, however, saying that George and people like him have given a great deal to the country in the form of wealth, while greedy men who pledged to do good for the country have used that wealth for



their own personal gain. She's referring to the fact that Williams pledged to address some basic infrastructure, but never did.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the attitudes some of Sabine's friends have toward Venus and Lucy during the riots. Are they correct to be concerned?

Discussion Question 2

Williams says that George has taken a great deal from Trinidad, but Sabine says men like George have made Williams. What does each mean by their comments?

Discussion Question 3

What do you believe happens to the relationship between George and Sabine once they miss the boat leaving Trinidad?

Vocabulary

delinquent, articulate, vulgar, stoic, ultimatums, inconsolable, folly, bourgeoisie, mutinied, officious



Characters

Sabine Harwood

Sabine is a young wife when she arrives at Trinidad with her husband, George. She believes they will remain on the island for three years while George works off an employment contract. From the beginning, Sabine hates almost everything about Trinidad. She never plans to remain longer than the three years of George's contract and is miserable for most of her life. She never chooses to leave George, partly because of her love for him but partly because she depends on him.

During the early years in Trinidad, Sabine often rides her green bicycle around the area. She eventually learns that people are staring and talking about her, "The White Woman on the Green Bicycle." This makes her uncomfortable, just one more thing she comes to hate about Trinidad.

Sabine and George have two children, Sebastian and Pascale. Sabine desperately wants to keep the children separate from the island culture and she sends Sebastian to school in England as soon as he is of age to attend. This breaks the bond between them though Sebastian and Sabine are closer in later life than Sebastian and George.

Sabine becomes very interested in the politics of Trinidad after she catches a few moments of a speech by the new political power, Eric Williams. She begins following his career and believes he will make a difference in the lives of the people of Trinidad. She feels betrayed when it turns out that he is merely another politician who breaks promises.

An important part of her character is that Sabine feels a deep level of guilt over the treatment of blacks, especially blacks in Trinidad, and she doesn't understand why other white people don't feel the same.

George Harwood

George is Sabine's husband and father of Sebastian and Pascale. George is much closer to Pascale than to Sebastian, probably because Pascale has become totally immersed in the island culture that George loves.

It's his job that takes him to Trinidad, and he initially promises Sabine that they will be there only for three years in keeping with his contract. When things begin to go wrong in Trinidad and Sabine wants to leave, George refuses. He points out that he is an important man in his company's Trinidad office but would be an ordinary clerk at an office in London. He loves Trinidad even before he arrives and desperately wants to remain there. He does agree to leave when the situation becomes very dangerous for whites, but even then he insists that the storm will pass. It's clear that he wants to



remain but gives in to Sabine's pleas. He doesn't have to follow through, because they miss the ship and he doesn't later make any arrangements to leave.

George is not, by modern-day standards, a good husband. While he provides well for Sabine's physical needs, he isn't willing to leave the island, even when she pleads with him to see that she's very unhappy there. He has an array of mistresses and doesn't particularly hide them from Sabine. He makes major decisions on his own, buying land and building a house in Trinidad, all without Sabine's knowledge. He sells their home in England, also without Sabine's knowledge. When she confronts him, he says that it was in his name, so therefore was his to do with as he pleased.

Sebastian Harwood

Son of Sabine and George, Sebastian slips away from Sabine several times to play with local children. Sabine wants to protect Sebastian from the culture of the island and sends him to school in England rather than having him attend a local school. The physical distance creates an emotional distance between Sebastian and his parents, and the childhood bond between mother and son is broken very early. This prompts Sabine to keep Pascale nearby, sending her to a local school and keeping her immersed in the local culture. Sebastian chooses a life in England and never returns to live near his parents in Trinidad.

Pascale

The daughter of Sabine and George, Pascale is born in Trinidad and grows up loving the island and the culture. She marries a local man and has children, fully submersing herself in the island culture and people.

