

This Earth of Mankind

Pramoedya Ananta Toer

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Summary

Pramoedya Ananta Toer—a famous Indonesian editor, essayist, and social activist—wrote *This Earth of Mankind* (1980)—the first book of his series *The Buru Quartet*—while imprisoned in the Buru Concentration Camp following a military coup that overthrew Sukarno, the first democratically elected president of Indonesia. Incarcerated for 14 years and prevented from having writing material, Toer memorized the books of his series and recited them to his fellow inmates each day until his release in 1979. The novel, set in Java in 1898, follows the first-person perspective of 18-year-old Minke, an especially bright Native Javanese boy who enrolls in an exclusive prep school for Dutch students. As his time to graduate approaches, a series of events causes him to wrestle with whether his allegiance is to his native Java or to the Dutch who educated him. Meanwhile, Minke falls in love with a girl named Annelies, whose mother is a concubine who desires a better fate for her daughter in a world riven by racial division and rampant misogyny. All the factors Toer writes about are those he faced as he lived through turbulent decades of transition in Indonesia. Toer’s books, though banned in his home country, have been international bestsellers. His accolades include the [PEN/Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write Award](#), the Fund for Free Expression Award, the [Fukuoka Asian Culture Prize](#), and the [Pablo Neruda Award](#) for the *Buru Quartet*.

This guide is based on the Penguin Paperback Edition (1996).

Content Warning: *This Earth of Mankind* discusses classism and racism at length. Chapters 6 and 14 contain descriptions of rape (with the latter perpetuated by a family member).

Plot Summary

The protagonist begins *This Earth of Mankind* by saying he does not intend to use his real name. He instead refers to himself with a name used by an aggravated teacher in grade school: Minke, meaning “monkey.” The novel is based on notes he took 13 years ago, in 1898. Minke describes a period of mourning in which a woman left him, and he did not know if he would ever see her again. He explains that he is a Native Javanese boy and a Muslim. Because of his grandfather’s influence, he has been able to attend schools meant for the children of Europeans—“Pure-Bloods”—and Mixed-Blood Indos. Now, Minke is in his last year at H.B.S. prep school in Surabaya as its sole Native student.

Minke is fixated on the beauty of Dutch Queen Wilhelmina, who shares his birthday. A fellow student named Robert Suurhof invites him to meet a girl whom he says is more beautiful than the new queen. Minke rides with Robert S. to the home of Herman Mellema, a wealthy Dutch recluse. Herman's son, an Indo also named Robert, is reluctant to allow Minke into his home. Minke sees Robert M.'s younger sister, Annelies, and realizes she is indeed more beautiful than the queen. He also meets the siblings' mother Nyai Ontosoroh, a Native woman who is a concubine—the unmarried partner of Herman (with *nyai* being the word for concubines and housekeepers). When the two Roberts leave, Annelies gives Minke a tour of the plantation, called Wonokromo. Awed by her beauty, Minke kisses her on the cheek, which she finds disturbing.

The group sits for supper, only to be interrupted by bearish patriarch Herman Mellema, who challenges Minke's presence, calling him a "monkey." Nyai orders him to leave and apologizes for his behavior. As Minke and Nyai leave, the latter stops their carriage and confronts the former with Annelies's statement that he kissed her. When Minke admits it, Nyai asks him to kiss Annelies again. He complies, and Nyai asks him to return soon.

Minke cannot stop thinking about Annelies. He goes to his business partner Jean Marais, a French military veteran, for wisdom. Jean tells Minke he is in love with Annelies and should return to Wonokromo soon. Back at his rented room, Minke encounters Darsam, a fierce-looking former soldier who is Nyai's most trusted servant. Darsam presents Minke with a letter saying Annelies is withdrawn, and that only his presence can restore her. Minke moves into Nyai's home. Annelies appears gaunt but recovers quickly upon seeing Minke. Nyai tells Minke that a carriage will take him to school every morning.

Minke learns that Annelies was so distressed the day she met him that she asked to sleep with her mother. As they lay talking, Nyai told her how her father sold her to Herman when she was only 14. Nyai decided she would improve her position in life so that no daughter of hers would ever be sold as a wife or concubine—and instead have a choice of husband. Thus, she learned languages, literature, and business skills, eventually taking over the plantation's operation from Herman. Nyai tells Annelies that Maurits, Herman's son by a Dutch wife, appeared one day at Wonokromo. He condemned his father, saying he was the legitimate heir and would take all of Herman's possessions one day. Herman deteriorated and his relationship with Nyai, who did not know he was married, ended.

Robert M. invites Minke to his room, quizzing him about his intentions. Later, Nyai shows Minke an article presenting a new, enlightened view of nyais. Minke confesses he wrote it under a pseudonym. Nyai is impressed and in turn, impresses Minke with her grasp of Native literature.

Nyai wakes Minke in the night to tell him that a policeman has come for him. The officer compels Minke to come with him, though he will not reveal where they are going. Minke finds himself on a train with the officer, riding toward his hometown. Eventually, he ends up at the home of the *bupati*—the Native local governor. As Minke prostrates himself, he realizes the bupati is his father, who chastises him for not reading his family's letters—telling him to attend his installation as an interpreter for Dutch visitors. Minke's mother greets him warmly and asks about his current living arrangement—knowing he lives with a nyai's family; she scolds him for ignoring his own heritage. Minke's interpretation at his father's installation impresses the "assistant resident," a Dutch overlord named Herbert de la Croix, who invites Minke to his home the next day. There, Minke meets Herbert's two daughters, who joust with him intellectually as a test.

While on the train back to Surabaya, Minke notices an Asian man watching him. The man, whom Minke nicknames Fatso, gets off the train when he does and follows his carriage with his own. Darsam and Annelies greet Minke. In town, Darsam tells Minke to accompany him into a store and confesses that Robert M. asked him to assassinate the younger. Darsam believes Minke should avoid Wonokromo. Minke returns to his carriage and tells Annelies that he must stay at a rented room.

When the police took Minke from Wonokromo, Nyai ordered Robert M. to ride to the police station to ask about Minke's destination. Robert M. stops on the road, unconcerned about Minke. Babah Ah Tjong, the Asian man who owns the brothel next to Wonokromo, approaches Robert M. He lures Robert M. into his establishment and sends him into a room with Maiko, a Japanese sex worker.

Babah cleans Robert M. up, cuts his hair, and sends him home late in the afternoon. When Robert M. says the police never heard of Minke, Nyai calls him a liar and says she recognizes the smell of the brothel on him, like his father. Robert M. leaves Wonokromo.

While visiting his business partner Jean, Minke sees Fatso watching him. Minke's landlord tries to attack Fatso, who deftly rebuffs him and runs away. Minke receives letters from Dutch overlord Herbert's daughters encouraging him to do well in his studies, because they believe he will be a great man. Darsam arrives with a letter from Nyai saying Annelies is desperately ill.

Arriving at Wonokromo, Minke receives a scolding from Nyai for his absence. She says only he can make Annelies well, though Annelies scarcely responds when he tries to speak to her. Dr. Martinet arrives and tells Minke he has sedated Annelies, and that she will awaken soon. He confides that Minke is now her primary caregiver, as she only responds to him. When Annelies wakes, both she and Minke quickly begin to feel better.

Minke's daily arrival at school in an expensive carriage attracts much attention from his fellow students, who begin to avoid him. The school director asks Minke if he is married, which would require him to withdraw from school. Minke attends a Saturday open discussion in which his favorite teacher, Miss Magda Peters, reads an article he himself wrote without knowing who the author is. However, Robert S. identifies Minke as the author. Magda makes Minke stand before the class and praises him. She then quizzes Minke about his living arrangement. He tells her about Nyai's great learning and wisdom, and asks her to visit Wonokromo. When Magda does, she is overwhelmed by all she sees and affirms Minke's judgment of the plantation as an excellent place to learn.

One evening, Annelies summons Minke to her bedroom to tell her a story so she can sleep. They end up having intercourse. Minke asks Annelies if she ever had sex with someone before him, and she confesses that she was raped by her brother, Robert M. They fall asleep together, and Minke realizes Nyai has covered them with blankets.

Minke learns that Robert S. spreads rumors about him. When Robert S. tells the paper that publishes Minke's stories that Minke is a Native, the paper summons Minke and offers him a permanent position. Minke also meets with Dr. Martinet and has a candid discussion about Annelies's well-being. He learns that the doctor is interested in the psychological aspects of healing and has written articles about it.

On a Sunday afternoon, Minke grows apprehensive, thinking he saw Fatso. When Fatso strolls past the front gate of Wonokromo, Darsam pursues him with a machete. Alarmed, Minke pursues Darsam, followed by Annelies and Nyai. They chase Fatso onto the grounds of the

brothel and go through an open door where they find the body of the recently deceased Herman. The sex worker Maiko appears, along with Robert M., who runs away. Nyai takes Annelies home. A police carriage arrives, and Darsam and Minke explain how they came to be at the brothel.

Great notoriety follows the police investigation, with many sensational newspaper reports; everyone who knows Minke reads about him at the brothel. Determining that Herman was poisoned, the police charge Babah with murder and commence a trial in which Minka, Annelies, and Nyai must testify. The judge stops the trial when it becomes clear that Fatso and Robert M.'s testimonies must be heard.

Minke returns to school and is immediately expelled. His teacher Magda shows up at Wonokromo and asks Minke to come to a meeting at school. He learns that there was such an uproar over his expulsion, that the administration decided to allow him to return, with strict limitations: Minke will attend the last three months of class, then take his final exams.

Minke arrives with Annelies for his graduation ceremony. He is stunned to learn that he finished with the second highest exam grades throughout the Indies. When the director congratulates him, Minke invites him, the faculty, and his fellow students to attend his and Annelies's wedding celebration. A crowd arrives, many of whom end up spending the night.

Six months after the wedding, Annelies and Nyai are summoned to the Dutch court, where they learn that Herman's son by his Dutch wife, Maurits, is asserting his control over Herman's estate. Since Annelies is a minor and the Dutch do not recognize her marriage to Minke, she must go to Amsterdam under the care of Maurits. Minke and Nyai summon several attorneys (including one sent by Herbert), who conclude that they cannot stop the proceedings. The judge orders Annelies, who is now bedridden, to depart for Amsterdam in five days. Darsam and other fighters surround the compound and do battle with the police, resulting in several deaths. A fearsome group of government soldiers arrives and dispel those defending Annelies. Minke and Nyai stand in the doorway and watch as Annelies is escorted to a carriage and driven away.

Background

Historical Context: Late 19th Century Social Classes in Java

A basic overview of *This Earth of Mankind's* distinct social classes is necessary for the reader to grasp the unique milieu that defines the decisions and actions of the characters. In particular, while members of the upper class possess an almost divine ability to move about and make uninhibited decisions that affect the lower classes, the potential of citizens in the lower classes is strictly limited. As one's caste is set by birth and legally reinforced by the established Dutch legal system, Pramoedya Ananta Toer makes it clear that escaping the boundaries of class is an impossibility. This tiered society keeps accurate, perpetual records of the births of children who belong to the two upper castes.

As a long-time colony of the Netherlands, the upper class of Java comprises the "Pure-Bloods"—individuals whose parents are of European descent. Legally, these fair-skinned people are both Dutch and Javanese citizens. The Pure-Bloods descend from the colonial conquerors of Indonesia, meaning the economic and legal world revolves around them. Since the Dutch began their conquest of Indonesia in the 17th Century, eventually naming it the Netherlands East Indies, it was inevitable that a biological group of multiracial citizens would emerge. In the novel, they are typically referred to as Indo, Indisch, or Mixed-Blood. Though legally not equal to the Pure-Bloods, this group holds many of the benefits belonging to those of European descent. Society regards Indos as a proper second caste. The chief right possessed by the Indos is legal recognition—they hold lawful rights in the courts and are able to access most of the property, nuptial, and financial prerogatives of the Pure-Bloods. The lowest class, called Natives, are those whose parents are of Javanese descent. Legally, people of this caste have no legal recourse against any claims by either of the higher classes. Even among the Natives, however, there are social distinctions. Some are considered High Javanese and others Low Javanese. High Javanese citizens are typically those descended from the Indonesian royalty that existed prior to Dutch occupation. The upper classes recognize the High Javanese as go-betweens and grant them the power of regulating Native society.

Cultural Context: Totalitarian Literary Censorship

Toer served multiple prison sentences over the course of his life because of his essays and novels. During his active literary career, the author was censored and jailed by three different totalitarian regimes. Japan occupied Indonesia during World War II, following which the Dutch reasserted their colonial control—only to face a spontaneous uprising in 1945 that developed into the 5-year Indonesian War of Independence. When Indonesia gained independence from the Netherlands in 1949, Sukarno declared himself president for life. He was succeeded by Suharto in 1967, who reigned until 1998. Each of these three regimes found a reason to incarcerate Toer, who never called for or instigated rebellion against any of them.

