

American Short Story Masterpieces Study Guide

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Introduction, Sonny's Blues, and Weekend.

Introduction, Sonny's Blues, and Weekend. Summary

American Short Story Masterpieces is a collection of short stories that focus on realism as an alternative to the surreal. The thirty-six stories in the book focus on topics set in seemingly-real settings around the United States in a variety of time frames and are primary examples of narrative storytelling. The themes of the story range from drug addiction to infidelity to tragic death to love, but all tell stories nearly anyone can relate to.

In the "Introduction," Raymond Carver and Tom Jenks, editors of the book, point out the trend in recent years toward the surreal and the fantasy genre. They note that this collection gathers what they believe to be thirty-six of the best short stories based in realism written between 1953 and 1986. They note this book is different from other short story collections in that they focused on a short time frame, American only authors, and those based in realism. They note they believe these stories will move readers.

In "Sonny's Blues," the narrator of the story learns that his brother, Sonny, has been arrested for selling and using heroine. The narrator, a teacher, has not seen his brother in over a year. He finally writes Sonny to tell him his daughter has died, and Sonny writes back. The narrator meets him following his prison release. The narrator recalls being on leave from the army and arguing with Sonny about his future. Sonny wishes to be a musician and tries to explain that he wants to leave Harlem to escape the culture he is falling into, but the narrator places him with his fiancé's family, after their mother dies. Sonny begins to miss school and use drugs. Following his incarceration, the narrator takes in Sonny. The two talk openly one afternoon, and Sonny explains that heroine makes life tolerable for many. That evening, the narrator goes with Sonny to watch him play. Sonny struggles through the music, clearly making an effort to gain control over himself and his addictions, and the narrator watches Sonny succeed in his battle to win back his music. The narrator finds himself able to relate, finally, to Sonny's struggle and realizes the struggle is that of all humanity.

In "Weekend," Lenore is partnered with George, a retired professor twenty-one years her senior who often drinks and eats too much when former students visit. She has overheard George tell others she stays with him because she is simple minded and resents this. Lenore admits she realizes what may be happening between George and his young female ex-students but that she convinces herself nothing is going on. Sarah and Julie, two former students, arrive. Sarah and George leave together for a hike, but when it begins to rain, Julie takes the car to find them. She returns unhappily, noting they are no where to be found. When pressed, Lenore admits they could be making love somewhere. Following dinner, George and Sarah go for a walk, and Julie confides in Lenore, letting her know she is aware of the relationship between George and Sarah.



When Sarah and George return, drunk, he declares his love for Sarah, and Lenore flees the room. Lenore later learns from Julie that she and Sarah are leaving. When Lenore walks downstairs, she finds George, still drunk, badmouthing Sarah. She thinks of happier times and consoles him.

Introduction, Sonny's Blues, and Weekend. Analysis

In the Introduction, the editors inform the reader of the point of the collection of stories, that of a return to realism in fiction. They have a passion for short stories that make readers feel genuine emotion is clear as well as a belief in realism as a valuable tool in modern literature that can be used to tell stories individuals are able to relate to in a very real and emotional way. They chose only American writers from a small time frame to show the vast amount of quality writing available as the trend in fiction changed from the surreal to realism.

In "Sonny's Blues," there is a distinct theme of the variations of the African-American experience, of religion, and of the coming together of two brothers in their journey through life. The narrator, having grown up with his father and mother, being well educated, and being in the armed forces, has assimilated into white culture. Sonny, on the other hand, has grown up fighting his father in a world of music and associated drug abuse. Both individuals feel the racism and pressures of the world, but while the narrator seeks to battle it through education and learning, Sonny seeks to escape it through drugs and music. Religious themes are peppered throughout the story, as the narrator battles his own faith as his brother loses control and as his daughter dies of polio, and as Sonny himself notes that God has virtually failed the narrator. At the end of the novel, the "cup of trembling" symbolized by Sonny's Scotch shows the inner sufferings of Sonny and the battle to overcome. At the end of the book, the narrator begins to actually hear Sonny's journey through his music and understands that the journey of men is similar regardless of their circumstance.

In "Weekend," Lenore is subconsciously aware of her husband's infidelity and even at times consciously aware of his individual affair with a previous student. She is able to keep such thoughts at a distance primarily because she knows she is well cared for and he is genuinely nice to her. She has a good home, a social life, and does not have to work in order to maintain her happy home. As a result, when others press her for why she stays, she simply shrugs, and admits she has accepted her position. George, a fallen professor, seems to need the flattery of having young women as lovers but also seems to need the reassurance of Lenore, with her kindness and care. George is an alcoholic, selfish, and often acts like a small boy without a care for consequences. Lenore allows this because she is safe and knows it. The story teaches the lesson that, at least for some, living with infidelity and difficult individuals is sometimes acceptable if given a comfortable life with little responsibility and little difficulty. Lenore is unable to leave George in part because she knows he lives in anguish and that she is the brightening portion of his life. For this, and for her family, she stays with him despite his infidelity.



The Bystander, The Amish Farmer, 1/3, 1/3, 1/3, Verona: A Young Woman Speaks, and Talk of Heroes.

The Bystander, The Amish Farmer, 1/3, 1/3, 1/3, Verona: A Young Woman Speaks, and Talk of Heroes. Summary

In "The Bystander," Arty's father, Lewis Lisle, is taken to a mental institution after he attacks a woman. Arty visits him and discovers his father will be transferred soon to another mental institution. Arty struggles to appear calm and rational wanting the state of his father not to reflect on him. Arty notes he has a hard time merging the image of his father as mentally ill with the icon that has been his father his entire life. Arty and Lewis discuss events, and Lewis laments about his declining health as Arty takes note of silent, ill patients throughout the room. Lewis asks Arty not to let his aunt sell his tools and shakes Arty's hand. As Arty leaves, he looks into the windows of the ward and sees a man. He feels he is looking at his father and realizes that in some respect he is, in that he is looking at a man who has broken down in front of his child.

In "The Amish Farmer," Vance, a teacher, tells the class a story of a situation he encountered years ago that shows the power of point of view in an effort to entice a student, Katie Jay, to participate. He tells of a former student, Noel, who comes to him believing he has nearly been killed. Earlier, Noel moves his wife, Dawn, and her son to an Amish farm in the country to live. On the farm also live an Amish family, headed by Daniel; a young, well-built man with a wife and children. One night during a storm, Noel and Dawn drive off the road. Noel walks to the cabin for help, and Daniel takes out the forbidden tractor and goes to get Dawn. Driving off the road himself, Daniel arrives at the car, where Vance imagines Dawn seduced Daniel. Noel confronts Dawn, and Dawn goes to speak with Daniel who immediately comes toward Noel with a wrench. Noel graduates, and Dawn, her son, and Daniel move after Daniel gives up his Amish lifestyle. At the end of the story, Vance asks about how the story would change if the point of view were switched to one of the characters. Vance expects a reaction from Katie, who has mentioned her lack of emotional attachment to sex and relationships, but she is silent. When class is dismissed, Katie Jay stays and notes to Vance that she needs that Amish farmer.

In "1/3, 1/3, 1/3," a young man is living on the streets in a welfare area. A woman lives across from him, and he notes her childlike appearance and unfortunate state of life. She propositions him one day to go in with her and another man on writing a novel. The other man will write it, she will edit it, and he will type it. Each of them is to gain 1/3 of the profit. The two travel to the man's trailer, where the narrator meets the uneducated



writer. The narrator reads a grammatically incorrect, misspelled story of a young man falling in love with a waitress. It begins to rain as the narrator reads.

In "Verona," a young woman recalls traveling with her parents as a young girl. She is dressed royally, given rich foods and she is often complimented on her looks and overall general goodness. She knows she is special. She recalls standing in the snow while her father places bird food on her outstretched arms, and she is caught in a whirlwind of birds. She becomes dizzy with happiness, and her father notices she has had enough. She realizes her mother is upset because something has happened between father and daughter of which the mother is not a part. The little girl feels power but also sadness. Later, her mother awakens her to look out at the vast night from the train, and they share a special moment. When the father awakens, the mother lets him know she loves him and is grateful for him, and the child feels jealousy. However, the father soon returns to bed and the mother and child share the view from the window.

In "Talk of Heroes," Emily Anderson is on her way to introduce a speaker after talking to her daughter, Sandra, who is staying with her, after having problems with her husband. Emily arrives at the meeting building where Mr. Elvekrog, the group president, is fretting about the speaker, Willi Varig. He has heard Willi is a drunk. Willi arrives very late and is clearly drunk. Emily introduces him quickly, noting he was part of a Norwegian underground network during WWII that smuggled information to England. Willi is unable to give his speech following a film, so Emily quickly takes the podium and tells of his heroic battle during the war, where he suffered horrific torture at the hands of the German army to allow his colleagues time to escape. Emily notes that the Willi they see before them today is a product of that event and asks that they remember his heroism. She drives home, thinks of her daughter's plight, and imagines the lives of the three people able to escape because of Willi's heroism.