Eric Williams

The first Prime Minister of Trinidad, Williams is a short man but a charismatic speaker who touts his grand plans for the people of Trinidad during his campaign. Sabine is infatuated with Williams, not because of his looks or even because she likes him, but because she believes he can lead the country into a new era of prosperity. When he fails, Sabine is heartbroken and feels personally betrayed. Williams is removed from office during the riots of the 1970s and dies eleven years later.

Lucy

Lucy is an older woman who works for George and Sabine after they move into the larger house. Lucy knows a great deal about herbs and frequently creates drinks for Sabine. These concoctions offer Sabine a level of comfort that she can't often find elsewhere. Lucy reveals that her daughter died when she was in her early twenties, and that Lucy had been unable to save her.



Venus

Venus is the first maid Sabine hires after her arrival on the island. Sabine initially hires Venus for a few days each week. When they move into the large house, Venus has her own suite and lives there most of the time. Venus is horrified when she learns that her son has been caught up in the group of boys who threw rocks at Sabine. By 2006, Venus is living in England, as are both her sons.

Joshua Pierre

Joshua's nickname is "Clock" because his arms don't match and he swings one awkwardly as he walks. George has the notion that Clock's father might be the famous calypso singer known as "The Sparrow." Clock and George are friends on a general level. George takes Clock to a sporting event and often offers Clock a ride around town.

Jennifer

The maid for the Harwoods in 2006, Jennifer is dedicated to them. Jennifer is typical of Trinidad's people with the attitudes and speech of the locals. Her son is Talbot, who is brutally beaten by the Trinidad Police. Jennifer is related to Venus, Sabine's first maid, and knows the history of the Harwood family even before her employment with them.

Bobby Comacho

Comacho is the man in charge of the Winderflet Police Department when Talbot is brutally beaten. He is dismissive of the complaints when George confronts him. Sabine shoots him in the chest in 2006 after George's death.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Green Bicycle

The bike is a symbol of youth and freedom for Sabine. When she discovers that people are staring at her and talking about her, she begins to feel self-conscious about riding the bicycle.

The Letters to Eric Williams

Eric Williams was Prime Minister of Trinidad for a period of years and was one of many black men calling for race reform of that era. Sabine writes dozens of letters to Eric and keeps them as something of a diary of her thoughts, fears, and heartbreaks over her failing marriage. The letters are in a storage area of the house when George finds them, years after Sabine writes them. To George, they represent Sabine's unfaithfulness, despite the fact that George himself has had a series of sexual affairs over the course of their marriage.

The Blimp

Hailed as a tool for police, it is literally a huge blimp that patrols the air over the country, apparently looking for crime. George and Sabine hate the blimp and all it represents. The modern American reader might equate the blimp with the "Big Brother" concept.

The Statue of Mary

The statue of Mary is a gift from Clock to George. It has a sticker on the bottom that adheres to the dash of George's truck. George initially believes the statue is greatly out of place, especially considering the number of times he has had sex in that truck. However, he later comes to a peaceful acceptance and believes the weight of his transgressions leave him.

The Lady of Lourdes

This is the church at Winderflet where Sebastian attends when he visits for Easter in 2006. This is where he and Pascale were baptized and the venue for Pascale's wedding. Sebastian says it's the only church he ever attends.



The PNM

The PNM is Eric Williams' party, and it takes control of the government in an election soon after Sabine's arrival in Trinidad. The party is supposed to be focusing on the people and seeking to make life better for the poor of the country, but it becomes corrupt with rumors of kickbacks and little to show for its time in power.

Winderflet Police

The Winderflet Police is a corrupt police force in the village where Sabine and George live. The police brutally beat a young man in 2006 and George wants to put a stop to the corruption by bringing legal action against them. The attorney George contacts believes the police are untouchable, but after George's death Sabine enters the station and shoots the head of the department.