Toer's translator, Max Lane, points out that Toer was jailed from 1965 to 1975 without ever facing trial. In total, Toer served 14 years in jail. The Dutch imprisoned Toer, fearing he was a revolutionary. Sukarno's forces erroneously believed Toer was a Communist and imprisoned him. After Suharto took power, he kept Toer in prison for another eight years. Following his release, Toer's books continued to be banned in Indonesia. Governmental criticism of Toer's writings proclaimed that his work had Communist leanings, although "the author's great literary dexterity made it impossible to identify actual examples of this Marxism-Leninism" (363)—meaning the government banned his literature because they *assumed* he was a Communist, even though there was no actual evidence of this in his writing. In his writings, Toer accurately described life under totalitarian rule in Indonesia.

During his longest stint in prison, when it was a capital crime for incarcerated individuals to possess writing implements, Toer famously entertained his fellow prisoners by reciting the work he created each morning. This was the author's way of memorizing the books he was creating with no way to record them. Following his release from prison, Toer committed to writing the four novels of his *Buru Quartet*, of which *This Earth of Mankind* is the first—an effort that required two years.

Chapter Summaries & Analyses

Translator's Note and Chapters 1-6

Translator's Note Summary

Content Warning: Chapter 6 contains a description of rape.

Max Lane, the translator who translated *This Earth of Mankind* three times, sets the stage for the economics of Indonesia that made it attractive to Europeans. He describes the characteristics of Dutch colonialism, how it disempowered Natives and made the Netherlands, like other colonial powers, very wealthy.

The characters in the novel are divided into several distinct groups. Lane describes the groups' languages, the way they relate to each other, and most importantly, their relationships with the Dutch colonial rulers. He concludes the Translator's Note by saying he tried to make the novel as easy to read as possible, though translating phrases with specific cultural meanings can make this process difficult.

Chapter 1 Summary

Minke, the narrator, identifies himself by this name, implying it means "monkey"—though it can also be translated to "mine." He writes about a series of events that happened 13 years ago, meaning the novel's present day should be 1912. He refers to someone who left him, a woman whom he is uncertain he will ever see again. Minke took notes throughout his life prior to writing the novel, and he compares these notes so he will know what to say.

Chapter 2 Summary

Minke gives an overview of his early childhood, describing the wonder of growing up in a world of new technologies and human capabilities in the process of shifting from manual labor to mechanization. Because he receives an education of "a very broad general knowledge [...] of the same level in many of the European countries" (16), Minke becomes aware of scientific and industrial advances around the world.

In subtle self-references, Minke reveals he is Muslim, though living under Dutch Reformed Church rule. He is a Native, meaning his parents are Javanese. Minke's grandfather was an extremely influential Javanese man who made his education possible.

Minke confesses his infatuation with the new Dutch ruler, Queen Wilhelmina, born the same year he was. He keeps a picture of her in his room. Robert Suurhof, a fellow student at H.B.S., an exclusive prep school in the city of Surabaya, bursts into Minke's room without knocking and finds him "crouched over the picture of that maiden, that beloved of the gods" (19). Calling Minke a "lady-killer," Robert S. invites him to visit the home of a young woman who is allegedly more beautiful than the queen. Along the way, Robert S. explains to Minke that he has no real interest in the girl, despite her beauty and wealth, because she is an Indo. Though Robert S. is also multiracial, he tells Minke that he will only settle for a girl of pure European descent.

Minke and Robert S. travel in an expensive carriage to the home of Herman Mellema, a reclusive Dutch entrepreneur whose home and businesses thrive because of the management of his Native concubine, Nyai Ontosoroh. Robert Mellema, Herman's son who is about Minke's age, greets the two boys but expresses reserve toward Minke, who is fully Native. Annelies Mellema, Robert M.'s younger sister, greets the boys. Minke is instantly smitten by her beauty. In their conversation, Minke reveals that he *is* a Native, rather than an Indo like the three others. The two Roberts leave to hunt, and Annelies takes Minke on a tour of the Mellema plantation, Wonokromo. Annelies introduces Minke to Nyai Ontosoroh, her mother, who surprises him when she speaks perfect Dutch. Nyai tells Minke to call her "Mama," as he is reluctant to call her Nyai (in ordinary conversation, calling someone "nyai" would be considered an insult). In the process of touring the plantation, Minke tells Annelies that she is the most beautiful woman he has ever seen and kisses her on the cheek. Her confused reaction causes him to believe he will be kicked out.

As Minke eats supper with the family that evening, Herman enters the dining room and challenges Minke's presence since he is a Native. Nyai orders Herman to leave and apologizes to Minke. After supper, Nyai tells Minke that Annelies has no friends and implies that he can be her friend. She then invites him to live at the Mellema home. Darsam, Nyai's fearsome servant, accompanies Minke and Robert S. home.

Chapter 3 Summary

Minke continually receives entreaties from Nyai to return to Wonokromo. He cannot stop envisioning Annelies, and wonders if he has been bewitched by a spell cast by Nyai. Minke turns to his furniture business partner, Jean Marais, a Frenchman and worldly war veteran, for advice. Jean tells a reluctant Minke that he has fallen in love with Annelies: "You're really in trouble; it's serious when you can't tell somebody they've fallen in love" (55-56). Jean is an artist who ended up fighting for the Dutch against rebellious Natives in Aceh, a province on the northern end of Java, where he lost a leg. He fathered a child, May, with a Native woman who was a prisoner of war and whose brother killed her because of their relationship.

Returning to his room, Minke finds Nyai's servant Darsam waiting for him with a letter from Nyai. She writes that Annelies has become withdrawn, and she herself must neglect her business duties to care for the girl. Nyai requests that Minke return and stay in their home, to which he complies.

Chapter 4 Summary

Minke arrives with his luggage at Wonokromo, suspicious of Nyai's intentions. Annelies looks gaunt, but rejoices in Minke's presence and moves him into his own bedroom. While he unpacks his bags, she points out that he brought a number of unopened letters. Minke questions Annelies about her brother Robert M., who dislikes his family, and about her father Herman, who seldom comes to the plantation. He wrestles with the strangeness of their relationships, noting, "A puzzling family indeed, each member playing their part in this fearful play" (67). Annelies is grateful that Minke will stay with them, saying he is their first guest in five years. Minke thinks, "How lonely were the hearts of this girl and her mother in the midst of this abundant wealth" (68). As Minke makes notes of his perceptions, Nyai comes to his room to welcome him and offer him a carriage to drive him to school.

During his first evening at Wonokromo, Minke tells Annelies the story of Jean's service with the Dutch army, describing the lonely existence of Jean's daughter, May. Nyai describes the loneliness Annelies has experienced since her removal from private school as a child. Minke admires Nyai for having achieved and learned so much despite being denied an education.

Chapter 5 Summary

Here, the first-person narration shifts from Minke to Annelies, who shares with him Nyai's life story, as told to Annelies. The night after Annelies met Minke, she was so upset that she asked to sleep with her mother. Annelies and Nyai had a lengthy conversation about happiness and how Herman's sudden "madness" robbed Nyai of happiness—leaving her determined to help Annelies achieve happiness.

Nyai then describes her childhood, having been "Sanikem" before becoming a concubine. Her father, Sastrotomo, was a clerk who yearned for a better paying, more prestigious job. He wished to become the paymaster of a sugar factory, to whom citizens would bow in respect. He groveled and placated the Dutch overlords, alienating other Javanese though failing to become a paymaster. Nyai describes the extremes her father sank to, saying "How he humiliated himself and his dignity" (80). By the time she was 14, Nyai's father had already refused many suitors' requests to marry her. Instead, he brokered a deal to give her as a concubine, a nyai, to regional Dutch supervisor, Herman Mellema. Against the pleading of her mother, her father made Nyai pack her clothing and ride to Herman's home, where she became his concubine.

In telling her story, Nyai explains to Annelies that she has provided for her and raised her as she has so the latter might never experience the same fate. When Nyai's father came to see her, she refused, perceiving herself to be an orphan. Herman relocated to Surabaya, buying a large acreage for his dairy cattle. From the beginning, he taught Nyai how to manage the farm. She studied in the evening, learning Dutch, studying business management, and saving money. Nyai realized Herman was more dependent on her than she on him. As Herman spent less time at home, Nyai expanded their business ventures and learned how to present herself as a lady. During this period, Nyai and Herman were happy together. She said to Annelies, "He fitted exactly the Javanese description of a husband: instructor and god" (92). Herman went to the Dutch court and acknowledged Robert M. and Annelies as his children, granting them certain legal rights. Because he had not married Nyai, she had no legal rights. However, Herman placed his businesses in Nyai's name, intending to protect her income.

Nyai reveals that a young Dutch engineer came to Surabaya and learned Herman lived there. The man came to Wonokromo and identified himself as Maurits Mellema, Herman's son by his wife in the Netherlands, whom he never divorced. Maurits condemns Herman and proclaimed that, as Herman's rightful heir, he would take all his possessions one day. When

Maurits left, Nyai verbally attacked Herman for keeping his wife a secret. From this moment on, Herman slowly receded from Nyai and Wonokromo; Nyai assumed all business responsibilities. This estrangement has since become permanent. Herman comes and goes without interacting with Nyai or his children. As Robert M. grows older and graduates from prep school, he also wanders aimlessly.

Chapter 6 Summary

Annelies's brother, Robert M., invites Minke into his room. Robert M. quizzes Minke about his intentions and feelings for Annelies in a condescending tone, saying, "What a pity you're only a Native" (105). He then invites Minke to play games and go hunting with him. Distrusting Robert M., Minke is evasive and refuses his requests. As Minke remains aloof, Robert M. grows angry, reminding him that he is "only a Native" and issuing a vague threat.

Annelies summons Minke from Robert M.'s room. Nyai appears, holding a copy of Minke's article "An Extraordinary Nyai That I knew (sic)" (109). Minke admits that he wrote the imagined story, using the pseudonym "Max Tollenaar," about Nyai. Nyai surprises Minke by telling him a great deal about Native literature. She encourages Minke to continue to write as he learns more about human experiences and human nature. However, intuiting that he is planning a story about Robert M., she asks him to allow her to read anything he writes about her family.

Minke gives up his plan to write an article on Robert M. He reflects on Robert M.'s desire to sail with the British Navy. Minke notes that his fellow students pay little attention to Japan, and that the Indies have done little in regards to their absence of a navy—given that the British and Dutch conquered different parts of the East Indies with superior navies. (This is foreshadowing, as Pramoedya Ananta Toer is writing after World War II, during which the Japanese occupied Indonesia.)

Translator's Note and Chapters 1-6 Analysis

The first section of *This Earth of Mankind* could be referred to as the "innocence section" of the narrative. The relationship between Minke and Annelies evokes the atmosphere of childlike romance. Their walk across the plantation, as Minke watches Annelies with the animals and workers in the sunlight, and her watching his discomfort with the odd smells and unusual environment, have a playful, pastoral purity.

This air of sweet romance continues after Minke and Annelies's separation. After their first meeting, each is cast off-balance. Minke ends up going to see his trusted confidant Jean, who immediately says he is in love with Annelies and encourages him to see her repeatedly, which will reveal if his feelings are true or merely a passing attraction. The poignancy of Jean's words touches Minke, as he knows the older had known real love and lost it brutally (his lover was killed by her own brother). A parallel scene occurs when Annelies lies in bed with Nyai, wanting to ask her opinion of Minke; her mother reflects on the brutality of her own loveless childhood. Like Jean, Nyai's earliest romantic experience ended with loss. When at last she came to love and appreciate Herman, she discovered he had a wife and son whom he had abandoned. This was the reason he never married Nyai, his concubine—he legally could not. This fact doomed all Nyai had worked for, leaving her at the mercy of Dutch law, to which she was a non-person. This is one of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's bitterest examples of impassable **Cultural Divisions in 19th Century Javanese Society** disrupting the lives of innocent Natives.

Another similarity shared by Minke and Annelies in the first section is the overcoming of their doubts and preconceived notions. Annelies has never heard anyone tell her how beautiful she is due to being sheltered. Thus, when Minke voices this very compliment, she is so stunned that she must ask her mother if he is being sincere. Later, when Minke kisses Annelies, she is at a loss as to how to take it. She waits for Minke to leave before confiding in her mother about the kiss. Nyai's response is to stop the carriage and confront Minke—not because she is outraged but because her dream for her daughter is finally coming true. She senses Annelies's attraction and only wants to be certain, through a second kiss, that Minke is a person of integrity who shares her daughter's feelings. Annelies's crush fulfills for Nyai what she never had—pure love. Nyai's only wish for her daughter is that she be able to choose her own love and not be trapped as either concubine or wife to a man she did not choose, a common happening in a society rife with **Entrenched Misogyny**. Minke is exactly the person Nyai wants in Annelies's life. While readers may react negatively to Nyai's openness to allowing someone so young to have a romantic relationship, it should be noted that Javanese culture in this era encouraged arranged marriages for daughters by the time of their sexual maturity.