The Bystander, The Amish Farmer, 1/3, 1/3, 1/3, Verona: A Young Woman Speaks, and Talk of Heroes. Analysis

"The Bystander" is a story that reflects the fall from grace of a father through the eyes of his son. Lewis has, according to psychologists, had a mental breakdown and is no longer safe in society. His son, Arty, is a bystander in this event, and yet plays an important role as the father's son. Arty is used to seeing his father as the icon of adulthood, and with his decline into instability, Arty is forced to view his father, and all fathers, as human beings. Through the eyes of Arty, the reader is able to see a variety of individuals in the institution, as well as their families, showing clearly the point that behind each person are others who love and care for them, regardless of their circumstance.

In "The Amish Farmer," Vance, as the author, shows a perfect example of the use of point of view in a story. Vance tells his class a tale of a previous student and his wife in an effort to extract a response from a bright but withdrawn female student named Katie



Jay. Vance, as the narrator of the story, tells of Noel and his wife, Dawn, as they move to an Amish farm where Dawn begins an affair with Amish farmer Daniel. Vance describes the characters with passion, seeming to defend Noel, admire Dawn, and wish to be Daniel. Following his tale, his questions of the students allow the author to show the vast differences in the story were it told by various characters. At the end, the reader is surprised to find another change in point of view, as Katie Jay interjects her own desires for the passion of the Amish farmer. This story shows, from the telling of the story to the discussion following, that the point of view of any story changes not only the tone of the tale, but the entire story its self.

"1/3. 1/3, 1/3" is a short story about the marriage between money and literature. The narrator of the story finds himself propositioned as a result of his ownership of a typewriter. His descriptions of the young woman who approaches him tell of poverty and sadness, as do his descriptions of his own living experience and the trailer of the author. It is clear, through these descriptions, that the characters in the tale are in severe poverty. The writer in the story is uneducated but dreams of telling his love story to the world. As a result, he hires his girlfriend to edit the tale, although her only experiences is in reading and hires the narrator to type the tale. While short, the story shows the power of descriptions to convey situations, as well as shows the unrealistic search for money.

"Verona" is a delightful story about childhood happiness and the unreality of human emotions. The young girl in the story is extremely perceptive, and through her vast descriptions of sensory perceptions, the reader is able to see the world through the eyes of a very happy child. As children are primarily sensory creatures, these descriptions convey the world around the girl in detail. In addition, the emotions felt by the child in the tale, often confused and extremely vivid, are apt as descriptions of childhood emotions and allow the reader to feel these emotions in the raw form felt by children. The jealousy of the mother as the child is catered to, followed by the urge by the mother to share a personal experience, followed by the child's own jealousy at her parents, are so vivid that they convey the intended sincerity well.

"Talk of Heroes" is a story about the unintended consequences of unfortunately situations and our ability to choose how we remember the past. At the beginning of the story, Sandra notes she is fighting her own war, and is uninterested in the stories of others who fought in WWII. The author then uses the small problems of others at the meeting to show that each person is concerned only with their own emotions, perceptions, and situations, and cares little for the life of Willi. Emily, on the other hand, comes to the rescue and shows people that Willi is not only an alcoholic and a bully, but a true hero who endured severe brutality in order to save lives. She asks the members to remember Willi as the war hero he was, rather than as the alcoholic old man he has become, showing that people can choose how they remember a situation and choose how they see others.



Fever, The Fisherman From Chihuahua, and Midair

Fever, The Fisherman From Chihuahua, and Midair Summary

"Fever" is the story of Carlyle, whose wife Eileen has recently left him. Carlyle is a teacher who must find a sitter for his two children, Keith and Sarah. He first hires Debbie, who does not work out. Eileen calls and has arranged for a woman named Mrs. Webster to help him. Mrs. Webster calls and appears the following morning. Carlyle admits they need someone to count on, and Mrs. Webster reassures him. Six weeks later, Carlyle realizes his life is improving. His relationship with Carol, his girlfriend, is blossoming, and the children are happy. He finds himself accepting his wife's departure. One evening, he becomes ill. Soon after, Eileen calls and tells him to write in his journal during his illness, since sickness is the body's statement of mental health. Mrs. Webster tells him she and her husband are moving and she can only finish the week. Carlyle begins to tell her of his and Eileen's love and pours his story to her. At the end, she tells him she understands, and as he watches Mr. and Mrs. Webster leave, he feels an ending to his old life, and a beginning to the new.

In "The Fisherman From Chihuahua," a restaurant owner, Pendleton, operates in Santa Cruz during the winter. He has a customer who comes nightly alone to eat but one night, the man comes in with another individual. He is also of Mexican decent but is handsome and wild looking. He does not speak, but after the other man plays a song on the jukebox, the man raises his head and sings a war cry similar to those of the ancient Moors. The two leave, only to return the following night to the same routine. After the same thing happens several times, the first man comes in one night alone. He says the other man calls himself Damaso and hails from Chihuahua. The Mexican man believes he is a gypsy and notes to Pendleton that he is gone because he is drunk. Several days pass, and Damaso returns but does not sing. The following evening, the Mexican tells Pendleton Damaso has gone.

"Midair" begins with Sean, a six-year-old boy, and Mary, a nine-year-old girl, being led along the sidewalk by their father, who has appeared suddenly after a long absence. When they do not have an apartment key, the father takes them to the roof, down the fire escape, and through the open kitchen window. Soon, men with straight jackets and a doctor come to the door. Sean is carried by his father out the window. Years later, such memories forgotten, Sean marries and has children. Sean begins having an affair and finds himself drunk outside his lover's home one evening. She is away on holiday, and he cannot stop himself from trying to break into her apartment by climbing to the roof and using the fire escape. Over the next several years, he becomes obsessed with writing and discovers a link between his children and his work. He begins to obsess over them, even sleeping on their floor at night. He begins to drink heavily and become



enraged often. One evening, he breaks into tears driving home and realizes his wife is about to leave him for another man. Months later, he announces to his children he is leaving. Years later, he finds himself stuck in an elevator with a man who is the same age as his now-grown son. He helps calm the young man until the elevator is fixed. That night, in bed, he remembers the event with his father.

Fever, The Fisherman From Chihuahua, and Midair Analysis

"Fever" is a story essentially about the power of human beings to help heal one another. Carlyle is lost without his wife, Eileen, and being given a huge responsibility to care for his two children alone. Carol, his lover, is a wonderful person, but because Carlyle cannot let go of the past, he cannot embrace the future. It is only with the coming of Mrs. Webster that Carlyle is able to begin to heal. Once his mind is able to accept that his wife is not returning, and with the knowledge that Mrs. Webster is able to help him, Carlyle begins to again enjoy his life. Although he believes his ex-wife is insane, her phone calls show the reader that Carlyle is beginning to see her as a historical figure in his life. Her timing in phone calls and her urging to show him that his illness is in relation to his mental state also shows she is more in tune than he believes. Carlyle's illness allows him to vent to Mrs. Webster, who knows he must vent his feelings in order to heal. It is this that helps Carlyle to become completely well again and to let go of the past, showing that sometimes illness of the body is related to illness of the mind, and that to move forward, one must find a way to purge the past.

In "The Fisherman from Chihuahua," Pendleton's character symbolizes an individual's passing between reality and unreality; whereas, the Damaso represents the antihero of many stories. Pendleton works each day and night in his restaurant, and has the same experiences each day throughout the winter. This sense of normalcy is disrupted by the coming of a new person, the dark Damaso. Damaso's arrival, along with his mournful yowling each night, seem to push Pendleton to hear the ocean and to truly experience life again. When Damaso leaves, Pendleton feels Damaso's absence, showing Pendleton is now more aware.

"Midair" shows a clear link between childhood experiences and the development of personalities and behaviors as adults. The story begins with an experience of Sean with his father, who is a clearly mentally unstable individual who behaves irrationally and is eventually recaptured by psychiatrists. This experience is not remembered by Sean as he becomes an adult; however, Sean's choices in life reflect an unstable mental state. He chooses a wife out of fear of being alone. His entire existence becomes built around his children until he begins to have an affair. His obsessions become clear throughout the story as he obsesses about the safety of his children. These obsessions become clear as he attempts to break into his lover's apartment. His drinking increases, as does his anger. His actions cause his wife to leave him, cause his work life to be stressful, and cause problems for him throughout his existence. It is clear that, although he does not remember the incident with his father, that incident along with his father's instability have lead Sean to make decisions in his own life that were irrational. It is only when

Sean, at the end of the story, remembers the event that he is fully able to understand his own life and decisions.