The Mountain

This is a large hill near the house George builds. Sabine believes it looks like the figure of a woman, lounging on her side. Sabine carries on conversations with the "woman" and hates that George loves this "woman" more than he loves Sabine and their children.

The Swimming Pool

A feature of the large house built by George, the swimming pool is the setting for many parties hosted by George and Sabine. During one such party, Sabine jumps into the water with a neighbor and kisses him, evidence of her hurt feelings over George's flirting and infidelities. George loves the pool and he spends a great deal of time there. After being diagnosed with a tumor, George goes out for a swim, dives in, and drowns. Neighbors help pull his body from the water and Sabine is at the poolside for a long time, holding George's body.

Eric Williams' Politics

The political party formed by Eric Williams is supposed to be dedicated to promoting the people of Trinidad. Williams is a charismatic speaker who says all the right things, earning a significant following among the people of Trinidad. Sabine is also captivated by Williams' ideals and believes he can make a difference. When he fails to make changes and even apparently becomes corrupted himself, Sabine and many of the country's poor are disillusioned and feel personally betrayed. Williams' Politics become a symbol of all that is wrong in Trinidad and the failure of anyone in power to implement solutions.



Settings

Trinidad

Trinidad is the country where George and Sabine settle as young people and where they spend their lives. The country is intoxicating in some ways and George loves it. Sabine hates the heat but remains because George does. There are brief mentions of some nearby villages and cities and only vague descriptions of the country itself. The overall setting is real and adds a level of realism to the story.

Winderflet

This is the village where Sabine and George live. It is a relatively small town but by 2006 traffic and parking are a problem. There are specific settings within the town, such as the park that serves as a gathering place for Eric Williams' speeches when he is running for Prime Minister.

George and Sabine's House

This is the home built by George against Sabine's wishes. It's a huge place by the standards of the time and place, but it is built outside the settled part of the island on the site of a former plantation. Initially, there is only one neighbor but the area is eventually populated by other families. The house features a pool and it's there that George dies, soon after being diagnosed with a tumor. There is a suite for the maid, a luxury for the servants at the time the house was built. George loves the house and it's clear that he plans to remain in Trinidad, despite Sabine's declarations that she won't stay.

The Country Club

A place where the well-to-do spend time during the early years of Sabine's time in Trinidad. She refers to it as "the hiding place" because it's one of the few places she feels safe. The club is fairly typical of a place of this type during this time, and has a bar, dance floor, and swimming pool. The Country Club doesn't accept blacks during those early years but the policies change as the attitudes about race change. The servants in the early years are all black and Sabine feels that most of them don't like the whites. This is where Sabine has a conversation with Eric Williams.

Venus's House

A ramshackle cabin in a poor part of the village where Venus lives with her grandmother and her two sons. The house is typical of the poor neighborhoods. There are no modern conveniences, including running water and sewer. Sabine visits the house only a few

times, meaning there are only a few scenes set here. However, the house and its decrepit state are an important part of the fabric of the overall setting and symbolizes the poor conditions of many of the country's inhabitants. Politics often focus on providing a better way of life for people living in houses like this, but none delivers.



Themes and Motifs

Race and Prejudice

While the white's view of the black people of Trinidad is important, Sabine's main fear is the blacks' attitude toward the whites. She notes that the black people of the island barely acknowledge the whites. When the racial tensions begin, a neighbor notes that Sabine and her family could be in danger from their maids. Sabine doesn't want to believe that's true, but the neighbor urges her to be careful. The people of Trinidad are largely descended from slaves, forcibly brought to the island to work in the agriculture there.

The racial tensions escalate during the 1960s and 1970s, much as it did in the United States during that period. There are people touting "Black Power" and blacks are seeking to gain control of their lives. There are demonstrations among the black communities and whites, as a rule, are not welcome. As is often the case, racial tensions lead to rioting at one point. Homes and businesses are destroyed, including George's office. Sabine has an interesting view on the racial issues which sets her apart from most of her contemporaries in this book. She feels a deep level of guilt for her race's role in the oppression of the blacks. Her friends cite typical arguments, such as the blacks' inability to actually take control of the government. They also tout stereotypes, such as the inherent "laziness" of the island people.