Like Annelies, Minke also wrestles with doubts. He is subject to the same prejudices held by the vast majority of Javanese society. It is nearly impossible for him to perceive that a Native woman (Nyai) could effortlessly run a large agricultural organization, speak eloquent Dutch, and face down a Dutchman (Herman) who is technically her owner. More than these unexpected realities, Nyai challenges Minke's concept of the "unworthiness" of nyais,

concubines. The misogynistic disconnect here, as revealed by Toer, is that few of the Pure-Bloods' kept women were concubines by choice. Rather, poor or greedy fathers often sold their daughters to members of the upper classes, irrespective of their wishes. Just as Jean wisely counsels Minke to explore his love for Annelies, he advises him to be fair and just in his thoughts toward others, a practice that combats prejudice.

This section's air of innocence actually begins with Minke's wide-eyed descriptions of the changing world he learns about at school. His first observations and declarations about the Dutch East Indies are equally innocuous: He describes the distinctions between himself and other students as if describing things that are incidental and not at all important. Going forward, his naiveté will disappear, replaced with new awareness. Toer will demonstrate that there are many ways to lose one's innocence.

A minor theme that develops in this section is loneliness, spoken and unspoken. Minke tells Nyai about the loneliness of May, Jean's daughter, who has almost no social network, constantly begging her father to pay attention to her to little avail. Nyai responds by saying her own daughter suffers with loneliness as well. Withdrawn from school a decade ago, Annelies has no peer or playmate in her life. Though Minke and Nyai do not address it, they also feel loneliness. Minke is the only Native and Muslim at his prep school; he is the only student in his boarding house and is estranged from his family. With Herman no longer a part of Nyai's life, she has no equal, and society considers her a pariah, leaving her isolated.

This section also foreshadows future disruption. Toer's introduction of the bearish Herman and the brooding Robert M. assures that their disruption of the serenity of Wonokromo will continue. The brooding silence of Minke's classmate Robert S. as the pair ride away also implies something amiss.

Chapters 7-14

Chapter 7 Summary

Content Warning: Chapter 14 contains a description of rape perpetuated by a family member.

Nyai wakes Minke in the middle of the night, telling him someone has come to see him. A

police officer waits downstairs with orders to transport Minke to an unannounced destination by 5pm. Minke protests, detailing his legal rights and demanding to know who has sent for him and where he is to go. The officer remains pleasant but insistent. Annelies expresses great anxiety as she prepares Minke: "Annelies [...] approached me, unable to speak. [...] She grabbed hold of my hand and held it. Her hand trembled" (117). Eventually, Minke ends up riding a train with the police officer to his hometown, which he identifies as simply "T—". Minke realizes he is being taken to the residence of the bupati, the highest ranking Native official of the town of B—. Once at the residence, Minke is ordered to walk on his knees as a sign of reverence. Sitting with head bowed, Minke recognizes his father's voice and realizes he is now the local bupati. Minke apologizes for not reading and responding to the family's letters, letters that would have informed him of his father's new position and required participation in his father's installation. Minke's father knows about his relationship with the Mellemas and castigates him for poor judgment. While apologizing to his father, Minke's thoughts are defiant, revealing his belief that he is intellectually superior to his family.

After leaving his father, Minke meets with his mother, who expresses affection and acceptance. Next, he encounters his judgmental older brother. Minke chastises him when he discovers he has found his journal and is reading it. As the brothers argue, Minke's mother interrupts them. She asks Minke if he has forgotten how to be Javanese, warning him that "You've mixed too much with the Dutch. So now you don't like to mix with your own people" (130).

Minke describes the elaborate preparations for his father's installation. An official tailor outfits Minke in the traditional clothing of a Javanese royal. In addition to accompanying his parents to the ceremony, Minke serves as the official interpreter, doing an excellent job to universal praise. Beginning with the Dutch "assistant resident," Herbert de la Croix, many locals invite Minke to visit their homes, assuming he will soon be a significant Native leader.

When Minke arrives at the home of the assistant resident, Herbert introduces him to his two daughters, Miriam and Sarah de la Croix, graduates of Minke's school. Herbert abruptly leaves Minke alone with his daughters. They ply him with questions to prove their social superiority, attempting to divine his thoughts about literature, the future of Java, and the rightful place of Native peoples. Afterward, the sisters make it clear that they intend to be Minke's confidants and advisors: "Fight at our first meeting, but be friends afterwards, perhaps forever. That's right, yes" (142).

Chapter 8 Summary

Because of Minke's stellar performance during the installation and his invitation to the assistant resident's home, Minke's parents no longer criticize him. He prepares to return to Wonokromo and telegraphs Nyai, asking for a carriage. Out of courtesy, Minke returns to Herbert's home, where his daughters treat him with respect. Herbert, though sincere, reveals a bias against Natives, believing them incapable of social advancement.

On the train to Surabaya, Minke notices an Asian man watching him, whom he begins to call "Fatso." When Annelies and Darsam take Minke toward Wonokromo in their carriage, Fatso follows them, though he disappears when Darsam stops in town. Darsam takes Minke into a coffee house, while Annelies waits in the carriage. He confesses that Robert M. attempted to enlist his help in assassinating Minke, but he refused. Minke becomes afraid, as "Surabaya was famous for its paid killers" (154). Back in the carriage, Minke tells Annelies that he is not going to Wonokromo yet, as he needs to spend some time at his rented room. Alone in his room, Minke grapples with feelings of distrust toward everyone he knows.

Chapter 9 Summary

This chapter describes what happened to Robert M. after the police took Minke away for his father's installation. When Minke leaves, Annelies demands that her mother do something. Nyai realizes how helpless and emotional her daughter is. She summons Robert M. and tells him to go to the police in Surabaya to find out what happened to Minke. Threatened by Darsam, Robert M. rides away on his horse. Annelies falls ill, and Darsam goes to retrieve Dr. Martinet.

Robert M. stops his horse as soon as he is out of view of Wonokromo, as he has no desire to find any information about Minke. As he sits, the plantation's closest neighbor, Babah Ah Tjong, greets him. Babah, a Chinese immigrant, is the owner of the brothel next door to Wonokromo. He reminds Robert M. that he has never entered his brothel and lures him inside. Within, Babah entices Robert M. with a variety of drinks, delicacies, and different prostitutes until he settles on the Japanese woman Maiko, about whom Babah says, "This is my own one. Sinyo [Young Sir] can have her if you like" (167). Babah shows Robert M. and Maiko to an opulent bedroom.

Chapter 10 Summary

Minke explains that the information in this chapter comes from Maiko's court testimony, as expressed in the first-person. Maiko shares her history of being sold from one brothel owner to another, beginning in Japan and finally ending up in Java. Her "price" consistently drops as clients discover she carries a venereal disease nicknamed "Burmese syphilis." She says, "It was famous for being incurable, and the men were ruined and destroyed more quickly and more painfully" (170). Maiko then describes her contact with Robert M.

Following Maiko's testimony, Babah's testimony is recorded in the first-person. He describes greeting Robert M. when he came out of the bedroom after a full day with Maiko. Babah tells Robert M. that he owes nothing for his time with Maiko. He then summons a female barber who cuts Robert M.'s hair and applies scented lotion.

Minke ends the chapter by relating the observations of Annelies and Nyai. Annelies awakens in the afternoon and, with her mother, sits in front of their home awaiting Robert M.'s return from the police station. Two hours later, Robert M. returns and reports that "The police don't know where Minke was taken. They don't recognize that name at all" (178). Nyai knows where he has been because of his appearance and smell. Robert M. changes his clothes and walks away from the house.

Chapter 11 Summary

Minke wakes with a terrible headache. After his landlady, Mrs. Telinga, feeds and cares for him, Minke visits his friend Jean. Minke spots Fatso sitting outside the house where Jean is painting. Minke's landlord, Mr. Telinga, shows up after shopping. When he learns that Minke is being stalked, he confronts Fatso. Mr. Telinga attempts to fight Fatso, who parries and avoids all of his blows. Fatso runs away, followed by Mr. Telinga, who returns out of breath. Though he fears for his life, Minke cannot report this incident to the police, believing it would bring unwanted attention to his parents, Nyai, and Annelies. In order to conquer his perpetual headache and end the crisis, he must emotionally release Annelies—which results in a slight abatement of his physical pain.

Minke receives a lengthy letter from Miriam describing her father Herbert's understandings of why the Indonesian people have not been able to rise and become partners with the Dutch, rather than continuing to be their indentured servants. She tells Minke of the extended

conversation she and her sister had with their father, expressing that Minke may be the long-awaited voice who raises the consciousness of the Javanese people. Touched, Minke answers her letter.

As Minke concludes his reply, Darsam startles him by appearing with a letter from Nyai saying that Annelies is ill. When Minke tells Mrs. Telinga that he is going to care for Annelies, she reminds him that he is also ill. Darsam responds, “Young Master will recover quickly at Wonokromo” (196).

Chapter 12 Summary

Nyai initially scolds Minke for having been gone too long. She recognizes that he is also ill, then says, “No matter. If the two of them get together again, everything will be all right. The sickness will disappear” (197). At first, Annelies, who is semi-comatose, scarcely responds to Minke, though he continually speaks to her. Eventually, Dr. Martinet arrives and confides that he has sedated Annelies, who will soon awaken. The doctor tells Minke that Annelies is especially fragile, and that Minke himself must now become her caregiver and ensure she experiences no major surprises going forward: “Her heart is too soft, too gentle. She can’t cope with hurt. You must always humor, caress, protect her” (203). As Annelies awakens, Minke struggles with the new responsibility of assuring her health. The two converse, and their illnesses disappear.

Chapter 13 Summary

Living at Wonokromo and riding an expensive carriage to school every day sets Minke apart from his fellow students. He notices that his relationships with his schoolmates and teachers have changed. Most students avoid him, and the school’s director questions him about his status, verifying he is not married. Minke realizes that Robert S. is spreading rumors about him. The only person who treats Minke the same is his literature instructor, Miss Magda Peters. Magda leads an open group discussion every Saturday afternoon. When she brings up an article written by Minke under his pseudonym, Robert S. stands before the class and identifies Minke as the author, intending to shame him. However, Magda calls Minke before the class and praises him. Her praise and willingness to question the primacy of Europeans in human development results in awkward silence and the termination of the discussion group. When Minke gives Magda a ride home in his carriage, she takes him into her home, praises his brilliance, and kisses him.

Minke receives two long letters from Miriam and Sarah. In them, he learns that Herman's son by his Dutch wife, Maurits, experienced capture by the British in the Boer War. The letters stir jealousy in Annelies. This is compounded when Minke says that, since she is no longer sick, he is going to sleep in his own room at night rather than in hers.

When Magda quizzes Minka about living with a nyai, he tells her that Nyai is self-educated. When Magda refuses to believe it, Minke challenges her to meet Nyai. They go to Wonokromo, so Magda can evaluate it as a suitable place for a scholar. Magda is stunned by Annelies's beauty and Nyai's intelligence. Later, she tells Minke that she would like to visit Wonokromo often, though she knows she cannot because of the gossip it would stir.

Chapter 14 Summary

One evening, as Minke finishes his studies, Annelies demands that he come to her bedroom and tell her a story to help her sleep. Minke remarks that she is a spoiled child but does as asked, making up a story about a princess so beautiful that all of nature makes allowances for her. The story quickly morphs into a description of their relationship. They proceed to make love for the first time. Afterward, Minke asks Annelies if she had experienced intercourse before that night. She sobs, saying, "I knew [...] that one day a man I loved would ask me that" (241). Before answering, she asks Minke if he will marry her, to which he agrees.

Annelies confesses that Nyai once sent her to find Darsam in the fields. While searching, she encountered her brother in the reeds. Robert M. proceeded to rape her. During the attack, Annelies's horse bit Robert M. on the behind, startling him and allowing her to escape. She decided not to tell Nyai for fear Darsam would kill Robert M. and cause more trouble for her mother. Annelies and Minke have intercourse a second time, falling asleep afterward. Minke realizes that Nyai entered the room and covered them with blankets while they slept.

Chapters 7-14 Analysis

The second section of the novel could be referred to as the "loss of innocence" section. As Toer demonstrates, there are many ways one can lose one's innocence. The most obvious form of losing innocence is through first-time sexual intercourse, which occurs between Annelies and Minke in Chapter 14. After the experience, Toer describes a darkness between them that Minke addresses by asking Annelies if she had been with another man before him, implying his sudden awareness that she was not a virgin. In this sense, Minke lost innocence

(ignorance) as well. Sobbing, Annelies shares a long kept secret—another first-time experience—that she had been raped by her brother. This sharing produces deep emotional intimacy and trust between the pair.

For the first—and second—time, Annelies experiences jealousy. The Dutch de la Croix sisters' letters do not read as romantic to Minke—but for Annelies, these missives from two young, unwed Pure-Blood girls stir a new emotion in her. This feeling only intensifies when Minke's favorite teacher, Miss Magda Peters—Dutch, youthful, and clearly enamored with the oblivious boy—visits Wonokromo to see if it is suitable for him. Toer implies a clear connection between these events in Chapter 13—the “jealousy” chapter—and Annelies's summoning of Minke to her bedroom in Chapter 14—the “seduction” chapter.