Willi, The Fat Girl, A Poetics for Bullies, and Rock Springs.

Willi, The Fat Girl, A Poetics for Bullies, and Rock Springs. Summary

In "Willi," a young man is thoroughly enjoying nature on a farm but comes upon his mother having sex in the barn with his tutor, Ledig. He is instantly enraged. At dinner, he runs from the table to his room. He feels he is living in an impossible situation, in that he must live in the "unholy trinity" that is his father, whom he idolizes, his mother, whom he now hates, and his tutor, who he now wishes gone. He finally goes to the barn to tell his father. He finds him breeding dogs and tells him by noting that the dogs should be named "mama" and "Ledig". He runs and returns to the house into his mother's arms but is unable to tell her what he has done. That night, he hears his father beating his mother violently. He runs to their room and attempts to cover her, but his father instead grabs her hair and punches her in the face. The boy then attacks his father.

In "The Fat Girl," a young girl named Louise spends her youth as a heavy young girl with few friends. Her mother is strict about her food intake, so Louise begins sneaking food. In college, her roommate Carrie supports her by offering to help her lose weight. For a year, Carrie prepares her meals and walks with her. She graduates, moves home, eats like her mother, and continues to maintain a small weight. She marries a lawyer in her father's firm and has a rich, wealthy life. She becomes pregnant and tells Richard, her husband, of her earlier weight problems. As her weight increases, she begins to lose her dedication and sneaks sweets. Richard begins to cruelly point out her weight, as does her mother. She begins to exclude herself from their social gatherings, wear baggy clothes, and snack more often. Richard pleads and begs with her, and Louise knows she is close to being alone. She is happy with the idea. She puts the baby to bed, gets a hidden candy bar, and begins to eat it in front of him.

"A Poetics for Bullies" begins with Push the Bully, who describes his power over children in his neighborhood. A follower, Eugene Kraft, who has a glandular problem which causes him to drool, tells him of a new kid. Push goes to the school yard, and sees the new person who is dressed well in rich clothing and handsome, telling the children of his time in India. Push attempts to make fun of him, but his jokes fall flat. Later he goes to see the boy at his home. He appears only saddened by Push and his bullishness. Push learns the boy's name is John Williams and paints graffiti all over town, but no one seems to care. Girls begin to swoon over him, and Push's own gang turn on him. He is envious but cannot find anyone who does not love John. Push eventually decides he must fight John, as this is the only way to beat him. But during the fight, Push realizes he is simply appearing as the one beaten. He rises but refuses John's friendship, noting that he is nothing but the bringer of false promises. Push feels power in his lack of care or concern, and in the end, is able to find himself again.



In "Rock Springs," Earl finds himself in trouble for writing bad checks and fleeing with his daughter, Cheryl, and his girlfriend, Edna. Edna is a hard woman who is annoyed with Earl's lack of compassion. Their stolen car breaks down near a trailer community outside a factory. Earl walks into the area to find a phone and learns the factory is actually a gold mine. He knocks on a door, which is answered by a kind black woman and her grandson, Terrel, who refuses to speak. Earl uses their phone to call a cab and returns to the car to find the cab waiting. Edna is again in a foul mood. The cab driver tells them of the prostitution problems in the area. The family stay in a hotel, where Edna tells him she is tired of living her life this way. She laments that she needs to stop living this life and tells him she is leaving. Earl goes outside to think and finds himself looking in the windows of cars, wondering about the people traveling in them. He wonders if anyone watching him would think he was just a man like them, or would think him a thief.

Willi, The Fat Girl, A Poetics for Bullies, and Rock Springs. Analysis

"Willi" tells the story of the dangers of infidelity, on not just the husband and wife, but on the children involved. Willi is busy enjoying his childhood, as is shown by the vivid descriptions of the author. However, his happy life is destroyed when he finds his mother in the barn having sexual relations with his tutor. The mixing of emotions, from anger, jealousy, shame, and guilt are vivid, and reflect the raw emotions of a child. Willi is torn by his love and admiration for his father and his sense of duty toward his mother. Unable to live with the horror that is now his existence, he goes to tell his father. However, unable to utter the words, he uses insinuation to show him the problem. However, again unable to live with raw shame and fear, he goes to his mother for comfort. In guilt, he is unable to even embrace her love. This emotional conflict is again shown as he tries to break the fight between mother and father. He attempts to protect his mother and ends up hitting his father, whom he adores and admires. This story shows the vast spectrum of emotion felt by Willi, and his inability to combine these emotions.

"The Fat Girl" depicts not only the struggle of a woman to lose weight but also the struggle of a woman who loses herself in her quest to please others. Louise is a heavy girl, but as described, is not obese. While her mother obsesses about her weight, her father attempts to save her. Over time, she develops a sense of happiness revolving around her food intake. In college, when her friend attempts to help her lose weight, she sees a change in her family and finds a similar happiness. However, she soon realizes that the happiness of her family, friends, and husband is based on her weight, not on her own self. As she begins to gain weight, she slowly pushes those who deem her weight important aside, including her husband and her mother. She begins to find herself again and begins again enjoying her life, and looks forward to a time when she no longer has to pretend to be something she is not. She achieves her goal in the end, and although it is sad that her loved ones are non-supportive, it is a clear story about taking control and being yourself despite opposition.



In "A Poetic for Bullies," Push admits he bullies others in an effort to figure out where he stands in society. He enjoys bullying and feels a sense of power when smaller children bow to him. When John appears, however, Push is threatened and is shown to be false in his powers. However, Push soon learns that everyone has something to be taken away. In John's case, his passion to be liked and accepted by all is thwarted when Push refuses his friendship. This leads Push to powers he did not realize before, as he himself has lost the ability to lose anything. The story teaches that to have absolute power means to lose everything.

"Rock Springs" is a sad story about a man who makes choices that lead him into trouble. Earl is not a bad person, and he actually spends much time caring for those around him as effectively as possible. However, he makes unwise decisions that often land him in legal trouble. His relationships, often with bar maids or other somewhat melancholy women, are a direct result of his lifestyle choices. He finds himself happy with Edna and believes for a moment the gold mine they discover is a turning point. However, Edna soon smashes his dreams by noting her own need to flee the life she has been living. At the end, Earl wanders, thinking, but makes a valid point about the state of society when he questions what people must think of him. Earl knows he is looked upon as a criminal, despite his intentions, and knows he is a victim of his own circumstances.



The Lover of Horses, Redemption, Dream Children, and The Ledge

The Lover of Horses, Redemption, Dream Children, and The Ledge Summary

In "The Lover of Horses", the narrator notes her family comes from a long line of gypsies and horse whisperers. Others in the narrator's family have been taken by obsessions as well, including music, card playing, and other pursuits. Her father was a card player, and her mother loved his determination and drive, but hated his card playing. He often drank when he played, but rarely lost money. Her father becomes ill at seventy-three, and believes if he can win at cards, he can cheat death. For days she takes nourishment to her father in the bar as he plays cards, and he continues to win. He eventually returns home, and guests fill the house, waiting for him to die. The narrator sleeps on the ground outside, speaks in languages she does not know, and lets her father go.

"Redemption" begins with Jack Hawthorne accidentally running over his brother, David, with the tractor and killing him. Their father, Dale Hawthorne is nearly destroyed by the accident. He begins to drink heavily and have affairs, leaving town for several days at a time. Jack, as a result, believes he is a murderer, a killer, and evil. He is filled with rage and self hatred and often remains silent. He arrives at the house one day to find his father being welcomed by the family, and Dale notes he is home for good. Jack admits to himself that he hates his father. Jack learns to play the French horn and obsesses with it for escape. Years pass, and Jack learns to play from Yegudkin, or The General, who is an old Russian with great skill. He finds himself longing to play like the Russian and is rebuked by him. He goes home.

In "Dream Children," a woman prepares for her husband to arrive home with company. Some in town believe her to ride horses recklessly, but most others see her as a kind, uninteresting woman. She gave birth to a stillborn several years ago, which has made her melancholy. She knows her husband lives two lives but is reluctant to tell him she does, as well. He is a producer during the day and a loving husband at night. She reads books about communicating with the dead and sleep travel and believes she has these abilities. She recalls sleepwalking as a child, and can remember her first episode of astral projection, where she met her son. He was playing in a room in the farmhouse. She meets him during these journeys several times. Her husband is worried about her. He has a mistress in town but has informed her he cannot leave his wife. The wife realizes she is happy with her life.