Eric Williams' attitude is also fairly typical in that he touts the oppression of blacks and hates white people for their attitudes. Early in Williams' career, Sabine truly believes that he will make a good leader for Trinidad, and she holds out hope that things will truly change under his control. A strong example of this theme is seen in the Country Club. When Sabine and George arrive in Trinidad, the people there are all white and wealthy in comparison to the people of the island. By the end of the story, this has changed and the lines of prejudice no longer exclude the blacks. Another important examples is seen in the marriage between the races. Early on, Sabine sees one mixed couple and she's surprised but heartened by the sight. But marriage between the blacks and whites become more common by the end of the book and Sabine's grandchildren are mixed.

Sabine and George's Marriage

Marriage and love in general is important, but there is a focus on Sabine and George's Marriage throughout the book. They arrive in Trinidad as a happy young couple. Sabine isn't excited about their stay in Trinidad but she believes it's short-term and she is determined to stay because it's so important to George. From the beginning, George is determined to remain on the island forever and he sets about creating a life for himself with that in mind. In the early years, their love is deep enough to survive the hardships of living in Trinidad.



When Sabine is unhappy, George shows his love in physical tones that makes Sabine focus again on her marriage. When things become very difficult for whites in Trinidad, Sabine begins preparing to move. She says she won't remain in Trinidad, regardless of George's decision to remain. At this point, Sabine and George make love often and desperately. It seems they have come to the point of believing that this is the only way to communicate and they are trying to save their marriage in the only way they know. It's not enough.

Another aspect of this theme is seen in George's infidelities. He has affairs almost constantly, even in 2006 when he is an old man. Sabine is aware of the affairs soon after their arrival in Trinidad, but she doesn't leave him over it. At one point, she kisses a neighbor in full view of George but doesn't act on the attraction she feels for the man. As George nears the end of his life, he finds the letters Sabine had written to Eric Williams over the years. He is hurt, feeling that she has betrayed him and looking on it as an affair of sorts. As they age, Sabine and George feel and express love in very limited ways. However, when George is diagnosed with a tumor, Sabine is fearful of losing him. She is devastated when he dies, and the neighbors find her holding George's body in her arms.

Political Corruption

Eric Williams is a well-educated black man, a native of Trinidad, and a charismatic speaker. He is able to captivate his audience from the beginning of his campaign, and he says all the right things. He talks about the reforms needed on the Island for the general well-being of its inhabitants. Venus's grandmother, Granny Seraphina, is among those who put their faith in Eric Williams. Ironically, Sabine hopes he will be the answer to those problems as well.

Sabine joins the ranks of those who think Williams will get basic services to the poorer parts of the island. Granny Seraphina's home is without water or sewer. When Venus is living there, she bathes in the street by way of a water channel that flows near their house. When that water stops, the family is in serious trouble, along with all the other families in that neighborhood. Sabine steps in, giving Venus and her family the option of bathing and even staying at Sabine's home, but other families may not have any help.

When Sabine encounters Eric Williams by chance at a public venue, she confronts him about the situation, and he assures her that there is a study being conducted to figure out how to correct that problem. It is never done and Sabine eventually comes to learn that Williams has become corrupt, accepting kickbacks from wealthy sources to focus only on the issues that concern them.

Sabine is heartbroken over Williams' actions, which she sees as a betrayal to the people of Trinidad. Williams' actions have far-reaching effects, sending many of the poor people of the country into a rage that leads to rioting. Eventually, the people back a new political leader but Williams tries to squash that by force. The political corruption doesn't end with Williams' term as leader. In 2006, years after Williams' death, the police force



in Trinidad is so corrupt that they beat a young man almost to death after he asks them to return his telephone. George tries to make an impact on the situation by hiring an attorney for the young man but it's clear that this will do little good. Sabine, in her final action in the book, shoots the man who is the head of the police department.