Magda experiences a sad first-time experience in this section as well. Swept away by the literary abilities of her handsome student, who considers her his favorite teacher, Magda kisses him passionately when he drops her off at her home. With little prompting, she visits Wonokromo and instantly finds her hopes dashed when she sees Annelies.

Awakenings begin earlier in this section for Minke. For the first time in the narrative, the question of his true **Allegiance to the Netherlands or Java** is raised. As he grovels before his father, fulfilling the ritual expectations of how a Native son should behave, Minke not only feels humiliated but put-upon, as if installing his father as the bupati is an archaic rite that is beneath him. He suddenly realizes that failing to open his family's letters was an implicit rejection of their way of living. His mother builds upon this new awareness by pointing out how much more comfortable he is among the Dutch than his own race. Confronted with the reality that he himself would be an ideal candidate for the position of bupati, he tells his mother that he has no interest in bureaucratic work. Minke then interacts with the de la Croix sisters, who delight in intellectually testing him to determine if he *is* the type of person worthy of their progressive dreams for Indonesia; reinforcing his mother's criticism, he does not hesitate to return the sisters' letters. It is in this section that Minke first utters the titular phrase “this earth of mankind”—something he will say throughout the narrative as he reflects on and wrestles with his purpose in dealing with various man-made problems.

For the first time in this section, Minke grasps what it is like to be stalked as he recognizes the troubling presence of Fatso trailing him on several occasions. Minke experiences the abject fear of knowing someone wants to kill him when Darsam informs him of Robert M.'s

assassination request. He also feels what it is like to be a pariah, as former friends and teachers distance themselves in response to his recent shows of wealth (i.e., the Mellemas' carriage).

This section also details Dutch parents' different expectations for their daughters. The first section lingers on the trafficking of young women in Javanese society. Dutch sisters Miriam and Sarah, on the other hand, are each half a dozen years older than Nyai when she was bartered by her father. While one has a boyfriend, neither is in a rush to the altar, instead focusing on enacting social change. Similarly, unmarried Magda is a well-educated career woman.

While these Dutch women have, to an extent, escaped the **Entrenched Misogyny** that is so pervasive throughout the narrative, Toer also speaks to the decisions women had to make simply to survive. The sex worker Maiko was shipped from one Pacific Rim location to another because the traffickers who bought her realized she carried intractable syphilis. When Babah Ah Tjong attempted to single out the disease carrier among his prostitutes, Maiko understood she was the one he was looking for but remained quiet. She did so to survive.

Readers may note that Toer refers to Annelies on a couple of occasions as a "Creole beauty" (206), which to most readers implies a woman of Cajun descent from southern Louisiana. Creole can also be used to refer to a person of European and Indies descent. Speaking of this mixing, Toer uses the lengthy letters sent to Minke—especially from Miriam—to comment on the exploitation of the Dutch East Indies by Europeans. The girls' letters provide a tool he can use to teach his readers about Indonesian history. Perhaps more so than any other aspect of the *Buru Quartet*, these truthful observations resulted in the banning of Toer's novels.

Chapters 15-20 and Afterword

Chapter 15 Summary

Minke has one remaining friend at school, a student named Jan Dapperste who reveals that he, too, is a Native. Jan reaffirms that Robert S. has spread rumors about Minke. Called into the director's office and asked to explain why he has become such a loner, Minke believes he

will be expelled. Like many others, the director assumes Minke's goal is to become a local government official: "Don't you want to become a bupati" (247). The director reveals that he knows all about Minke's writing and life, to which Minke casually says he should do what he thinks is best.

The audience for Minke's articles increases. Robert S. contacts the newspaper that publishes them and tells the editor that Minke is "only a Native" (248). When Minke confirms this, the editor offers him a permanent part-time job.

Afterward, Minke attends an appointment at the home of Dr. Martinet to discuss Annelies's condition. Martinet confides that Annelies shudders every time he touches her. He muses on her aversion, proposing that Nyai may have convinced her that white-skinned people are disgusting. He believes it is obvious that Nyai hates Europeans, which is why she has had no fair-skinned suitors. Martinet moves on, saying that Annelies has placed her well-being in the care of Minke, which Nyai approves. When Minke offers no insight on Annelies, the doctor confronts him, saying "Look, Mr. Minke, in science, the word embarrassed has no place" (253). They proceed to have a candid conversation about Minke's relationship with Annelise: The doctor deduces that Minke was not the first to have intercourse with Annelise, and Minke explains that she was raped by her brother.

Through this first experience with psychological analysis, Minke gains respect for Martinet. He learns that Martinet is also an author who writes articles on analysis for English language magazines. While making a regular visit to Wonokromo, Martinet suggests to Nyai that Annelies and Minke should get married as soon as possible. Jean and May come to visit; the former wants to paint a portrait of Nyai, who is highly resistant to the idea. Jean and May spend the night at Wonokromo, with Minke sharing a bed with Jean. They discuss the manner in which people mature to full personhood, a process accentuated by toil.

Chapter 16 Summary

On a gray Sunday afternoon, Minke grows anxious about the possibility of encountering Fatso. While riding with Annelies the day before, he had glimpsed Fatso. Discussing this with Darsam, he discovers that Fatso has been seen around the city. They speculate about him being an assassin hired by Robert M. Minke cautions Darsam not to attack Fatso with his machete if he should appear. Everyone at Wonokromo is on edge.

When Fatso appears, calmly walking past the entrance to Wonokromo, Darsam runs after him with his machete. Minke runs after Darsam, trying to stop him. Annelies runs after Minke, and Nyai runs after Annelies. The five runners reach Babah's brothel, where Fatso disappears. One after another, they charge into the brothel, where they discover the dead body of Herman. As they stand around the body, Maiko appears, followed by Robert M., who is scarcely recognizable. When he sees Darsam and the machete, he flees, jumping out a window and running away. Instructing Minke and Darsam to stay, Nyai takes Annelies home, saying she will send a carriage. However, a police carriage arrives, and Minke is forced to give the police his proper name—which is not mentioned anywhere in the narrative.

Minke becomes notorious following the death of Herman. Newspapers in many languages report that Herman died after drinking poisoned alcohol. Minke and Darsam's names appear in all the articles. Using his position as a journalist, Minke deals with the fallout through articles; this increases the paper's circulation. Minke receives supportive letters from the de la Croix sisters, a grieving letter from his mother, and his illiterate father's condemnation through his older brother. The Dutch language papers continually suggest that Minke and Nyai should be investigated in regards to Herman's murder. In response, Nyai remarks, "They can't stand seeing Natives not being trodden under their feet. Natives must always be in the wrong, Europeans must be innocent" (278). For the first time, Nyai begins to refer to Minke as "son."

With Fatso and Robert M. absent, the Dutch prosecutors deal with Herman's death by charging Babah with murder. Journalists arrive from all over the country to follow the trial. The school dismisses class so students and teachers can attend. Babah acknowledges he drugged Herman with "an aromatic palm wine" (282), though he said it should not have caused permanent damage. When a Chinese physician refutes Babah's testimony, Babah finally confesses to the crime, saying he was tired of Herman hanging around after five years. The court does not allow Nyai, a Native, to testify in Dutch, telling her to testify in Javanese. Instead, she testifies in Malay. She explains that she paid a monthly bill for Herman and Robert M. to use the services of Babah's brothel; she had never seen Babah until his appearance in the courtroom.

The prosecutors make a point of questioning Minke about his relationships with Annelies and Nyai, causing courtroom spectators to laugh. Minke finds this offensive, as it is irrelevant to the trial. After two weeks, the judge pauses the trial, ordering that it be continued when the authorities locate Fatso and Robert M.

Chapter 17 Summary

At the conclusion of the trial, Minke returns to school where the director calls him into his office, congratulates him on successfully defending himself during the trial, and expels him. After his convoluted explanation of why the school is dismissing him, the director asks Minke if he understands their reasoning. Minke replies, "More than understand" (286). As he departs, Magda runs to him and says she fought to retain him.

Minke reflects on Nyai's response to the prosecutor asking why she allowed Minke and Annelies to sleep together. Speaking illegally in Dutch and ignoring the judge as he tries to gavel her down, Nyai describes the conditions under which she became a concubine against her will. She expresses the hypocrisy of the colonial Dutch, which allows her to be a sex slave without question while ridiculing the "pure love" (287) between Annelies and Minke because one is an Indo and the other a Native. An officer drags Nyai from the courtroom as she continues to expose the Europeans' pretentiousness.

Minke goes to see his friend Jean, who tells him about supportive editorials in various newspapers and encourages him to marry Annelies immediately. When Minke suggests this to Nyai, she asks him to wait until her businesses recover from the downtime resulting from the trial. Minke writes an article about the precarious, unappreciated position of nyais and their children.

Magda shows up at Wonokromo 10 days after the publication of Minke's article. The director sent her to ask him to attend a meeting at the school. Though he initially refuses, Magda persuades him to return. Minke attends a meeting with the school's instructors and learns that his article has caused a public outcry. Several important individuals, including Herbert de la Croix, have petitioned the school to readmit Minke. The instructors have decided to allow Minke to receive his diploma with severe limitations. Minke accepts their offer.

Minke rides to the newspaper office, where he receives an offer of a full-time position. He is warned to distance himself from Magda, who has been marked as a "fanatical radical because of her membership in the 'Indies for the Indies' movement [...] They say the Indies should be equal with the Netherlands" (294). Minke wrestles with the idea that Pure-Blood Europeans could be so hostile toward other Pure-Bloods. At his boarding house, he receives a

letter from his mother expressing pride in him and encouraging him to follow his own path, reminding him of the principles she instilled in him. Minke decides to marry Annelies after finishing his school exams.

Chapter 18 Summary

After three months of uninterrupted study, Minke takes his exams and shows up to the school's graduation ceremony with Annelies. Her beauty stuns the teachers and guests. Minke remains the only Native. He is stunned upon learning he is the second highest scoring graduate throughout the Indies. When the director shakes his hand, Minke invites him to attend his wedding to Annelies the following Wednesday. Minke then allows him to invite all the students and guests as well.

The only representative from Minke's family, his mother, shows up days before the wedding ceremony to help prepare. The ceremony is conducted according to Islamic custom, at 9am. The wedding party takes place in the evening; at the end of the ceremony, Robert S. enters, presents Annelies with a golden diamond ring, and immediately departs. When Annelies refuses the ring, Minke realizes that Robert S. had loved her just as he does; she makes Minke promise to return the ring. Among the wedding gifts, Minke receives a pen with a note saying, "Greetings and best wishes to the doves Minke and Annelies Mellema, with the hope that you will forgive and forget a person you do not know except by the name: Fatso" (319).

Chapter 19 Summary

After the graduation and wedding, Minke records a number of developments among the narrative's characters. Fired by the school, Magda returns to the Netherlands and discovers Robert S. working on the same ship. Robert S. writes a letter to Minke confessing that all his underhanded behavior was an attempt to drive a wedge between Minke and Annelies, whom he still desperately loves. Minke's request to travel to the Netherlands to continue his education is refused because he is not deemed morally acceptable.

Six months after the wedding, Annelies and Nyai are summoned to the Dutch court; Minke waits for them at Wonokromo. They return four hours later, extremely distraught. Minke discovers that Herman's elder son, Maurits, has begun legal proceedings to claim Wonokromo. In Amsterdam, he has obtained a court order that not only gives him control of Herman's other children's finances but allows him to bring Annelies to Amsterdam under his protection as she is legally a minor. The judge told Nyai that, being an unmarried Native, she

has no rights to dispute this legal action: "Actually our business is only with Annelies [...] You are a nyai, a Native, you have no business with this court" (329). Nyai's attorney arrives, examines the documents, and explains that Maurits is in a much stronger position.

Minke realizes that Maurits and his mother desired revenge and wanted Herman dead. He decides "this was what was called a colonial case [...] a case of swallowing up a conquered Native people" (333). As he reflects, Minke comes to believe that Herman's murder, his being summoned him back to school, and Magda being sent away were all part of a conspiracy to allow Maurits to assume possession of Wonokromo and Annelies. Minke resorts to his greatest skill, writing an article about the unfairness of the situation. Annelies, unable to handle the stress, becomes bedridden again. Nyai convinces Minke to write in Malay rather than Dutch, which will reach a greater audience and be more confrontive. As Minke gains more supporters, the group is also joined by a famous attorney who has been sent by Herbert.

The new attorney examines the case closely, asking many questions. Eventually, he reiterates that they cannot win against Maurits. As a result of their legal action, Annelies and Nyai are summoned before the judge again. Because Annelies is bedridden, Minke goes in her place. Despite protestations, Annelies is ordered to embark on a ship to the Netherlands in five days.