In "The Ledge" a woman watches as her gruff husband takes his son and nephew fishing early Christmas morning. Hours later, the boys set the decoys, and the threesome travel by boat to the ledge, uncovered at the moment, from which they plan to shoot ducks. Shortly, the ducks begin to land. The boys are excited, and the



fisherman and his son take the skiff to collect the twenty-seven dead ducks. This pattern repeats several times. At the end of the day, the fisherman goes to collect the skiff, only to find it missing. He finds it a quarter mile away and realizes they are stuck with no way off the ledge. He begins to speak to the boys tenderly. The men fire shots at five second intervals, hoping to be noticed, but are not. As the shelf begins to disappear under the rising tide, it begins to snow. The fisherman pushes the boys to the higher edge of the shelf, and picks up the dog, whose belly is already wet. He raises the boys to his shoulders and begins to feel the water to his knees. The fisherman tells his son to swim for it when he falls, and his son understands his father will soon die. The following day, they find the dead fisherman, and drag the lake for the two boys. His wife sees him, in death, absolved of his mortality.

The Lover of Horses, Redemption, Dream Children, and The Ledge Analysis

"The Lover of Horses" tells the story of addiction, albeit in a different form than has been told in other stories in the novel. In this story, addiction takes the form of passions such as music or horses or gambling. Just as harmful to loved ones, the addictions in this story lead to heartache for some, and a sense of grandeur for others. The daughter, much like her father, begins to understand his passions and the passions of her family as he begins to perish. She is able to succumb to her own obsessions only as a method of letting her father die with dignity.

In "Redemption," the author focuses on several themes, including the relationship between obsession and healing, as well as the consequences of death and a religious struggle following the death of a loved one. Dale Hawthorne finds solace in women and alcohol following the death of his son; whereas, his son finds refuge from his hatred of his father and himself in music. The death of David has a profound effect on the entire family, with the mother becoming sorrowful, the father abandoning the family, the sister becoming silent and sad, and the son burning with hatred. It is clear these characters would be vastly different if young David had not been killed. In terms of religion, Dale finds himself in one breath cursing God for the death of his son while in the next praying for peace. Jack, too, finds religion difficult as he shuns God but feels it necessary to help his sister maintain her faith. The story ends with Jack's realization that the world is not simply a stage and that there are some in life whose troubles far outweigh his own. This knowledge allows him to forgive himself and his father.

"Dream Children" tells the story of a young woman who, in tragedy, finds or believes she finds a way to transverse the universe and to communicate with her dead son. Following a tragic accident during birth, the woman of the story gives birth to a stillborn child, but because of a mix up, is given another child to hold for several minutes. She bonded with this child. Her husband moves her to a remote farm to allow her time and space to heal. Here, she finds she is able to astrally project herself and meet a boy she believes is the boy she bonded with years before. This belief, whether real or false, allows the woman to remain happy despite her lack of true marital happiness or a family. The husband, on the other hand, also finds a replacement of sorts, in that he



begins to have an affair, while still caring for his beloved wife. While sad, the story does show that life does move forward in tragedy.

"The Ledge" is a tragic tale of loss as a gruff fisherman is turned tender only in his dying moments. The fisherman of the story is clearly a gruff man, but he also clearly cares for his son and nephew. He seeks to give them a fine fishing adventure and struggles to remain less gruff than he would be under usual circumstances. His anger when he realizes the skiff is gone immediately turns to tenderness as he begins to realize the situation will likely kill them all. The fisherman, from that point forward, is tender, loving, and above all, heroic to the boys as he attempts to save their lives. The tragic closing scene, where the fisherman's wife is able to absolve him of his human faults in death, is a poignant reminder that all men, even those who seem invincible, are mortal. This sad story shows that under the right circumstances, even men of gruff character can be tender, loving, and heroic.



Water Liars, Letters from the Samantha, Ile Forest, The Magic Barrel, Shiloh

Water Liars, Letters from the Samantha, Ile Forest, The Magic Barrel, Shiloh Summary

In "Water Liars," a man escapes to a pier off Farte Cove to escape the knowledge that his wife had lovers before meeting him. On Farte Cove, several old men tell tall stories. One man, the son of the founder of the cove, tells of ghosts he has seen on the island. Another claims God helped someone pull fish from the river without bait. They also speak of seeing ghosts of the Yazoo River founder and of Farte himself. The man suddenly thinks of his wife's teenage lovers and is ill. Another man speaks of hearing noises he takes for a ghost only to find his teenage daughter having sex. The narrator has the man over for drinks and realizes they are bound together by the truths that hurt them.

"Letters from the Samantha" tells the story of a captain, Samson Low, who pulls a large monkey from the sea after a violent typhoon. The captain regrets his decision but cannot bring himself to harm the animal, since it is much like man. In the following letter, the captain has the men building a raft for the monkey. The monkey is the size of a man, with baring teeth. He is covered in reddish fur and has clear blue eyes. The captain manages to look the monkey in the eye, and he immediately calms down. To convince him to come down from the mast, they entice him with vegetables, and the monkey comes down and eats. They chain him to his small boat where he is comfortable. The following morning, however, the captain rises to find the crew has thrown the small boat overboard, not wanting to see the monkey put adrift. The captain attempts to throw the monkey overboard, and the two wrestle. Eventually, the captain strangles the animal and throws him overboard. He tells the crew there is no lesson to be learned and that the ape does not stand for anything.

In "Ile Forest," Gil is a doctor who explains he believes there are some crimes that can be unpunished. He tells the story of a man he once knew. In the story, he is a doctor and is called to make a house call in Ile Forest. When Gil gets there, he realizes it is really rather poor in nature, but that Galven Ileskar, the patient, is a kind man, although his servant, Martin, seems overprotective. After Ileskar's recovery, Gil takes Poma, his younger sister, to meet Gil and the two respond well to one another. Minna, the house servant, notes that Galven's wife left him for another man, after which he changed. One day months later, Gil hears Poma and Galven outside the window and realizes they are having a sexual relationship and are in love. To avoid marriage, Gil tells Poma he plans to take her away from Ile Forest, but Poma tells him she is in love and plans to stay with Galven. Gil goes to Ile and finds Martin, who tells him Galven, in a rage, killed his first wife and her lover but does not remember doing so and that Martin has covered it up for years. Gil rides home to find Galven at his house, asking to marry Poma. Gil tells Poma



the entire story, and she chooses to remain with Galven. They marry and have several children, and Galven dies without incident.

Leo Finkle, a rabbi student in "The Magic Barrel" is seeking a wife through Pinye Salzman, a marriage broker. The matchmaker arrives and shows him several photos of women he can choose from, but Leo is particular, and sends him away without choosing a woman. Leo is upset for many days, but Pinye returns with more photos. Leo at first responds blankly not wanting to become further depressed but is interested in a young woman who is a school teacher. He meets with her a week later and goes for walk, only to discover Pinye has portrayed him to Lily as nearly a prophet, rather than just a rabbi. Leo begins to question his faith in God, and when Pinye returns with more photos, Leo sends him away but notices he has left the pictures. In the stack, he sees a snapshot of a woman he is in awe of and finds Pinye to tell him about her. Pinye informs him he cannot marry the young woman in the photo, as she is wild and unfit for a rabbi. After being pressed, Pinye admits the woman is his daughter. Months later, Leo finds Pinye again and asks for an introduction. He meets Stella and falls in love.

In "Shiloh," Leroy Moffitt, a truck driver, has been out of work since an accident. His wife, Norma Jean, works out daily, eats healthily, and has begun going to classes. The couple had a child early who died from sudden infant death. Leroy plans to build a log cabin for his wife, who seems uninterested. Her mother finds Leroy humorous, but Norma pressures him to go back to work. The couple decide to go to Shiloh nearby, where Norma's mother has suggested they go to get away. At Shiloh, Norma admits she wants to leave Leroy. He is not surprised, but when pushed, Norma can't quite explain why, other than that a woman prefers a man who wanders. Leroy decides he has to change to save his marriage and hobbles toward his beckoning wife, who has walked away.

Water Liars, Letters from the Samantha, Ile Forest, The Magic Barrel, Shiloh Analysis

"Water Liars" is a story about how the truth, even if it is not a bad truth, can hurt a person. The narrator of the story clearly loves his wife but cannot live with the idea that she has had lovers prior to him, even though he himself has had many lovers. This truth drives him to Farte Cove, where he meets other individuals whose own truths have led them to drink, poverty, despair, or simply to tell tall tales of ghosts. While short, the story points out that any truth can be negative, given the right circumstances.

"Letters From the Samantha" is the story of a man who battles his own decisions and is forced to do that which he does not want. The captain of the Samantha is a kind person, bound by duty and loyalty to his crew and ship, as is shown by his perfect record with the military. However, when he finds the man-sized monkey who lived through the typhoon, he is drawn to the animal and saves him, despite his misgivings. The animal is tormented until the captain comes to his level, and then both seem to see one another as equals. The captain seems highly concerned with the good treatment of the animal, and sees him as a duty. Soon, however, as the men on the boat seem to side with the



monkey more often than the captain, he begins to change. His headaches seem to be brought on by his anger at being second to the creature on the deck. Giving in to his animal instincts, he kills the creature and throws it from the boat. He then pretends the animal meant nothing. However, it is clear throughout the story that the monkey did mean something to the man, and as such, became a threat that had to be eliminated. This story shows clearly that although the creature on the boat was less civilized, it was the captain who showed true animal tendencies.