Sabine's Relationship with Trinidad

When Sabine arrives in Trinidad, she believes she will remain there for three years while George fulfills an employment contract. From the beginning, Sabine hates Trinidad. She hates the oppressive heat, the people, the local dialect, and the culture. She brings her bicycle to Trinidad and that bicycle is, for some time, her only mode of transportation. With that bicycle, Sabine is able to leave their apartment, travel to meet George after his day at work, and reach places of interest to her, such as the Country Club.

Sabine then discovers that, in Trinidad, her appearance on the bicycle is cause for gossip. She says she doesn't understand the people and how to fit in, and this attitude about the bicycle is really a breaking point for her. She becomes self-conscious and gives up riding the bicycle altogether.

Another aspect of this theme is seen in Sabine's conversations with the mountain near the large house George builds in the bush. Trinidad equates the mountain with Trinidad's personality and refers to the mountain as a woman. She carries on conversations with "her" and admits things there that she doesn't admit anywhere else, such as the fact that George loves Trinidad more than he loves Sabine.

Sabine's hatred for the island is so strong that she wants to save her children from its lure. She sends Sebastian away from school and tries to correct Pascale's language, though she ultimately fails on the latter endeavor.

Family and Relationships

Sabine and George move around the world when they are a very young couple, leaving their family and friends behind. They are in Trinidad only a few years when they begin their own family. They have two children, Pascale and Sebastian, and establish a circle of friendships despite the fact that many people leave during a time of racial tension. The family relationships are complex, as is typical of any family. Sebastian grows distant from his parents when they send him away to boarding school. He never again feels the deep connection to his mother and she mourns that loss. George and Pascale are close, probably because of their shared love of Trinidad. Sabine and Pascale are not nearly as close, probably because Sabine hates Trinidad despite living there for fifty years.

The relationship between George and Sabine changes dramatically over the years. The fact that George loves Trinidad creates a rift between them that widens because of George's affairs. Both are somewhat self-absorbed and somewhat indifferent to the



needs of the other. For example, George feels that his career and life are better in Trinidad than in England, and most of the time he refuses to even entertain the idea of returning to England. Sabine doesn't really care that George is happy in Trinidad and wants desperately to go home, despite the fact that George's life would be much different there. Despite their differences, the tumor brings Sabine and George closer. When George dies, Sabine is distraught and can't imagine a life without him.

The relationships between Sabine's family and the various servants over the years is another example of this theme. When Sebastian returns home from boarding school for the first time, it's Venus who comforts him. When Sabine is struggling with depression, Lucy provides home remedies to help her.

Styles

Point of View

The story is written from a split perspective. The first section of the story is written from an omniscient perspective though the majority of the focus is on George Harwood. There are some limitations, such as the fact that the reader doesn't know the thoughts of every character in every scene. As the story reverts back to 1956, the perspective reverts to first person from Sabine's perspective. The first section of the story covers the final days of George's life. The tone of that section is one of impending doom through the heartache of a couple who know they are nearing the end of their lives.

There are many sections of the book that are more upbeat with a hopeful tone. Sabine is miserable in Trinidad from the beginning but is determined to remain for George's sake. This colors her thoughts, attitudes, and actions toward the people and culture. She is afraid of some of the black people, especially the black men. This fear is heightened by her interaction with the "Robber Man" in a parade. She also feels a great level of guilt for the oppression of blacks. These attitudes also impact her perspective. An important part of Sabine's character is revealed through her attitude toward George's affairs. Though they are frequent, Sabine never really focuses on them from her personal perspective. This means they may not be very important to her.

The omniscient perspective in the first section of the book (which is the final section, chronologically,) gives the reader the first unbiased look at George's thoughts and motivations. In the sections that are from Sabine's perspective, the only insights into George's character are seen through his statements and actions, and those are interpreted by Sabine which means they may not be entirely accurate.