As news of the court's decision spreads, angry groups of Native fighters, the Madurese, gather to prevent Annelies from being taken. In response, the police send multiple carriages of officers. Fighters from both sides die in the confrontation. The Dutch send a legendary group of Indies fighters called the Marechasse. They defeat the Madurese, arrest Darsam, and surround the house.

Dr. Martinet is prohibited from entering the house by soldiers, leaving Minke and Nyai unable to properly care for Annelies, who seems incapable of absorbing and coping with what will happen to her. The situation is compounded when Minke and Nyai learn they will not be allowed to travel with Annelies. Annelies withdraws further, refusing to converse or eat.

The penultimate morning, Minke wakes to find Annelies caressing him. She speaks only to say she wants to feed him, then grows silent again.

Chapter 20 Summary

On the last day, the soldiers prevent anyone from entering or leaving the house. Annelies asks Minke to tell her about Holland. A strange woman enters the house and tells Annelies what to expect on the voyage; it is hinted at that Annelies may be pregnant. Annelies asks to use the same suitcase her mother used when she was forced to leave her home as a young teenager: "Like Mama before, Mama, I too will never return home" (357). She also implores Nyai to have another daughter in her stead.

Unable to accompany Annelies to the carriage, Minke and Nyai helplessly watch from the house as she is escorted, lifted into the carriage, and driven away.

Afterword Summary

The novel's translator, Max Lane, describes the conditions faced by Toer in the Buru Island penal colony where the possession of any written material could result in death. Lane describes Toer's career as a writer, editor, and activist. His imprisonment for 14 years never resulted in a trial, as it was the unlawful result of him being a progressive advocate and truthful historian. Though the first two volumes of the *Buru Quartet* quickly became bestsellers after their publication in 1980, the Indonesian government ultimately banned Toer's books in 1981.

Chapters 15-20 and Afterword Analysis

The third section of the novel could be referred to as the "death, hypocrisy, and injustice" section. Toer signaled an unhappy ending to the novel in the first chapter when Minke described losing someone he loved and his uncertainty about getting them back. By this final section, the blush of innocence is gone as Toer introduces death in several ways. Annelies's father, Herman, is found murdered on the floor of Babah's brothel. Death appears again in Chapter 19, when Darsam and other defenders fight with the police and a trained military squadron. The *shadow* of possible death hangs over this section as well. When Darsam chases Fatso with an unsheathed machete, then chases Robert M., there is no doubt Darsam will kill these men if he catches them. The most ominous of Toer's references to death, however, is Annelies's final speech to Nyai—in which she says she will never return to Wonokromo and implores her mother to have another daughter when she is gone.

This section also contains a good deal of hypocrisy, posturing, and convoluted thinking. A prime example of this is in Chapter 17 when Minke returns to school after the murder trial is halted. The director summons Minke to his office and, after congratulating him on defending himself in the courtroom, expels him after giving a convoluted explanation for it. Furthermore, the court refuses to allow Nyai to testify in Dutch because she is a Native. Nyai gets the last laugh, however, when she switches to Dutch and confronts the hypocrisy of the court in allowing prosecutors to question Annelies and Minke about their romance—which has nothing to do with the murder.

Graver than the hypocrisy of the court, however, is its injustice. The Dutch court allows Maurits, a half-brother who is a stranger and lives more than 9500 miles from Surabaya, to take custody of Annelies, a young woman who currently lives with her mother and husband. The court does not allow Nyai or Minke to object because neither is Dutch nor Indo, another instance of injustice resulting from **Cultural Divisions in 19th Century Javanese Society**. Because Minke and Annelies's wedding was a Muslim ceremony, the court considers it invalid. As Minke reflects on this injustice, he recalls his mother's ironic comment that at least the Dutch never stole people's wives.

As the absurd loss of Minke's wife becomes a possibility, another minor theme emerges: tragic lost love. The narrative includes several instances of relationships that ended tragically: Nyai and Herman, Jean and May's mother, Maiko and her boyfriend, and now Minke and Annelies.

Chapter 18 is a hopeful yet ominous chapter. It begins triumphantly when Minke and Annelies appear at the graduation celebration. Annelies is so beautiful and graceful that the students, teachers, and guests stare at her in silence. Minke is so startled by his scholastic achievement that he can scarcely stand; yet the applause for him is muted. At the wedding celebration, beautiful customs are fulfilled—yet, among the wedding gifts is a pen with a note from Fatso. Underlying what should be the happiest of occasions is an element of dread.

Once Maurits's legal actions are brought to light, Minke finds himself feeling suspicious. Because his doubts are often without merit, Minke tries to dismiss them. On this occasion, however, the pieces fit so perfectly that he believes he may be correct. The piece missing during Babah's trial was motive: If Maurits paid Babah to poison Herman with the promise of a large sum of money, it would explain Babah's motive. And if Fatso were working for Maurits

and intentionally lured Nyai's family into the brothel, and then escaped without leaving a trace, this would make it easy to disrupt Nyai's family and difficult to prove Babah committed murder.

A final question that Toer leaves unanswered to possibly foreshadow the plot of the second book in the series, *Child of All Nations*, is the nature of Annelies's illness. Those charged with taking her to Amsterdam ask Minke and Nyai if Annelies's illness is due to pregnancy. Stunned by the question, the two look agape at each other. The question is meant to intrigue readers and perhaps suggest that they continue the *Buru Quartet*.

Character Analysis

Minke

18-year-old Minke, the first-person narrator and protagonist of *This Earth of Mankind*, never reveals his actual name. He explains to the reader that, “I don’t really need to reveal who I am before the eyes of others” (15). When introducing himself to others, he refers to himself as Minke, a nickname bestowed upon him by a frustrated elementary school teacher; Pramoedya Ananta Toer implies the name means “monkey.” Dutch recluse Herman Mellema, Robert M. and Annelies’s father and Nyai’s owner (and former partner), meets Minke once but refers to him as a monkey twice. The name can also be translated as “mine,” an equally appropriate meaning considering many characters and forces seek to claim Minke. In addition to Minke, the character is called by other titles, mostly ones of affection. His mother calls him Gus, which could be translated as “sonny.” Annelies often refers to him as Mas, meaning “big brother,” while her own mother Nyai calls him Nyo or Sinyo, derived from the Portuguese word for “mister.” Darsam and other servants call Minke “Young Master.”

Minke is often treated respectfully because he is a unique person. Exceptionally bright, he is the only Native—a Javanese boy with no European parentage—and Muslim attending the exclusive H.B.S. prep school, where he is to graduate within the year. His instructors recognize that he is gifted, as he is able to fluently speak Dutch as well as different dialects of his native tongue, Javanese, and the official language of the Dutch East Indies, Malay. Minke is also an exceptional writer, who has written copy for furniture sales and begun submitting popular articles to local newspapers.

Minke is private but exceptionally proud. When humiliated by his father, he rages internally about the poor treatment. Though he loves and listens to his mother, he has no relationship with his father and ignores his family’s letters. People assume Minke will become a bupati, a position comprising the roles of local mayor and royal governor, but he wants no part in bureaucracy. Instead, he dreams of going to the Netherlands to pursue higher education.

Despite Minke being quiet about his being a descendant of the ancient royal Javanese families, his mother notes that he has forgotten how to speak to his fellow Javanese. Having been educated by the Dutch, Minke is most comfortable consorting with Europeans and Indos—multiracial individuals with European blood. He wears European clothes and enjoys

discussing Dutch philosophy and literature. Thus, he is frequently accused of no longer being Javanese. While Minke is not the womanizer his classmate Robert Suurhof accuses him of being, he *is* interested in beautiful women and is awed when he meets (and eventually marries) Annelies Mellema, a woman he finds more beautiful than the new Dutch Queen Wilhelmina.

Annelies Mellema

Annelies Mellema is the youngest child and only daughter of Nyai and Herman Mellema. In her mid-teens, she is strikingly beautiful, with fair European skin and Javanese features. Just as Minke is taken by her the moment he sees her, so is she. Because Annelies has been cloistered for a decade, she has had no exposure to peers or playmates. She has no friends and only one brother, Robert M., whom her mother has warned her to avoid. On the family farm, Wonokromo, Annelies remains at home with the workers and animals. The Natives who work for her mother treat her with adoration. When Minke praises her beauty and expresses affection for her, Annelies has no idea how to respond, going to her mother for guidance.

Like Minke, Annelies also speaks several languages fluently. She loves stories and constantly asks Minke to read or tell her stories. Despite his love for her, Minke describes Annelies as a spoiled child because she always gets what she wants. In reality, her family physician, Dr. Martinet, reveals that she is emotionally delicate and unable to withstand disappointment and grief. When confronting difficult situations, Annelies turns within, refusing to eat or leave her bed. Eventually, she reveals to Minke that she was once raped by her brother but keeps it to herself to avoid causing problems for her mother.

Nyai Ontosoroh

A pivotal, unique character in the narrative is the mother of Robert M. and Annelies, who asks people to call her Nyai Ontosoroh. The word nyai is not a name but a title, meaning concubine. She chooses to be known to most people as Nyai—concubine. At 14, Nyai—then called Sanikem—was bartered by her father to Dutchman Herman Mellema to become his nyai. She never forgave her parents for selling her. Over the years, she learned languages and reading. She proved apt at business and took over Herman's growing agricultural companies. Nyai's sole goal in life is to provide for her daughter and prevent her from being traded against her will as a wife or nyai.

Because Minke cannot bring himself to refer to her as Nyai—which he perceives as a slur—Nyai encourages him to call her Mama, as Annelies does. As the story develops, Nyai begins to refer to Minke as “Son.” Minke is continually stunned by Nyai’s insight into human nature. She always seems to know what he is thinking, and he finds it virtually impossible to refuse her when she asks him to do something. Above all, Nyai wants Minke to be in Annelies’s life, to be the pure love she herself was denied. She encourages their closeness and accepts their physical intimacy.

Miss Magda Peters

Miss Magda Peters is a young, unmarried literature instructor at Minke’s prep school. He describes her as being covered with freckles with round glasses. Magda is bold and open-minded, unhesitant in expressing her desire for the Indies to be considered equal to the Netherlands. Well-read, she exposes her students to many different ideas and encourages discussion, though she recognizes there are political limits to what students may advocate.

Magda is an emotional person. When reading an article written by Minke—though she does not know he is the author—she is overcome with the beauty of the writing. Discovering Minke to be the author, she must stop and gather herself before explaining the greatness of his piece to the other students. Magda is also physically attracted to Minke. When he gives her a ride home in his carriage, she invites him in, praises his brilliance, and smothers him with kisses. As Minke’s troubles mount because of his association with Nyai and Annelies, Magda remains an unwavering supporter.

Dr. Martinet

The European family physician to Annelies and one of Nyai’s most trusted advisors, Dr. Martinet is frequently summoned to Wonokromo to care for the delicate girl. When he recognizes the powerful relationship between her and Minke, he expresses that Minke is now her primary caregiver. Martinet is completely candid with Minke when discussing how to treat Annelies, prodding for information to better understand how to care for her.

Minke discovers that Martinet is also an author, one who writes articles about mental health and how to analyze and treat emotional conditions. It is apparent from his questioning that Martinet strives to grasp the psychology behind Annelies’s illness.

Darsam

A long-time laborer for Nyai, Darsam is a former Madurese fighter who has become her protector and most trusted servant. Large, mustached, swarthy, and never without his sheathed machete, Darsam is completely dedicated to Nyai and her household. When the estranged Robert M., Nyai's son, requests help in killing Minke, Darsam replies that Minke is a friend and is ready to kill Robert M. for the threat.

Darsam's impetuous nature also causes issues. Seeing a potential assassin in Fatso, Darsam chases him with his machete until the man leads him into Babah Ah Tjong's brothel, where he stumbles upon the body of Herman. Upon learning that Annelies will be forcibly shipped to Amsterdam, Darsam assembles a formidable group of Madurese men and engages in a bloody clash with the police and a legendary group of Indies fighters called the Marechassees—resulting in multiple deaths.

Themes

Cultural Divisions in 19th Century Javanese Society

The most pervasive reality portrayed by Pramoedya Ananta Toer is the irrevocable striation of Javanese society into cultural groups. Apart from foreign travelers, merchants, and mercenaries, every person in Java belongs to one of three distinct groups: the Pure-Blood Dutch, the Mixed-Blood Indos (who have some verifiable Dutch heritage), and the Native Javanese. There is no possibility of moving from one group to another. This cultural rigidity is reinforced by Dutch law administered by European judges. Several times in the narrative, a Native person stands before a Dutch judge to point out the blatant inequity. In each case, the prosecutor or judge will say the court is for the Pure-Bloods. Thus, the Natives have no legal standing. Indos possess certain legal rights if they are acknowledged by their Pure-Blood parent. When Minke first meets Robert M., the latter presses him to say his last name. If Minke were an Indo with no last name rather than a Native, it would mean that he had a Dutch father who denied being so. Most would assume Minke is an Indo because of his dark skin, while his impeccable Dutch would argue against him being fully Native.