"Ile Forest" makes a valid point about the ability of man to judge other men on their crimes. The story told by Martin about Galven is a sad, horrific tale where a man loses himself in his crime and is thereafter unable to live with his own actions. As a result, Galven pushed the incident from his memory. Poma, the young naive woman, is able to forgive him of this crime, as she loves him and cares for him. Martin, too, is able to forgive Gavin, as he knows he did not commit the crime in his right mind. In the end, Gil is able to love the man as a brother and a friend, even knowing he has committed murder. This story shows the value of knowing a person before knowing his crime and shows that while there may be unpardonable crimes, there are no unpardonable men.

Leo Finkle in "The Magic Barrel" is a shallow, selfish character who knows nothing of himself. He has followed a religious course blindly, without really understanding his motives. When he hires a matchmaker, Leo is forced to look at himself in a manner that lets him see his imperfections, and allows him to understand that he is not the rabbi he believed but is instead a shy man unsure of his convictions. His obsession with Leo's daughter, with her pain and suffering, shows he still does not understand love, but finally understands a desire to be with another individual. The inclusion of Stella's photo with the other girls indicates Pinye understood that Leo required a woman he needed to save. As a result, Pinye achieved two goals, that of the marriage of Leo and also the marriage of his own daughter.

"Shiloh" is the sad tale of a man whose life is turned upside down and who finds he has little support. Leroy is not a bad man and clearly cares very much for his beloved wife. He dreams of building her a log cabin home with his own hands, but she is a selfish character who cares little for his dreams. She admits she enjoyed it more when he was gone, but to say this to a man who fears his career after an accident shows her own selfish nature. The baby the couple lost clearly had an impact on Norma Jean, but she seems to take her anger and frustration out on Leroy, who simply wants to provide a home for her. While her frustration at the situation is understandable, her own logic for wanting to leave him is unclear, so one is left with the impression she is simply confused. At the end of the story, however, there is hope in that Norma Jean waves to her husband, who makes a mental decision to begin changing for his wife.



The Story of a Scar, Murderers, The Misfits, Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?, and A Good Man is Hard to Find.

The Story of a Scar, Murderers, The Misfits, Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?, and A Good Man is Hard to Find. Summary

A young black man in a doctor's office asks an older woman how a scar on her face happened. The older woman explains that she was a young, beautiful woman once. In her story, she is working at the post office, and falls for a young, well-educated man named Billy Crawford. He is a student who others often believe is stuck up. She is still young, pretty and starts to believe Billy is too good for her. Another young man begins working at the post office named Teddy Johnson. Teddy is a smooth talker who begins to show interest in her. The young man at the doctor's office points out that she is paying homage to a womanizer and condemns her for ruining a good student. She chastises him for jumping to conclusions and continues with her story. One day after work, she is sitting with Teddy and Red, when Billy comes in and tells her she is leaving with him. She refuses, and after an argument, Billy slashes her face open with a knife, as well as stabs her several times. The young man at the doctor's office asks her name.

In "Murderers," four young boys, Melvin and Arnold Bloom, Harold Cohen, and Phillip Liebowitz, discover the rabbi is home. They head to the roof in order to look through the open blinds of the rabbi and his wife having sex. The woman wears a variety of wigs and the narrator, Phillip, thinks of his relatives dying. Arnold loses his footing and falls. The other children scramble from the roof, but the wife and rabbi see them. The rabbi mouths "murderers" and screams the boys' names. The boys are sent to a "camp" and nothing more is said. Phillip realizes, as he lay awake at night, that owls and the sound of night open like a mouth inside of you.

In "The Misfits", three men, Perce Howland, Gay Langland, and Guido Rancanelli are herding wild mustangs for money in the mountains. Perce and Gay help Guido load and start his plane, and as he flies into the mountains to scare the horses down, Gay and Perce ready the truck to drive and lasso them. Gay lives with a woman, Roslyn, and likes Perce a lot but believes he may be sleeping with his woman. Gay has not seen his children or ex-wife for many years and feels Perce is much like a son. Gay asks Perce to come with him north when this trip is done, and Perce agrees he might. Both men agree they are misfits and laugh. As the plane drives down the horses and lands, they drive to pick up Guido, and the three drive toward the horses. There are five in all, a stallion, a mare, two smaller horses, and a colt. The men lasso the horses, except the



colt, who stays by its mother. They lasso the horses, and the lassos are tied to tires so the horses can't run. They leave them for the night, and travel home. On the way, Perce tells Gay he will join him in the north, and Gay is happy.

"Where Are You Going" is the tale of Connie, a pretty, outgoing, cocky, arrogant girl who knows she is pretty to look at. She often sneaks off to a drive inn with her friends and goes with the boys she meets. One night, she sees a boy in a gold convertible but dismisses him. Days later, her family is out, and she hears a car in the drive. She goes to the door to find the boy from the gold car. She is mean to him at first but becomes more frightened as he makes it clear he doesn't plan to leave without her. He knows everything about her and even knows her family is not home. He continues to torment her, making it clear he is planning to rape and kill her and will kill her family if she doesn't cooperate. She becomes disoriented, has a panic attack, and at his command walks outside to his car.

"A Good Man is Hard to Find" begins with a grandmother trying to talk her son, Bailey, from taking his family and her to Florida on vacation. She notes there is a killer loose in that area. They leave the next morning and spend hours listening to the grandmother drone on. When they stop for sandwiches, the grandmother and the restaurant owner lament about crime and how little people respect one another. They leave, and the grandmother begins speaking about an old plantation nearby. Bailey grudgingly turns down a dirt road where the grandmother says the plantation is and crash the car. A car comes down the road, and three men get out. The grandmother recognizes the man as the criminal from the paper. She tries to convince him he is a good man and that all he needs is prayer, but he claims he needs no help and that he does what he does because he enjoys it. He has the other two men take Bailey and his son to the woods, and the grandmother hears two gun shots. She continues to try to convince the men they do not have to kill her, but the two men then take the mother, daughter, and baby to the woods. Three shots are heard. The grandmother is then killed.

The Story of a Scar, Murderers, The Misfits, Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?, and A Good Man is Hard to Find. Analysis

In "Story of a Scar," the author tells a tale designed to counter common stereotypes. The woman in the story tells of two lovers, one who is educated and bright, the other of whom is a womanizer and a cad. The young man in the story makes consistent assumptions about which character is to blame, and even blames the woman whose face is scarred for destroying the life of the student. In the end, however, it is clear that in this case, it was the student who could not stand to look a fool, and the womanizer who sought to protect the woman. The young man, at the end, finally asks the woman's name, making the story much more personal.

"Murderers" tells the tragic story of four young boys and their deadly quest for curiosity. The boys are clearly friends, as is indicated by the tone they use with one another.



Additionally, it is clear these boys have committed the same act of curiosity many times. Unfortunately, in this instance, one slips and falls to his death. The rabbi, seeing the situation, unwittingly calls the other boys murderers, even though their intentions were not to harm anyone. The boys are clearly upset as they attempt to escape, but the rabbi handles the situation and sends the boys away rather than have them face trial. Their friendship falls away, and it is clear that the narrator, Phillip, is still bothered by the death as he lay awake at night.

"Misfits" is a touching story about age, commitment, and friendship. The three men in the story are clearly friends who enjoy what they do, even for the meager pay they receive. Gay is a happy, calm man who has loved women in the past but who cannot commit to anything and remain tied to something for long. He has not seen his wife or his children for years, showing his problems with committing to someone. Perce, a younger man, is much like Gay. Although Gay believes Perce may be sleeping with his wife, it is clear from the story that Perce thinks of Gay and Roslyn as parental figures. Gay, becoming older and fearing loneliness, shows a tendency to overcome his fear of commitment when he pressures Perce to travel with him, and in his relief at Perce's agreement. Just like the horses in the story, these men, although antisocial by nature, require kinship and companionship in order to survive.

"Where Are You Going" is an eerie tale about a self-centered girl and the deadly circumstances that lead to her undoing. Connie is clearly happy with her looks but does not use good judgment with dealing with older boys. It is not surprising, therefore, that Connie ends up in trouble. However, her trouble comes in the form of an intimidating man and his friend at her home. This intrusion shows not only a lack of respect for her by the boy but also foreshadows the knowledge the boy has been stalking her. The fact that he knows all about her is an eerie detail that shows the boy is not quite sane and will not leave without her. Connie, for all her looks, is unable to handle her fear and thus has a momentary lapse of consciousness, leaving an opening for the boy to continue to torment her. In her fear and confusion, she is talked into leaving the house with the boy, likely to be raped and killed. However, she believes she is doing this to protect her family, showing that Connie, at least in the end, does care about others.