Language and Meaning

The story is divided into narrative and dialogue. In an effort to make the reader understand the culture, the quotes are written in the dialect of Trinidad's people. The words are sometimes difficult to follow because of this. For example, the word "steupsed" is used quite frequently. It is a word specific to Trinidad and means disgusted or disappointed. There are also many words that are spelled as they sound in the dialect of Trinidad's people. When a character says "don't," it is written as "doh." "Mih" is used for "me" and "dey" is used for "they." The final "g" is left off most words in quotes, meaning "doing" becomes "doin." The language may be difficult for some readers, but sounding out the words should help with understanding. The use of the words help create a level of understanding about the people that might not otherwise exist.

The story does not flow in chronological order, which means the reader knows how the story ends before learning the details about the Harwood's arrival in Trinidad. This impacts the language and the tone to some degree. For example, Dr. Sebastian Baker



is mentioned in the first section. He is the one who declares George dead at his home. Sabine also names her son after him. But his history with the family is not fully revealed until much later in the book. Overall, the language is fairly straightforward and other than the local dialect, the reader with an average vocabulary will have no trouble understanding the book.

Structure

The story is divided into four sections. The first is titled “Trinidad, 2006” and includes the first ten chapters of the book. The titles are: The Blimp, Fly Away, The Affair, Nice Try, Sebastian, The Mighty Sparrow's Advice, Brian Lara and His Strange Ideas, Soca Warriors, Manning, and Departure. The chapters in this section are set in 2006, which is literally the end of the book. The final chapter of this section ends when Sabine enters the Winderflet Police Station and fires several shots into the body of a corrupt police officer. The reader may be disappointed to learn that Sabine's fate is not revealed in the book.

The second section is titled “Trinidad, 1956.” In this section, the reader begins to learn the back story. Sabine and George arrive in Trinidad to begin their lives there. They are young and very much in love. There are seven chapters in this section. They are titled: Arrival, The Hiding Club, The University of Woodford Square, The Robber Man, He Wants to Be One of Us, The House in Paramin, and Massa Day Done.

The third section is titled “Trinidad, 1963.” This section picks up near the point the previous section ends. By now, Sabine and George are facing marital issues and Sabine has realized George will never go home, though she still wants to leave Trinidad. There are four chapters in this section. They are: The Castle, Valium, Qu'est-Ce Qu'il Dit?, and De Man Woh Bite. The title that appears in French is a statement of Sabine's French culture and her longing for someone who can share that.

The final section is titled “Trinidad, 1970.” In this section, there is rioting with blacks fighting for their rights and seeking their place in the world, in the local culture, and in the government. There are three chapters in this section. They are: Black Power, Emergency, and The Green Bicycle.” In the final chapter of this section, the rioting has become so severe that Sabine and George fear for their safety. Sabine convinces George to leave but they miss their ship by mere minutes. As they return to the house, their daughter asks if this means they are going to remain on the island, and Sabine agrees to that statement.



Quotes

His first wife, here in his hands. The wife he'd lost.

-- George (Chapter 3 paragraph 22)

Importance: George has just found the letters Sabine wrote to Eric Williams during the years of Williams' political career. He reads them and discovers that Sabine has written her deepest thoughts, fears, and ideas that she might once have shared with George. His "first wife" refers to the relationship he had with Sabine when they were young newlyweds as compared to the stale relationship of their old age.

George vowed on the letters he'd found to be good. A better man.

-- George (Chapter 5 paragraph 5)

Importance: George and Sabine are waiting to meet Sebastian at the airport and George has only recently read the letters Sabine wrote to Eric Williams. Those letters mean a great deal to him and he sees Sabine's writings as something of a betrayal.

You will have the press and the law on your side. There is still legal redress in this country, for the rich.

