

Book Club Discussion

“Under Chad’s Spell” by Michael Varga

1. What major emotion did the story evoke in you as a reader? Why?
 - a. Did you identify with one character more? Why?
2. How would you define the book: love story, Peace Corps promotion, political statement, a melding of two cultures?
3. How do you feel about the author’s style in his use of various points of view, descriptions, immersion into a new culture?
 - a. How do you feel about the country of Chad now? Do you feel like you might want to visit it one day, if the opportunity arose? Why or Why not?
4. At the start of each chapter there is a snapshot of Chad and its people, its customs. Do these help develop the plot, define the characters, have symbolic significance?
5. What main ideas, or themes, does the author explore throughout the story?
 - a. Can you list three? Which one is dominant?
6. Were there any particular quotations that stood out to you? Why?
7. Early in the book, Madison feels he receives the message “live like you care what happens.” Why do you think he needed to get that message? Did he change his approach to life in Chad after that?
8. How realistic was the characterization, especially of Madison and Charlene? Would you want to meet any of the characters? Which one and why?
9. Both Madison and Charlene are very young in this novel. If you could meet them, what you want to tell them about life, about love, about choices we make?
10. Who seemed more in love with the other: Charlene or Madison? Why?
11. Do you feel that Charlene and Madison are changed by their time in Chad? How? Are the changes in them believable? In what ways did they mature? In what ways are they still so young?
12. What obstacles confront Charlene in her growth? What do other characters want from Charlene? And does she provide what they want? What does Charlene want from others? Does she get it?
13. What obstacles confront Madison in his growth? What do other characters want from Madison? And does he provide what they want? What does Madison want from others? Does he get it?
14. Was there a moment when you think a character made a bad choice? When? What would you have done differently?
15. Imagine a sequel to this story. What is Charlene doing five years after the Peace Corps? What is Madison doing five years after the Peace Corps?

16. What was the significance of the Chadians watching “Gone With the Wind” at the start of the novel?
17. The author chose French writer Roger Martin du Gard’s quotation as the epigraph for *Under Chad’s Spell*: “...one of the turning-points in my life was when I realized that what others disapproved of in me and thought pernicious was, on the contrary, the best and most genuine in my nature.” What does that quotation mean to you? Why do you think the author chose it? How does it apply to the story? What might Charlene mean by it? What might Madison mean by it?
18. How did Chad becoming independent in 1960 factor into the story? Do you think most Chadians have a sense of loyalty to the country of Chad? What is their primary loyalty?
19. Did the book affect you in a personal way? Was there a part of the book that offended you? Was there a part that exhilarated you? Did you reassess your views on certain topics because of the novel? Which ones?
20. The author dedicated the book to the “lapel-shakers.”

“This book is dedicated to the lapel-shakers of this world. May they continue to compel examinations of conscience in the United States and abroad and build compassion for any hero or heroine blessed and cursed with both a wound and a bow.”

What is that dedication about? Why do you think the author did that?

21. If you could ask the author one question about the book, what would it be?
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