In "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," the moral of the story is related to the goodness of man and the tendencies of men to think of others as good. The grandmother in the story is a negative woman who spends much of her life complaining and criticizing others. When faced with a mass murderer, her first instinct is to try to reason with the man so he does not shoot her. She seems not to argue to save her son or their children, but only herself. She tries to convince the man he is a good person who simply went awry. He notes he is not a good man but not a bad one either, and that he simply exists as the world forces him to do. In the end, he kills them all, noting that the woman may have been a good woman if she had not been afraid all her life. He also notes his own belief that he is neither good nor bad but simply a product of his environment. Such a lesson is clear in the story, as is the lesson that sometimes the only thing to do is survive.



The Used-Boy Raisers, The Heavenly Animal, Walking Out, The Conversion of the Jews, Akhnilo, The Christian Roommates, The Wedding, and The Liar.

The Used-Boy Raisers, The Heavenly Animal, Walking Out, The Conversion of the Jews, Akhnilo, The Christian Roommates, The Wedding, and The Liar. Summary

"The Used-Boy Raisers" is the story of a woman with two husbands, one who comes around on occasion, and one who is a permanent fixture. They are at her home, and her boys are excited to have their father and step-father in the same place, and both men seem to get along. The men argue good naturedly about the boys, and the woman comes to their defense. She notes she is happy in her duties to them. The woman has firm opinions about the Jews and the Diaspora, but not in Israel in a country, in that she believes the Jews should remain scattered the remain a thorn in the side of mankind from all directions. The men finish their conversation, ready themselves, and leave for work.

In "The Heavenly Animal," Jancy comes home from college. Her father and mother are divorced, and she feels badly for her father. He is consistently asking about and worrying about her car, and she knows this is him, worrying about her. Jancy is having problems with her boyfriend, and knows her father will be angry when she tells him she is driving the twelve hours to see him. She agrees to have lunch with her father at the Catholic church. He picks her up, and is clearly happy to have her near him. The two eat, and she tells him she will leave the following day. He is angry but tells her to come so he can wash down the car. She arrives at five in the morning, and her father is waiting for her. He rinses off the car and tells her to be careful. She drives for several hours but hits a deer. The car is damaged and she is stunned as she gets out. She falls to the grass, noticing the gold color of feces on the car door. She remembers her father hitting a deer on Christmas.

In "Walking Out," eleven-year-old David and his father are on a hunting trip in the woods. David isn't fond of hunting, or the cabin, or the cold, but wants to spend time with his father, as his parents are divorced. They enjoy their first evening, other than the coldness of the cabin. As they are hunting the next day, David goes for a drink in a lake in the snow and is attacked by a bear. His hand is mangled, but his father runs over, scares the baby bear, and shoves David into a tree. David is crying and in severe pain, and in his confusion, shoots his father through the leg. His father, clearly mortally



wounded, bandages the boy's hand. He is unable to walk, so David first supports him, and then carries the man through the woods. At night, the father tells him how to build the fire and cook the meat they are able to catch. The following day, David sets out again in freezing snow with his father on his back. He is exhausted but gives himself energy by knowing he has to save his father. He can picture himself at his father's funeral, and knows his father has given him the cabin, and that this was the point of the trip. He hears his father giving directions often, and when he comes to a farmhouse, is relieved. He walks to the door and explains while the farm wife who answers looks at him without a word, seemingly in shock. The farm wife and her husband take the boy to the fire, and take the father to a side room, noting that the boy has carried the man over eight miles. When the doctor comes, he tells David his father has been dead for at least a day.

In "Conversion of the Jews" Ozzie is a curious little boy whose honest questions often land him in trouble, particularly when it comes to his Jewish faith. His mother, one evening, hits him when she discovers he has been questioning the rabbi in class about things she believes are simply part of faith. The rabbi, too, is exasperated with the boy. One day in class, the boy asks one too many questions, and the rabbi begins to taunt him, hoping to force faith into him. Ozzie becomes angry, and during the argument, the rabbi hits Ozzie, making his nose bleed. Ozzie flees to the roof. The fire department and his mother are called, but no one can talk him off the roof. He realizes he has power, in that the people on the ground believe he is suicidal. He asks everyone to get onto their knees and admit God can do anything, as well as to admit they believe in Jesus Christ. Ozzie then informs them they should never hit anyone because of God. When they all agree not to hit because of God, he comes down from the roof.

In "Akhnilo," Eddie Fenn is a carpenter who is listening to sounds outside his window one evening. He believes he begins to hear a voice uttering words just outside. Climbing out the window, he follows the sound until he hears four words. These four words he tries to memorize as he makes his way back to the house, but the sounds of nature force them from his mind. On arriving at home, his wife is concerned and begins badgering him to tell her what is wrong. He tries to push her away so he can write down the words, but only manages one. His daughter comes out, and asks what is wrong as well, and remembers later on saying the same phrase to her father many times after that.

In "The Christian Roommates," Orson Ziegler comes to Harvard and rooms with Henry. Whereas Orson is a straight-laced, good student with many skills, Henry is more worldly, with a passion for yoga and the spinning wheel who gets medium grades. Both are Christian, but Henry prays loudly, and showily. They hang out with several other boys from their floor. Orson finds himself disliking Henry for no particular reason. He is a vegetarian, and others are giving him a hard time at lunch. When Orson comments on his leather shoes, he feels Henry is more gruff with him than with the others. He finds himself angry that Henry consistently bests him in arguments of wit. He tells others he dislikes Henry because everything he does is exaggerated. They claim he is a saint. He spins the hair of a girl into a rope. Orson becomes more irritable and obsessed with Henry as Henry continues to shine. One night, Henry and Orson get into a fist fight



because Henry steals a parking meter. They end the year as friends but never really speak again. Orson grows up, graduates, and raises a family, but never prays again.

In "The Wedding," Elizabeth often tries to read her child fables, which she hates. Her boyfriend, Sam, finds this endearing. Sam is married to someone else but in the process of a divorce. Elizabeth would like to marry Sam but is a nervous woman by nature. Sam's ex-wife divorced him after taking courses in animal behaviorism. She claimed he drank too much and was too predictable. Sam's first wife was pretty, and Sam was devoted to her, as he is to all his wives. However, she developed depression, and became unbearable. Sam finally asks Elizabeth to marry him, and she agrees. They marry, Sam gets drunk, and they seem very happy together.

In "The Liar," James is a young boy with a lying problem. He lies consistently, telling people morbid stories about the illnesses of loved ones or the deaths of others. His mother is angry at this habit and has taken him to a doctor, who seems more interested than helpful. James remembers his father as a kind, gentle person and believes his mother dislikes him because she sees the same gentleness and sees it as weakness. His father is deceased. When he was alive, he used to read morbid details to his son from the paper, and he believes it is this morbidity that separates him from his mother. His overbearing mother is consistently questioning him, and he uses the lies to make her uncomfortable. As his father passed, he spent more time with him while his mother organized the household. His mother sends him to live with his brother to help him stop lying. He lies on the bus to Los Angeles and tells people he helps Tibetan children. He speaks to them in a random language, believing it must sound Tibetan.

The Used-Boy Raisers, The Heavenly Animal, Walking Out, The Conversion of the Jews, Akhnilo, The Christian Roommates, The Wedding, and The Liar. Analysis

"The Used-Boy Raisers" is an entertaining short piece about a woman who has firm beliefs in her religious history and in the Jewish position as reminders of history for all of mankind. Her husbands, while odd, get along well with the boys. They are very different from one another, in that one appears more gruff and worldly while the other seems content and happy in his role as step father. In both cases, the men clearly love their children, and the wife is clearly happy with her own way of life.

"The Heavenly Animal" is a touching story about a young woman's feelings for her father and the love between a father and daughter. Jancy clearly adores her father, in that she feels sympathy for him in his age, his illness, and his loneliness. Her father, conversely, loves her equally, but is unable to show it without involving a material object, that of the car. He still also cares for her mother, and her mother for him, but their divorce has left Jancy in a position as the go between. His father is prideful as he takes her to lunch, as most older fathers would be with a daughter in tow. She is happy to oblige him this favor. Even when she tells him she is leaving, her father shows concern



as he rises early to wash her car. When Jancy hits the deer, she is stunned, but still is reminded of her father.