Consorting across racial lines during this era was condemned in several ways. Herman abandoned his wife in the Netherlands because of her alleged infidelity. Yet, when Maurits, the Dutch son of Herman, confronts him at Wonokromo, he says Herman has committed sins beyond adultery by consorting with a Native (his concubine Nyai) who is not Christian and brought "illegal" children into the world. After Herman's death, Nyai discovers she has no legal recourse to prevent Maurits from claiming her property and businesses, despite Herman registering her as co-owner.

The English and then the Dutch colonized Indonesia in the 1600s and established cultural divisions by the late 19th Century. This left Native Javanese with no access to the ongoing technological, industrial revolution taking place around the world. The Dutch education system was reserved for Pure-Bloods and Indos; Minke is only able to study with the Dutch through a special dispensation. Even progressive Dutchmen, like Herbert de la Croix, criticize the Javanese for failing to seek parity with Europeans. Toer portrays the Dutch as oblivious to an important reality: Cultural divisions established by Europeans have prevented the

Javanese from accessing education, financial stability, and means of travel. These divisions via cultural influence and colonial law forced the lowest Javanese class to continue living as they had when they were first occupied.

Entrenched Misogyny

While Javanese women were very much victims of the cultural divisions between classes, they also endured other challenges that had oppressed them long before the arrival of the Dutch. In Native Javanese society in 1898, women were considered the property of men—first their fathers, then their husbands. Nyai, whose childhood name was Sanikem, experienced this firsthand. By the time she was 14, her father had turned down several offers of marriage on her behalf, hoping to use her to further his career. He eventually bartered her to Dutchman Herman Mellema, who takes her in as his concubine, permanently disgracing her. Sanikem, later calling herself Nyai, points out in a court of law that such treatment of women is nothing short of slavery.

In telling Minke how he must treat Annelies, Dr. Martinet warns him that he must treat her as Europeans treat their wives, not the way Javanese do. This implies that physical and emotional abuse of women by their husbands is a given in Javanese Native society, despite the hypocrisies of Dutch men of power (i.e., Herman, the Dutch judge and prosecutors). Maiko, a sex worker from Japan, was sold from one brothel owner to another across the Pacific Rim. When these men discovered Maiko had contracted a virulent form of syphilis, they responded by selling her for a lower price. Not until the Dutch judge hears her story does Maiko receive medical treatment. Maiko expresses remorse for infecting her customers, though selling her body was a matter of survival.

For their part, the women in the novel respond differently to the entrenched misogyny they face. Before Sanikem became Nyai, her mother pleaded with her husband not to sell their daughter, to no avail. Far from home, Maiko pins all her hopes on saving enough money to return to her boyfriend in Japan—though she intends to continue sex work to support him. Minke's mother, a Native, accepts the orders of her husband and the immature posturing of her sons. However, she speaks with Minke at length, sharing her wisdom. Due to her initial relationship with Herman and her own strength, Nyai is the only woman able to rely on herself. She sets up businesses, forms alliances, and buys property in her own name—as problematic as this turns out to be. Her daughter Annelies is largely dependent on Minke, until she bids him farewell and moves past his ability to protect her. The novel's ending centers on the resilience of this delicate girl entering a new world—in which entrenched misogyny will still be

prevalent.

Allegiance to the Netherlands or Java

Throughout the novel, Minke struggles with his allegiance to the Netherlands (as the Dutch provided him with a life-changing education) and Java, the place of his birth. At the beginning of the narrative, Minke is clearly more comfortable with the Dutch world than that of the Javanese. He excels at his studies and is admired at his prep school. His excellent writing skills, for which he is constantly praised, are exercised in the Dutch language. Yet, Minke does not open his family's letters, nor can he adequately write in Javanese or Malay, his languages of origin. He dresses as a European, even on the one occasion he goes to see his parents. He also keeps a photograph of the new Dutch queen and openly admits his adoration of her.

Against the backdrop of ever-increasing Dutch influence in Minke's life (which borders on internalized racism), there are those who implore him not to forget that he is Javanese. When he must participate in his father's installation as a bupati, Minke has the first of two lengthy conversations with his mother about where his allegiance should be. She reminds him of the Javanese principles she instilled in him from childhood. She also questions why he is so attracted to all things Dutch, pointing out that the Dutch consume the resources of Java. When dressing him for his wedding feast, Minke's mother describes the importance of each element of his attire (as they are intimately tied to Javanese nobility). Listening to her explanations, Minke weeps.

As the story progresses, Minke continually encounters the unyielding customs and rules that reinforce his world's **Cultural Divisions**. It is only through Dutch overlord Herbert's intervention that he is able to resume his schooling and graduate with his class. Furthermore, the Dutch legal system forces Annelies to leave for Amsterdam—with Minke and Nyai unable to either prevent this or leave with her. Toer does not state where Minke's allegiance ultimately lies, though Minke's final speech *is* an apology to his mother for failing to save Annelies. The implication is that the Dutch have failed him, and in turn, he has failed the Javanese.

Symbols & Motifs

Characters as Symbols

Pramoedya Ananta Toer uses his characters to symbolize specific groups and ideals in Indonesian society. Using these symbols, he makes observations about classism and racism. For example, Minke's classmate Robert Suurhof symbolizes the Mixed-Blood Indo, a person caught between the cultural and legal legitimacy of the Pure-Blood Dutch and the marginalized Natives. Thus, the Indo is perpetually looking up with longing and down with scorn. Robert S. represents this internal conflict perfectly. He tells Minke in the first chapter that he will only settle for Pure-Blood women, looking up with longing. He also spends most of the novel telling various authority figures that Minke is *only* a Native, looking down with scorn. Because Robert S. is in love with Annelies Mellema, he attempts an Indo courtship tactic. When trying to appeal to someone, the Indos know to bring a "monkey" (a "third wheel") to make themselves look better. However, Robert S. is devastated and outraged when the perfect woman, as symbolized by Annelies, falls for his monkey, Minke. Toer uses Robert S. to demonstrate the shallowness of the artificial **Cultural Divisions in 19th Century Javanese Society** established by the Dutch East Indies.

Minke, who symbolizes a new, promising Java, embodies both an appreciation for the Dutch who enlightened him and an awareness of the hypocrisy and inequality of colonialism. Thus, Minke embodies Java itself, struggling to stay honest as it determines its **Allegiance to the Netherlands or Java**. In this regard, Nyai embodies a new kind of Javanese woman, a person who perseveres despite societal expectations and restrictions. She defies the subservience forced upon nyais, having made an effort to educate and sustain herself and her daughter. However, it is important to note that not all nyais are privy to the same opportunities as her; she simply represents *a* path forward.

Education/Science Versus Ignorance/Superstition

One of Toer's subtle but recurrent motifs involves weighing education and ignorance, or as Minke frames it, science and superstition. Minke points out that his favorite teacher, Miss Magda Peters, tells her students that astronomy is nonsense. Minke himself is living proof of this mentality, as he and the new Dutch Queen Wilhelmina share the same birthday and

horoscope, yet their lives turn out quite different. When Minke is forced to kneel before his father, fulfilling an ancient Javanese tradition, he feels he is abandoning his education to give homage to ignorant, outdated customs.

Minke sees the transition from ignorance and superstition toward education and science as part of a newly developing world. He only knows about the larger world—something most Natives do not—because of his Dutch education. This reinforces the question of **Allegiance** for him, as without the Dutch, he would not understand the benefits of education—even though **Cultural Divisions** prevent him from fully utilizing what he has learned.

The Bad and Good Dutch

When Minke learns that conservative Dutch leaders have forced Magda to return to the Netherlands, he is surprised that the Pure-Bloods would turn on each other. Readers may find Minke's feelings surprising, as his story is full of struggles between the traditional Dutch and the progressive Dutch. To Minke, this conflict reads as the "bad" Dutch versus the "good" Dutch. There are individuals who wish to preserve the centuries-old relationship in which the Javanese serve the Dutch. Most of Minke's teachers fall into this group, as does Nyai's personal lawyer and the prosecutors who embarrass Annelies and Minke in the courtroom with questions that have no bearing on Herman's murder case. A callous judge later rules that Annelies must go to Amsterdam as per her half-brother Maurits's order.

Magda believes the Indies should be equal to the Netherlands; she is considered progressive, along with Herbert, Miriam, and Sarah de la Croix, who want Minke to become a Native spokesman. Dr. Martinet is always honest with Indos and Natives, thus falling into the good group. Toer distinguishes between bad and good Dutch characters to frame compassionate characters as on the side of equality, and vice versa—a stark contrast against those who use **Cultural Divisions** to marginalize others.

Pervasive Prejudice

This Earth of Mankind is realistic in that virtually every character is biased in some way. Minke remains happily estranged from his father, whom he looks down on because he is illiterate. Furthermore, it takes him a while to trust Nyai because he has long assumed that all nyais, concubines, were immoral. Minke's surprise upon learning Nyai is educated overlaps with his other false assumption about women—that they cannot run a business.

While readers focus on Minke's growth in awareness, the reality is that he is an outlier: Toer uses Minke as an example that even bright, progressive individuals can harbor prejudices. Most often, such people do not *believe* they are biased. Toer combats this phenomenon through the wisdom of Minke's friend Jean, who constantly reminds him not to judge any person or situation without all of the pertinent facts.

Literary Devices

The Plantation, School, and Brothel as Settings

Pramoedya Ananta Toer's settings are similar to those of a stage play, in which the events in each particular setting are consistent and further the author's storyline. This is true of some lesser used settings in the narrative. For example, whenever Minke needs advice, he ends up in business partner Jean's art studio. Whenever Minke rides on a train, he finds himself wrestling with uncertainty. Riding in carriages, however, creates moments of closeness.

Furthermore, Toer portrays Wonokromo, the plantation created and cultivated by Nyai, as a place of refuge and serenity. Minke discovers that all the workers at Wonokromo express an almost beatific joy. Inside the Mellemas' house, everyone is received with hospitality (at least when Nyai is present). The house is a place for telling stories, healing, and making love. In turn, Wonokromo is a place that ejects troublemakers. When Herman confronts Minke for being a Native, Nyai scolds and banishes him. When Robert M. fails his mother and sister in a moment of need, and Nyai confronts his lying, he walks away and does not return. It is no surprise that the narrative's greatest moment of joy, Minke and Annelies's wedding, takes place in the accommodating house, where guests who stay too late are simply told to spend the night. When Toer wants to illustrate the callous, destructive force of colonialism, he sends a military force to disrupt the hospitality of Wonokromo and take its most delicate resident, Annelies, by force.

In contrast to Wonokromo, the happenings of H.B.S. prep school are never serene. Rather, these moments are rife with competition. Toer implies that Minke's standing at school has deteriorated. Despite being supposedly accepted as the school's only Native (bar Minke's friend Jan Dapperste who keeps his heritage a secret), Minke is often spotlighted in negative ways: He is revealed as the author of a controversial article by classmate Robert Suurhof without his consent; he later walks past silent, staring students to the director's office to be praised, then expelled; and he is greeted with muted applause upon receiving the second highest exam grades throughout the Indies. Scenes of Minke being singled out and challenged always take place at school.

A final setting Toer uses to deal with betrayal, illness, and death is Babah Ah Tjong's brothel. While there are only a few scenes set here, they all involve decadence, deterioration, and ultimately death—including Robert M.'s seduction by a sex worker (Maiko) with a deadly disease and the grotesque discovery of Herman's body. Toer uses each of his settings to establish a particular emotional tone.

The Shifting First-Person Narrator

Toer has a unique method of utilizing a shifting first-person perspective to create a near-omniscient narrator. Throughout most of the novel, Minke tells the story from his perspective. One strength of this type of narration is that the reader is privy to the narrator's emotions and thoughts. For example, when Minke believes he is being stalked by an assassin and considers the importance of keeping a low profile, while pitying himself, he asks himself why he is such a coward.

At other points in the narrative, in which Minke would have no insight, Toer creates ways for other characters to speak in the first-person. Speaking in the first-person, Annelies describes lying with her mother in bed, hoping to talk about Minke. Then, the narrative shifts to Nyai recalling her past being sold as a concubine in the first-person. Using this technique, along with the fact that the novel's framework is Minke documenting his past based on notes transcribed 13 years earlier, Toer can relate everything he wants the reader to know without resorting to a fully omniscient narrator. This helps preserve some elements of mystery that will develop in the three subsequent novels.

The Unfinished Story

Toer intentionally constructs the narrative to begin—yet not complete—several significant plot threads. The reader might perceive that he is planting seeds in this first book of the *Buru Quartet*; the events of this book are akin to the sprouting and budding of some seeds, with more growth to come before the eventual harvest. The clearest example of this is the unfinished story of Annelies. As Annelies's husband and mother watch the young, fragile girl ride away, the reader may wonder whether or not she will even survive the trip, why she believed she would never return home, why she implored her mother to have another daughter in her place, and whether or not Minke will attempt to reunite with her in Amsterdam.