-- George (Chapter 6 paragraph 29)

Importance: George is talking to Talbot and has offered to pay for Talbot's legal fees if he will testify against the police officers who beat him. George is pointing out an important aspect of the corruption – that the police will only attack the poor because the rich have the means of fighting through legal channels.

A knowing, right there, between her shoulder blades. The garden was too quiet.

-- Sabine (Chapter 10 paragraph 8)

Importance: Sabine hears George jump into the pool and then notes the silence, which is unusual. George has recently been diagnosed with the brain tumor and is slated for surgery to remove it. Sabine rushes outside and George is dead in the pool. It's a statement of their familiarity that Sabine realizes there's something wrong from the silence rather than from any particular sound.

A seventy-five-year-old white woman, mad as hell and riding down to the police station in Winderflet.

-- Narrator (Chapter 10 paragraph 85)

Importance: Sabine has just learned that George was defending Talbot and that police are threatening Talbot now that George is dead. She rides her bicycle for the first time in many years and kills the head of the police department.

Beauteous Trinidad, a country already encrusted with charms. Bejewelled Trinidad – oh, George's lust fantasies had commenced long before he even met the island.



-- Sabine (Chapter 11 paragraph 8)

Importance: Sabine and George are just arriving in Trinidad and it's obvious that he's obsessed with the country already. George's love for Trinidad surpasses everything else and, with only a couple of exceptions, he refuses to consider leaving Trinidad to return to England. George's love for the island is compared to his many affairs.

And you think George will leave his new job and all that's happening here? Go back to that dreary weather and all those grey, sick-looking people in England? Live in the Suburbs?

-- Irit (Chapter 16 paragraph 37)

Importance: Sabine has just said that she and George will be leaving Trinidad at the end of George's contract but Irit voices the thoughts George is having. George is happy in Trinidad and even though he never spells it out for Sabine, he has no intention of leaving. At one point he says that he would live a very ordinary life in England where there are many people of his caliber.

My green Raleigh bicycle saved me. Without it, I was stuck.

-- Sabine (Chapter 12 paragraph 29)

Importance: Sabine goes on to say that she rides all over the region on that bicycle and it gives her at least a small measure of freedom that would otherwise be out of her reach.

At least they killed us lousy filthy Jews quicker. Six million in only five years.

-- Irit (Chapter 14 paragraph 47)

Importance: Irit is talking to another of the wives who condemns Eric Williams. The other wife says Williams' politics will force many of the white businessmen out of Trinidad and dismisses the idea that the blacks are justified in their revolt against the current political system. Irit compares slavery to the Holocaust, saying the main difference is that the Jews were killed quickly instead of deaths spread out over decades.

And at that moment I didn't understand what was happening, how much my fate was bound to his ideas. My husband was in the act of staying.

-- Sabine (Chapter 18 paragraph 12)

Importance: George has purchased land and is beginning construction on a huge home for his family. Sabine has still not come to terms with the idea that they will remain forever in Trinidad, mainly because she refuses to see the truth of George's plans.

Her voice was curt, anger smoldering in it. She was tired of waiting.

-- Sabine (Chapter 20 paragraph 24)

Importance: Sabine has just picked up Granny Seraphina who is headed to Eric



Williams' office with her monthly letter. Each month she takes a letter to Williams, asking for "somptin" each time. But by this time, Williams has been in office for a long time and there are still no changes. It hurts Sabine that the changes haven't come and that the poor people of Trinidad are still living in such terrible conditions.

I imagined them marching down Fredrick Street with Granny, their fists raised. I imagined she was filling their heads, lighting fire in their souls; that one day the boys would be just like Geddes Granger.

-- Sabine (Chapter 23 paragraph 66)

Importance: Sabine has been a proponent of change for the good it could do for the poor of Trinidad, including Venus, Granny Seraphina, and their families. "Them" in this quote refers to Venus's children and Sabine believes they will be doing what's right in their quest for change. She's later very disappointed to find that the boys fall in with the mob mentality and that one of them even pelts Sabine with rocks.