"Walking Out" is perhaps the most heart wrenching tale within the novel. Young David clearly does not wish to be in the mountains with his father, but he struggles to make his father believe he is man enough for the trip. Even when he is cold, he never says anything, and when his hand is destroyed, he bravely fights back tears. His shooting of his father is as much his father's fault as his own, but it is clear the boy is tragically struck by this unfortunate event. His choices over the next few days are written as though they come from a father, and the reader has hope that the father will live. But clues along with way, such as the father's occasional silence in times of need and the new blood stains, foreshadow the ending. The father's death is all the more heart wrenching as one pictures the little boy carrying his dead father eight miles down the mountain. This story shows not only that man can do more than he believes he can, but also that even after death, one can influence another.

In "The Conversion of the Jews," a little boy learns about the power of man over God. Ozzie, the young boy, is innocently curious about God and the Jewish faith and doesn't understand some of the followings of the faith. He is chastised for his questions and finds himself angry that he is punished because of a curiosity about God. When the rabbi hits him, Ozzie takes flight, not to kill himself, but simply as means of escape. However, when he sees the power he has over others, he begins to use that power in a way that allows him to get the people to say what he wants them to say. He forces people to betray their faith for him, showing he is more powerful than God. He is not a mean boy, but simply a boy beginning to understand the powers of religion and of blasphemy.

"Akhnilo" is a story about a man who has looked into the past and realized he has lost his future. Eddie is a carpenter, although he is a Dartmouth graduate. He is plagued with sleeplessness and feels his life is not where it should be. He hears voices in the night that call to him, but when he follows them, he hears only a few words. Desperate to find meaning, he is thwarted in his efforts to translate the words by his daughter and wife, which clearly show his feelings that these individuals have gotten in the way of his dreams. The sounds of nature he loves simply turn to the words of his subconsciousness, but because he loves his family, he cannot face these words in English. His daughter remembers this night as the beginning of consistent episodes of delusion, showing Eddie has lost his link with reality.

"The Christian Roomates" is the story of a young man's inability to accept the greatness of another. Orson has been good at everything his entire life and has always been the best person on the block. When he goes to college, however, Henry has him bested in most areas, even though he is admittedly smarter than Henry. Orson cannot accept that perhaps it is not intelligence or money that make someone worthy, but a power within them that Orson simply does not have. His obsession with Henry shows his complete lack of self-awareness in that Orson does not understand his jealousy of Henry and yet allows it to fester. His eventual decision not to pray shows his inner hatred for Henry and his beliefs, which affect the beliefs of Orson forever.



In "The Wedding," readers meet three lovely individuals, those of Elizabeth, her child, and Sam. Sam is portrayed as a loving, honest, sincere man who simply has unfortunate relationships with woman. Elizabeth, too, has had unfortunate relationships. Together, the two seem to fit well with one another and both adore the child very much. Their marriage starts off a bit rocky in that Sam drinks too much, but one can see these individuals care for one another and are honest with one another, which bodes well for their life together.

"The Liar" is a story of a young man who uses his unreality to make his mother's reality miserable. It is clear that James adored his father and found his mother to be overbearing and cruel. As a result of his father's death, James seems to use morbid lies to irritate his mother. His father was a fan of morbid ideas, and the use of these concepts to hurt his mother show his disdain for her treatment of his father. His lying began as a tribute to his father, when he lied about where his father died. When she was angry, James had to question if her anger stemmed from his lie or from her inability to handle the truth. He seems to push this question further with each lie, and although he knows that what he does is wrong and bothersome to her, he also seems unwilling or unable to stop. His lies have become, in essence, a barrier between him and his mother that he prefers to remain in place.



Characters

Sonny's Brother appears in Sonny's Blues

Sonny's brother is a kind, loving man who teaches at a local school. He has not spoken to his brother in many years, as they had a falling out over his brother's drug use. When Sonny's brother's daughter dies, the brother finally contacts Sonny, and the two rekindle their relationship. The brother has difficulty understanding Sonny, because he himself has not led the life of his brother. The brother was assimilated into white culture early on and tries to combat racism and poverty through education; whereas, Sonny has spent his life trying to escape it through drugs. In the end, the brother is able to relate to Sonny's troubles by watching him struggle through his music to remain free.

Sonny appears in Sonny's Blues

Sonny is a young black man with a troubled past. As a younger man, his father and he fought often. When his father died, he began hanging out with the wrong crowd. When his mother also died, he was sent to live with his brother's wife's family. He became highly interested in music but soon began using drugs. He flees into the Navy to escape but on his return ends up where he started. He is finally arrested for selling drugs and sent to prison. On his release, he struggles to find himself without drugs and to be able to play his music without being on anything. He shares his struggle with his brother, who helps him to succeed.

Lenore appears in Weekend

In "Weekend," Lenore is a quiet, easy going housewife with two children. Her partner, George, is an alcoholic ex-professor who likes spending time with his previous female students. He is gentle and kind to Lenore but tells others she is simple. He also does not wish to divorce her. Lenore is fine with this arrangement, and when she begins to worry, she simply forces herself to forget the situation. She is, at least subconsciously, aware George is having affairs with his young students but refuses to admit it, noting to herself that she doesn't know that to be certain. At the end, when she is confronted with obvious knowledge of his infidelity, she still stays and consoles him. Lenore is a perfect example of a woman who gives up much for the love she believes she feels for another.

Arty Lisle appears in The Bystander

Arty Lisle is a young man whose father has had a mental breakdown. Living in a boarding house with him, Arty has watched his father's decline in mental stability but has been unable to stop it. He is torn between his love for his father and a desire to separate himself from his father's torn image. He clearly loves his father but cannot



seem to link the current father with the idol in his memory. At the end, Arty realizes he has seen something no child should, that of the decline of his or her parent.

Vance appears in The Amish Farmer

In "The Amish Farmer," Vance is a school teacher who aims to make his students think. He is kind, but his narration of the story shows he identifies with weak Noel, and desires to be more like Daniel, the Amish Farmer. He admits he is smitten with Dawn Butler, but also notes his wariness of her, showing his lack of understanding about her personality. This misunderstanding of women is further shown by his dismay when Katie Jay notes her desire for the Amish Farmer. Vance is heroic in his own story but in life often seems to misidentify motives.

The Young Woman appears in Verona: A Young Woman Speaks

The young woman in "Verona" is a young, pretty, vibrant, happy young girl who adores her parents and is having a luxurious vacation in Europe. She understands about the power of her strong, independent mother but also understands that this power is somehow tied to her love for her husband. The young girl also knows her father has powers to make her mother cooperate or become jealous, but her young mind attributes these powers to things other than simple love. By the end of the story, however, she is beginning to learn how these emotions play off one another.

Emily appears in Talk of Heroes

Emily is a kind-hearted woman who finds the good in nearly everything. As a mother, she is concerned about her daughter who is having difficulty with her husband. She is the confidant to many and a natural leader, which allows her to cover for Willi. It is Emily who explains Willi's situation to the group, and Emily who asks that they forgive what he is in light of what he has done.

Willi Varig appears in Talk of Heroes

Willi Varig is a Norwegian war hero who smuggled information to England during WWII. When he is captured by German Gestapo agents, Willi endures horrible torture to allow his colleagues time to escape the country. This event, however, leaves him emotionally, physically, and mentally scarred. He becomes an alcoholic and has difficulty dealing with normal life.



Carlyle appears in Fever

Carlyle is a teacher in his mid-thirties with two children. His wife has recently left him for one of his colleagues, and he cannot seem to accept his new life. He loves his children and worries for them but for himself as well. He is only able to put the past behind him with the help of Mrs. Webster. With her kindness and guidance, he is able to overcome.

Mrs. Webster appears in Fever

Mrs. Webster represents sanity and stability in the story "Fever." She is an older woman with a sense of grace and wisdom, as well as being wonderful with children. She understands the needs of others, and helps Carlyle to overcome his past, and look forward to the future.

Sean appears in Midair

Sean is a man who lives without knowing why he acts as he does. He is neurotic, compulsive, obsessive, and generally confused as he makes his way through life unsure of why his behavior is as it is. However, late in life, he remembers an episode with his insane father that helps him to realize his life has been a product of childhood events and inherited traits.

Willi appears in Willi

Willi is a young boy who is torn by the actions of his parents. He loves both of them deeply, but after catching his mother in an affair, he cannot stand to deal with her. He tells his father, but is then unable to face his mother. He, at first, cheers silently as his father beats her but eventually comes to her rescue. Willi is an example of the strength of children's emotions and the toll their parent's lives take on them.

Louise appears in The Fat Girl

Louise is a young woman whose identity is strongly tied to her weight. As a child, she finds happiness in sneaking food and slowly develops a weight problem. She lives a life of ridicule until her college roommate accepts her. However, when her college roommate meets a man, she helps Louise to lose weight. Throughout the diet, Louise is torn between the love she now sees in the face of others toward her and her own loss of identity. She gains wealth, a social life, and a husband, but still is unhappy. It is only when she begins to eat, and finds herself again, that she is happy.