Beyond this obvious set of questions, Toer uses foreshadowing throughout the narrative. The point of all his foreshadowing is to create questions for the reader that can only be answered in the three subsequent novels. Readers may recall that there is an unsolved murder case and wonder if Fatso and Robert M. will reappear to face justice (despite it being likely that Maurits was behind Herman's death). In addition, this novel ends with Darsam arrested and Nyai in an uncertain place, emotionally and financially. As for Minke, he and Nyai are left with the question as to whether or not Annelies's illness is the result of pregnancy by Minke.

Beyond incomplete plot threads, there are also thematic elements to be addressed. The question remains as to what Annelies's forceful departure will do to Minke's ongoing struggle with his **Allegiance to the Netherlands or Java**. Furthermore, the **Entrenched Misogyny** of the Dutch legal system may confiscate Nyai's property, and Minke may or may not reengage with Miss Magda Peters and the de la Croix sisters to attack the cultural divisions of Dutch colonial society. By design, the story is far from over.

Important Quotes

1. "In front of us stood a girl, white-skinned, refined, European face, hair and eyes of a Native. And those eyes, those shining eyes! ('Like a pair of morning stars,' I called them in my notes.) If this was the girl Suurhof meant, he was right: Not only could she rival the queen, she triumphed over her. And she was alive, flesh and blood, not just a picture.

'Annelies Mellema.' She held out her hand to me, then to Suurhof.

The voice that came from her lips left an impression that I will remember for the rest of my life."

([Chapter 2](#), Page 25)

By nature, 18-year-old protagonist Minke is suspicious. His awkward encounter with Robert Mellema, the friend of his classmate Robert Suurhof, stokes his defenses, putting him on edge until Robert M.'s sister suddenly appears. The clearest indication of Annelies's great beauty is the manner in which she completely, instantly disarms Minke. There is no other individual in the narrative who provokes his quick acceptance. As the novel progresses, Minke's cautious comments and nature appear continually. With Annelies, however, he cannot keep himself from telling her how beautiful she is, then kissing her on the cheek twice.

2. "On one occasion, one of the girls who sat beside me, Vera, pinched my thigh as hard as she could, as a way of getting acquainted. I screamed in pain.

Mr. Rooseboom's eyes popped out frighteningly, and he yelled:

'Quiet, you monk ... Minke!'

From that day, everyone in the class called me Minke, the one and only Native. My teachers followed suit. Then my friends from all the other classes. Also from outside school."

([Chapter 2](#), Page 39)

The protagonist's real name is not given anywhere in the narrative. He reveals that he comes from ancient Javanese royalty, though he does not want to be defined by this. He does not want to be pigeonholed by either the Dutch, some of whom expect him to become an

important bridge between European and Javanese society, or the Natives, who take for granted that he will become a regional governmental authority. As part of this resistance, he strictly identifies himself as “Minke”—the gibberish half-curse bestowed upon him by an irritated teacher. When Dutch recluse Herman Mellema later refers to Minke as a monkey, Toe implies that Minke literally means “monkey.”

3. “Annelies has told me, Nyo—don’t be afraid—is it true, you kissed her?”

Even a flash of lightning would not have startled me so greatly. [...]

“So it’s true. Now Minke, kiss Annelies in front of me. So that I may know that my daughter does not lie.’

I trembled. Yet I could not resist her command. And I kissed Annelies on the cheek.

“I’m proud, Nyo, that it’s you who kissed her. Go home now.”

([Chapter 2](#), Page 51)

Virtually everything about Wonokromo impresses Minke—who is referred to in this quote as Nyo, a title of respect usually reserved for Dutch youth—though most surprising of all to him are mother and daughter Nyai and Annelies who run a successful business. He does not understand Annelies’s initial reaction to his impetuous kiss, thinking Nyai will ban him from the plantation. Instead, Nyai is thrilled and Annelies demands that he return as soon as possible. Nyai’s pleasure at Minke’s affection toward her daughter is not only because she sees goodness and potential in Minke but particularly because, like herself, Minke is a Native who thrives in Dutch society.

4. “...such indeed was the moral level of the families of nyais: low, dirty, without culture, moved only by lust. They were the families of prostitutes; they were people without character, destined to sink into nothingness, leaving no trace. But did this popular judgment apply to Nyai Ontosoroh? This was what was confusing me. No, she wasn’t like that.”

([Chapter 3](#), Page 54)

This quote from Minke reveals his initial opinion of nyais, Native Javanese concubines taken by European overlords. Nyai persuades Minke to call her Mama, as he considers calling her Nyai inappropriate. His experience with Nyai contradicts everything he assumed about

concubines. There is an ironic contrast between Annelies and Minke at this point in the narrative. Intentionally sheltered by her mother, Annelies knows little about relationships or the world beyond Wonokromo, yet is capable and literate. Minke is educated at a prestigious European school, but has been sheltered from the world of his Native ancestors and Javanese like those who perform manual labor at Wonokromo.

5. "Love is beautiful, Minke, very, very beautiful, but perhaps disaster follows. You must dare to face its consequences."

([Chapter 3](#), Page 58)

This quote is spoken by French veteran Jean Marais, Minke's furniture business partner. Jean shares the story of the murder of the Native mother of his child, May (by her own brother). Confused about his feelings for Annelies, Minke approaches Jean, whose wisdom he trusts. Telling Minke to visit Annelies and determine if he truly loves her, Jean speaks this quote, which turns out to be ironically prophetic: Minke and Annelies fall deeply in love and wed, only to be tragically separated.

6. "'So you're our first real guest. And you're so close to us, so good to Mama and also to me.' Her voiced faded into quietness, no longer childlike. 'See, I'm ready to tell you everything, Mas. And you mustn't feel restrained about anything here either. You'll be the good friend of us both.' She became very sentimental. 'Everything I own is yours, Mas. You are free to do as you wish in this house.'"

([Chapter 4](#), Page 68)

This conversation between Annelies and Minke takes place during their second meeting, when Minke agrees to live at Wonokromo. In addition to a degree of hospitality he has never experienced, Minke has never encountered anyone so completely, genuinely candid. While he is slower to share his personal information, he finds that Nyai has an uncanny ability to sense his thoughts and intentions, commenting on them before he himself admits them. As reserved as Minke strives to be, he cannot refuse anything that Annelies asks of him. From the beginning of their relationship, there is intimacy.

7. "Shhh! Pity is only for those who are conscious of their condition. *You* need pity, not him—the child of someone like him. Ann, you must understand: he is no longer a human being. The closer you are to him, the more your life is threatened by ruin. He has become an animal who

can no longer tell good from evil. He's no longer capable of any service to his fellow human beings. It's over, don't ask about him again."

([Chapter 5](#), Page 78)

This quote is Nyai's advice to Annelies as they lie in bed together, discussing Herman's interruption of their meal with Minke. Nyai's comments reveal a keen insight into the human psyche, something Minke also recognizes in her, writes about, and yearns to understand. Underlying Nyai's realistic outlook is the powerful drive of a survivor, acquired in her early teens, along with the unwavering commitment to make her daughter's life better than hers (especially in regards to choosing her own husband).

8. "...that was my situation, Ann, the situation of all young girls then—they could do nothing else but wait for a man to take them from the house, to who knows where, as wife number who knows what, first or fourth. My father and my father alone determined everything. [...] The girl never knew beforehand whether the man would be young or old. And once married, the girl had to serve this man, whom she had never met before, with all her body and soul, all her life, until she died or until he became bored and got rid of her. There was no other way, no choice."

([Chapter 5](#), Page 82)

Here, Nyai describes the circumstances faced by young Native girls in Java before describing her own story in which her father bartered her to Herman as a concubine. Her efforts to acquire property and independence have all been to spare her daughter from having a similar experience. As an Indo—a multiracial individual of European heritage—Annelies should be able to avoid such a fate by law. However, much like her mother, Annelies's Pure-Blood Dutch half-brother, Maurits, has absolute control of her life and takes her away from her home.

9. "‘Mr. Mellema.’ Maurits spoke again in Dutch, still ignoring me. ‘Even if you married this nyai, this concubine, in a legal marriage, she is still not Christian. She’s an unbeliever! And even if she were Christian, you, sir, are still more rotten than Amelia Mellema-Hammers, more rotten than all the rottenness you accused my mother of. You, sir, have committed a blood sin, a crime against blood! Mixing Christian European blood with colored, Native, unbeliever’s blood! A sin never to be forgiven!’

‘Go!’ I roared. He still ignored me.”

([Chapter 5](#), Page 99)

*Nyai recounts the story of Herman's oldest child, Maurits, hunting him down and uncovering his life post-leaving the Netherlands. This quote demonstrates the **Pervasive Prejudice** of the Dutch toward the Native Javanese. Maurits ignores Nyai, demonstrating his bias against her because she is a Native, an unmarried concubine, a non-Christian, and a woman. For all these reasons, Maurits considers her unworthy of any recognition.*

10. "Ah! This earth of mankind. Sometimes a tobacco plantation would appear, shrink, and disappear, swept away in the train's acceleration. Appear again, shrink again, disappear again. And paddy fields and paddy fields and paddy fields, unirrigated, planted with crops, but no rice, almost ready to be harvested. And the train crawled on slowly, spouting thick black and dusty and sparking smoke. Why wasn't it England that controlled all this? Why Holland? And Japan? What about Japan?"

([Chapter 7](#), Page 119)

Minke utters the title of the novel, This Earth of Mankind, several times throughout the narrative, always when he is struggling to understand the motives of others. As he observes some fertile fields, he thinks of the different colonizing nations that have controlled the land, recognizing that it no longer belongs to its ancestral inhabitants. He reflects on this as he rides, against his will, to an unknown destination for a purpose of which he is unaware. Toer implies that Minke embodies Java itself, a rich resource under the control and for the benefit of others.

11. "Indeed the civil service reports were something that never attracted my interest: appointments, dismissals, transfers, pensions. Nothing to do with me. The world of priyayi, Javanese aristocrats who became administrators for the Dutch colonial bureaucracy, was not my world. Who cared if the devil was appointed smallpox official or was sacked dishonorably because of embezzlement? My world was not rank and position, wage and embezzlement. My world was this earth of mankind and its problems."

([Chapter 7](#), Page 125)

These thoughts rage through Minke's head as he kneels, face to the floor, before his estranged father, recently appointed the bupati—or local administrator—of a community. Throughout the narrative, Minke often hears people predict that he, too, will become a bupati, an idea he detests. Though he feigns obedience, he wants to ignore the insignificance of

bupati concerns and address this earth of mankind. Ironically, Minke's inner conflict pits two colonial visions of himself against each other: a local bureaucrat officially authorized by the Dutch and a journalist writing for the elite Dutch reader.

12. "Minke, if you maintain your present attitude, I mean your European attitude, not a slavish attitude like most Javanese, perhaps one day you will be an important person. You can become a leader, a pioneer, an example to your race. You, as an educated person, surely understand that your people have fallen very low, humiliatingly low. Europeans can no longer do anything to help. The Natives themselves must begin to do something."

([Chapter 8](#), Page 148)

*This racist quote is spoken by Herbert de la Croix, the "assistant resident," a colonial lieutenant governor of the area around Minke's hometown. While he is impressed with Minke's intelligence and learning, his words reveal the **Pervasive Prejudice** of the Dutch about the abilities and status of the Javanese people. As supportive as he intends to be, Herbert does not grasp that the colonial treatment of the Dutch has prevented the Natives from making the social progress to which he refers. For example, Minke's outcry over the kidnapping of his wife Annelies does not influence the Dutch authorities.*

13. "When I changed hands to become the property of Babah Ah Tjong at a price equivalent to ten Singapore dollars, he gave me half a guilder and said in broken Japanese:

'Actually I wanted to make you my concubine.'

'It was such a disappointment to hear those words. A concubine's life was not so harsh as a prostitute's; you could live reasonably, and were freer than the wife of a Japanese youth who hoped for capital from his future woman. What could be done? This accursed disease had taken root with me.'"

([Chapter 10](#), Page 171)

*This quote is the courtroom testimony of Maiko, a prostitute of Japanese origin who was used exclusively by Herman and his son Robert M. at Babah Ah Tjong's brothel. She is disappointed upon hearing of Babah's desire to make her his concubine because, being infected with a deadly form of syphilis, she knows he will eventually sell her, as she has been sold for lower and lower prices across Pacific Rim nations. The treatment of prostitutes as chattel reinforces the **Entrenched Misogyny** found throughout the narrative.*

14. "I rested my face on the table. I tried to absorb all of Miriam's letter, trying to ensure I would never forget it as long as I lived. Friendship is indeed beautiful. And my headache slipped away and slipped away, and then disappeared altogether, who knows to where. Miriam, you did not just send a letter. More than that: a charm to rid me of tension. [...]"

'Young Master!' I raised my head. On seeing the person in front of me the tree in my head returned, spreading its roots and seedlings. But now more vigorously. Him. Darsam."

([Chapter 11](#), Page 195)

This quote describes a culmination of forces working to claim Minke's focus and commitment. Though he dismisses his parents' desire for him to fulfill a traditional Javanese governmental role, he does listen to his mother's criticism of him favoring European culture over his Native roots. Minke fears that Robert M. will murder him—that is, until Miriam de la Croix's letter reminds him of her own family's expectations that he might become the first Native to hold a parliamentary seat, a thought that eases his headache. Then, he sees Darsam and receives a letter from Nyai summoning him to care for Annelies, which turns out to be the one call he cannot resist.

15. "You have studied European civilization, so you no doubt know the difference between the attitudes of European and Native men towards women. If you are the same as most other Natives, this child will not live long. Quite frankly she could fall into a living death. If it came about, if I say, you married her, would you take a second woman at some later stage? [...] So you will marry her and will not take a second woman.' [...]"

I had never intended to take more than one wife. I always remembered the words of my grandmother: Every man who takes more than one wife is a liar, and will certainly become a liar whether he wants to or not."

([Chapter 12](#), Page 203)

This conversation takes place between Dr. Martinet and Minke as they wait for an ill Annelies to wake. Martinet blames her condition on Minke and tells him that he is now her primary caregiver, explicitly saying she will die if he fails to coddle her. Minke is compliant despite having told various individuals, including the doctor, that he does not want to commit to anything but his personal freedom. In this respect, Minke again embodies his native land: Many outside interests pull him in different directions, none of his own making. As Java was militarily colonized, he is emotionally colonized.

16. "My grandfather had taught me that if you believe you will be successful in all your studies, then you will be successful; if you think of all study as easy, all will be easy. Be afraid of no kind of study, because such fear is the original ignorance that will make you ignorant of everything."

([Chapter 13](#), Page 208)

Returning to school after taking several weeks off, Minke remembers his grandfather's advice. Toer writes that only a brilliant student like Minke can find all studies easy and achieve universal success. Minke's precocious abilities gain him both positive and negative attention. Understanding he is the focus of the higher classes' attention, Minke is judicious when answering their challenges. However, as his grandfather proclaims, he is not fearful of the truth and never misrepresents or lies about his beliefs.

17. "Europeans who feel themselves to be a hundred percent pure do not really know how much Asian blood flows in their veins. From your study of history, you will all know that hundreds of years ago, many different Asian armies attacked Europe, and left descendants—Arabs, Turkish, Mongol—and this was after Rome had become Christian! And don't any of you forget that under the Roman empire, the Asian blood, and perhaps even African, of those citizens of Rome from various Asian nations—Arabs, Jews, Syrian, Egyptians—now mingles with the blood of Europeans."

([Chapter 13](#), Page 215)

While leading her Saturday open discussion class, Miss Magda Peters reads an article secretly written by Minke that discusses issues of class and race. Robert S. identifies Minke as the author to embarrass him, causing a stir among the students. Magda proceeds to support Minke, explaining that no one is truly a Pure-Blood, as the Dutch characterize themselves. Despite Minke and Magda speaking truth, in true colonial fashion, the director of the school ceases the discussion, finds a reason to expel Minke, and gives Magda the opportunity to resign before being fired. Like other examples in the narrative, purveyors of colonial rule will not stand to be confronted with truth.

18. "Ya Allah, in truth, the trials and tests You have made me undergo have been too great for someone as young as me. My situation has forced me to grapple with questions that should not yet be my concern. Give me the strength to face every trial and test You confront me with, just as You have done with others before me...I am not insane. And neither am I a criminal. And never will be."

([Chapter 15](#), Page 264)

Though he occasionally addresses Allah throughout the narrative, this quote is Minke's only prayer. In it, he admits he grapples with questions beyond his understanding. The prayer is ironic in that Nyai was forced to deal with even greater life-and-death challenges at a younger age than Minke, as do many underprivileged people struggling against forces beyond their control. Unlike a young Nyai, Minke has the resources and education to navigate most forces. In fact, his actual problems are the direct results of the special treatment he has received.

19. "Since I was little I had lived with grandfather, so father was really no more than a title to me. Every time I met him, all he wanted was for his authority as a father to be acknowledged. [...] If Father withdraws me from H.B.S., that too is his right. [...] Only it was not Father who guaranteed me, but Grandfather. And it was no certain that the school director would accept Father's request."

([Chapter 16](#), Page 277)

As Minke feared, involving the police in the affairs of Nyai's family would result in condemnation and unfounded speculation. Because his father, a new bupati, is hypersensitive to any negative attention from official sources, he has his wife and Minke's older brother write letters castigating him. Minke is unconcerned, believing those at school have it out for him anyway, and his real future lies in following his grandfather's vision for him. To a greater extent than in the previous crises, Minke stands up for himself, facing down his critics and acquiring a supportive readership; in turn, his connection to the school grows all the more tenuous.

20. "Between Mr. Mellema and me there were only the ties of slavery and they were never challenged by the law. Between Mr. Minke and my daughter there is a mutual and pure love. [...] Europeans are able to purchase Native women just as I was purchased. Are such purchases truer than pure love? If Europeans can act in these ways because of their superior wealth and power, why is it that a Native must become the target of scorn and insults because of pure love?"

([Chapter 17](#), Page 287)

After prosecutors expose the relationship between Minke and Annelies in court, Nyai defends them in Dutch, pointing out the inequalities experienced by Natives—and particularly Native women—at the hands of Europeans. The court struggles to silence her, as she speaks truth.

The Dutch practice of keeping Native concubines, who have no rights as they are women of no European heritage, is clearly human trafficking and a form of slavery.

21. "If you ever run away from something, your schooling and your education will have been in vain, because my son would then be only a criminal. [...] Don't run from your own problems, because to resolve them is your right as a man. Seize the beautiful flowers, because they are there for him who is manly. And don't become a criminal in affairs of love either—one who conquers a woman with the jingle of coins, the sparkle of wealth and rank. Such a man is also a criminal, while the woman is a prostitute."

([Chapter 17](#), Page 296)

Here, Minke's mother persuades him to stand up for himself in the face of the criticism he has received. She counsels him to remember the principles she instilled. Her words call back to his own words to her when she criticized him at his father's instillation: He said that his parents wanted him educated, and now they balk at the direction in which education has taken him. The essence of her message is that maturity is what drives real learning. It is ironic that a Native woman, who is assumed to be inferior by society due to her race and gender, imparts this wisdom.

22. "'...if you were Javanese, you would be able to write in Javanese. You write in Dutch, Gus, because you no longer want to be Javanese. You write for Dutch people. Why do you honor them so greatly? They drink and eat from Javanese earth. You do not eat and drink from the Dutch earth. Why, why do you honor them so greatly?'

'Yes, Mother.'

'What are you yessing? Your ancestors, the kings of Java, all wrote in Javanese. Are you perhaps ashamed of being Javanese? Ashamed that you're not Dutch?'

([Chapter 18](#), Page 309)

*This quote is part of the extended conversation between Minke and his mother as she dresses him for his wedding feast. She refers to him as Gus, not a name but an expression of endearment. She alludes to Minke's personal struggle—that between his **Allegiance to the Netherlands or Java**. Minke's academic achievements are all written in Dutch; he cannot sufficiently write in Javanese or Malay, the Indonesian national language. Rather, he has trained to become a literary giant in a land where he cannot be a citizen.*

23. "I had never harmed another's reputation. I had never done away with other people's goods. I had never dealt in contraband. How was I to defend myself from such arbitrary judgments? Perhaps only Jean Maris taught the truth on this matter: People must be just and fair, starting with what they thought. It turned out that the Europeans themselves, and not just any Europeans either, were the ones who were unjust."

([Chapter 18](#), Page 323)

*This quote comprises Minke's reaction when his request to travel to the Netherlands to continue his education is refused on grounds of morality. His renewed awareness of the hypocrisy of his Dutch overlords highlights the conflict that his mother repeatedly addresses –Minke's **Allegiance**. This sets the stage for the three subsequent novels in the Buru Quartet, which focus on Minke's dealings with his Javanese heritage.*

24. "I understood at that moment: we would be defeated and our only duty now was to fight back, to defend our rights, until we were unable to fight back any longer—like the Acehnese in their fight against the Dutch according to Jean Marais's story. Mama also bowed her head. She more than just understood. She was going to lose everything: her child, her business, all the fruits of her efforts, and her personal property."

([Chapter 19](#), Page 331)

*Minke's thoughts come after an initial conversation with the family lawyer, who examines the legal documents asserting Maurits's legal claims upon the death of his father, Herman. Throughout the narrative, Minke wrestles with whether he is going to act as the Native he is or in service of the Dutch who educated him. However, Natives like him and Nyai clearly don't have rights within the Dutch legal system, making the impersonal aspect of **Allegiance** irrelevant. To Europeans, Minke will always be a clever non-person.*

25. "Mother, your son had been defeated. Your beloved son did not run, Mother; he is no criminal, even though he's proven incapable of defending his own wife, your daughter-in-law. Is this how weak a Native is in the face of Europeans? Europe, you, my teacher, is this the manner of your deeds?"

([Chapter 20](#), Page 358)

These are Minke's thoughts as he watches Annelies escorted to the carriage which will take her to the ship that will transport her to Amsterdam. His words call back to his lengthy conversations with his mother, in which she encouraged him to face and conquer his problems, rather than run away like a criminal. Having given his best to protect Anneleis, as

he and Nyai agree they did, they are nonetheless defeated. Minke recognizes in this moment that as he fails his mother, mother-in-law, and wife, so has Europe, with all its supposed refinement and learning, failed him.

Essay Topics

1. From the very start of *This Earth of Mankind*, Minke conceals his true name from readers. Why is he so concerned about readers finding out his identity? What does Pramoedya Ananta Toer imply about Minke by giving him a nickname that means either “monkey” or “mine”?
2. There were three distinct castes in the Javanese society of 1898 and no individual could move from one caste to another. Does (or did) the U.S. have a caste system? Can a caste system be uncanny, that is, universally understood though unspoken?
3. According to the novel, the Javanese Native society of Minke’s lifetime disempowered women and apparently did little to protect them from abuse. Has Javanese culture and law improved in this regard? In what ways did colonization exacerbate the poor treatment of women?
4. Nyai encourages Annelies to spend time with Minke and grow emotionally attached to him; she also seems to condone their physical relationship. Why does Nyai desire Minke to be a part of Annelies’s life? What are Nyai’s hopes for the young couple, and how do they benefit herself?
5. During the murder trial of Nyai’s owner (and former partner) Herman Mellema, the judge refuses to allow Nyai to testify in Dutch, even though she speaks the language fluently. What message was the court trying to send with this ruling? Why would prosecutors go out of their way to discuss Minke and Annelies’s relationship when it had no bearing on the murder? Since the prosecutors did not end up convicting anyone, what *did* they accomplish?
6. Is Dr. Martinet justified in blaming Minke for having to drug Annelies to keep her calm until Minke returned to Wonokromo? Minke often refers to Annelies as a spoiled child. Why, then, does he accommodate her every wish?

7. Why do you think Toer added minor characters Robert Suurhof and Robert Mellema to Minke's story? Is there significance to them sharing the same first name?
8. Minke is an exceptionally gifted child of a Native family who received the privilege of a Dutch prep school education, enabling him to understand the Dutch world. How does his schooling affect his personal struggle with allegiance? Considering his bias toward European culture and his estrangement from his family, why does he struggle at all?
9. Toer was successively imprisoned by colonial, then anti-colonial, governments for 14 years. Why would opposing political powers find it necessary to keep an author in prison? If not for Toer's political leanings, why else would the Indonesian government want to ban his novels?
10. Why does Toer employ shifting first-person perspective rather than make Minke his one narrator? What is gained from other characters' perspectives? Do other characters' perspectives provide further insight into the tension between Dutch and Native society?

Further Reading & Resources

Further Reading: Literature

The Buru Quartet: Child of All Nations, Footsteps, House of Glass by Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1996)

This compilation of the three subsequent novels in Toer's series continues the stories of the characters first introduced in *This Earth of Mankind*.

Further Reading: Beyond Literature (Nonfiction)

A Brief History of Indonesia by Tim Hannigan (2015)

Hannigan offers a concise but detailed description of Indonesia from its pre-colonial period to the present.

Exile: Pramoedya Ananta Toer in conversation with Andre Vltchek and Rossie Indira (2006)

This is a series of interviews in which Toer describes his lifelong struggles against tyranny and his hopes for Indonesia.

Video & Podcast Resources

"Pramoedya Ananta Toer Documentary Part 1"

This video interview of Toer discusses his 14-year imprisonment, frequently including excerpts from *This Earth of Mankind*.

- "[Pramoedya Ananta Toer Documentary Part 1](#)" on YouTube

Other Relevant Media Resources

Photograph of Queen Wilhelmina

This photograph of 18-year-old Queen Wilhelmina was taken as she was about to ascend the throne of the Netherlands in the 1890s. 18-year-old Minke's adoration of Wilhelmina leads classmate Robert Suurhof to introduce him to Anneliese Mellema, saying her beauty exceeds that of the young queen.

- [Photograph of Queen Wilhelmina](#) on Wikipedia