Push appears in A Poetic for Bullies

Push is the symbol for all bullies around the world. Unsure of who he is and jealous of everyone around him, Push finds it easier to harm and harass others than to admit his own failures. Unable to attain his own goals, he limits the ability of others to achieve theirs. It is only when he is challenged by a local hero that he finds strength in his own lack of self-worth. He finds power within himself because he realizes he has nothing left to lose.

Earl appears in Rock Springs

Earl is a kind, loving man who makes bad decisions that often lead to trouble in relationships and with the law. He cares for his daughter deeply and consistently strives to improve her life but has no skills, so turns to minor criminal activity. When he travels to Rock Springs with his girlfriend, Edna, he believes he can again make a fresh start and be happy. He interprets the finding of a gold mine as another positive sign. However, when Edna leaves him and he again finds himself alone, he wonders how the world views him, and why they cannot see themselves in him.

The Narrator appears in The Lover of Horses

The narrator in "The Lover of Horses" is a kind young woman whose father is dying. Coming from a family of wanderers and addicts, she has been careful to shut out the voices inside of her that tell her to stray from her life path. When her father is in his last days, however, the young girl allows herself to give in to this wandering voice and in her peace finds the strength to let her father go.

Jack Hawthorne appears in Redemption

Jack Hawthorne is a torn, miserable boy who accidentally killed his brother. As a result, he feels he is responsible for tearing his family apart and forcing his father into his adulterous, drinking ways. Jack cowers inside himself until he discovers the French horn. In learning to play the horn, he begins to let go of the past. However, it is when he learns from his instructor that to play greatly, you have to have had suffered, that Jack can fully let go.

The Wife appears in Dream Children

The wife in "Dream Children" is a young, pretty, intelligent woman who has suffered tragedy. Having given birth to a stillborn child, she was already vulnerable when a nurse accidentally brought a child to her to hold, believing it was hers. This event nearly destroyed her. When she moves to a farm house, she begins riding horses recklessly, as though she has nothing to lose. However, she soon learns she is able to be with that



child she held during her sleep stages through astral projections, or sleep travel, and again becomes content with her life. For her, the loss of her child defined her, and it was only through the substitute of another child that she is able to find herself.

The Fisherman appears in The Ledge

In "The Ledge," the fisherman is a gruff, cranky old man who loves his son, wife, and nephew. Although he seems crass and rough and rarely has good things to say, he continues throughout the story to show that he does care deeply for his family. When he and the children are abandoned on an island with little hope, the man does all he can to save them and tenderly helps them try to weather the storm. He gives his life trying to save his son and in the end, even his wife knows that his final acts absolved him of his life, led as a miserable man.

The Narrator appears in Water Liars

The narrator of "Water Liars" is a man torn by knowledge. He is a kind man who loves his wife, but when he discovers he has not been her only lover, he becomes distraught. He is unable to cope with the idea of others touching his beloved. He goes to the sea to hear the lies of others in order to come to terms with his own truth.

Samson Low appears in Letters from the Samantha

Samson Low is the captain of the Samantha, a military vessel in the late 1700s. He is a noble man with high principles and very little discipline issues. However, on a whim, he takes in a monkey found at sea. He compares him often to a man and attempts to care for him until they can unload him. He seems to be caring and dignified, but after his own men begin to cross him and defy orders, he begins to change. He no longer claims the monkey to be a man, but simply an animal, and he eventually kills the monkey. In the end, he shows that his own power struggle has allowed him to change his beliefs.

Gil appears in Ile Forest

Gil is a young man whose goal is to be a valued doctor. He takes care of his sister, Poma, and cares deeply for her. When he finds out Poma is wanting a relationship with Galven, he questions Martin, the servant. Martin reveals Galven is a murderer. However, Gil, loving his sister, tells her the story, and leaves it up to her as to what her choice is. Gil is a strong character who shows his love for his sister by allowing her to choose her own fate.



Galvenappears in Ile Forest

Galven is a young man whose life is not as it seems. He is ill when Gil first meets him and claims he is divorced. However, through his servant Martin, it is revealed that Galven originally slaughtered his wife and her lover. Galven remembers none of this and is a kind, gentle, honest character in the book, showing that people can do things outside of their normal behaviors and still be good.

Leo Finkleappears in The Magic Barrel

Leo Finkle is a lonely, educated man working to be a rabbi. During his search for a wife, he begins to realize that he does not love God and was not particularly called to his position, but rather, chose it to find God. He also realizes he does not know himself well and that he suffers because he is not a social animal. It is only when he sees a picture of a young woman he desires who appears lost that he attempts to find himself through her.

Leroy Moffittappears in Shiloh

Leroy Moffitt is a thirty-ish man with a leg that was damaged in a car accident. As a previous truck driver, Leroy now fears getting back into his truck and has semi-retired as a result. He has hopes to build his wife a beautiful log cabin. His wife, however, has adjusted to life primarily on her own, and Leroy senses she wishes to leave him. He admits he knows little about the workings of a marriage but makes a promise to himself to try and learn in order to save his marriage.

Scar Patientappears in The Story of a Scar

In "The Story of the Scar," an older black woman is questioned by the young man in the waiting room of a doctor's office. She has a large scar running from her forehead through her cheek that she explains was created by the knife of an old boyfriend. She is clearly the victim of society in that she is immediately blamed for the event, but as she points out, she simply made a choice to stand up for herself. She is seeking to have the scar at least lessened, but is a primary example of an abused woman who shows her pride through the telling of her story.

Phillipappears in Murderers

Phillip is a young boy whose family is dying off in the neighborhood. His experiences are not unique in neighborhoods where extended families reside, but he ponders the issue deeply, examining their deaths. When his friend falls from the roof they are on to spy on the sexual activities of their rabbi, Phillip feels at least partly responsible and learns to deal with death in a new way.



Gay appears in The Misfits

Gay is an older individual with a commitment issue. He is caring but cannot be tied down to one thing or person for long. He has found a woman who tolerates this, but fears his friend, Perce, is sleeping with her. When forced to choose by his own thoughts, however, Gay chooses Perce and traveling over his fears of infidelity and loneliness, showing again that for him, friendship and constant movement are vital.

Connie appears in Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?

Connie is the ideal example of a teenage girl whose immaturity, irresponsibility, and cockiness lead to her demise. Connie is a beautiful teenager who defies her family often by sneaking to a drive in where older teens hang out. She often goes with boys she meets, putting herself into dangerous situations. A boy arrives at her home, threatens her, and indicates he plans to rape and kill her but lets her know she would be going with him to save her family from harm. In the end, she is selfless, and exits the house to her fate to save her family.

Grandmother appears in A Good Man is Hard to Find

The grandmother in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" represents the sect of society who firmly believe that man's relationship with God determines their own sense of free will. She believes that The Misfit is a good man, even after he kills her son and grandchildren. She tells him he simply needs to find God, not recognizing that the man has already denounced God. In the end the grandmother is killed along with the rest of the family.

The Misfit appears in A Good Man is Hard to Find

In "A Good Man is Hard to Find", The Misfit represents the criminal who has lost faith in God and goodness and firmly believes that to commit crime is simply to reject God. He is cruel and merciless but polite and dignified at the same time. One senses that with a different upbringing, the Misfit may have been able live a decent life, but without faith, he has chosen evil.

The Wife appears in The Used-Boy Raisers

The unnamed wife in "The Used-Boy Raisers" is a woman with distinct feelings about her Jewish heritage. She is proud of her history and believes strongly in the Diaspora but also believes in the role of the Jewish people to remain a reminder to all humanity about suffering. She loves her children and both husbands equally but is also distant from them, as they have separate lives.



Jancy appears in The Heavenly Animal

Jancy is a young college student whose parents are divorced. Jancy loves her mother and father deeply and feels badly for her aging, lonely father, who seems to show his love for her through caring for her car. Jancy recognizes her father's need for her and agrees to cater to him to a point but is determined to settle her own affairs. When she has an accident, she immediately thinks of her father, showing her love for him.

David appears in Walking Out

David is an 11-year-old boy with a heroic image of his father, an avid hunter. Determined to impress him, David goes hunting with him, despite a hate for the cold, snow, and the hunt. However, when he is injured and accidentally shoots his father, David is forced to grow up tremendously in an effort to save his father's life. With the help of his father's voice, David carries him eight miles out of the forest, only to discover his father has been dead the entire time.

Ozzie appears in The Conversion of the Jews

Ozzie, in "The Conversion of the Jews," is a young boy who is inquisitive about the nature of his Jewish faith. He questions his elders in terms of why some beliefs exist, and is consistently unhappy with the responses. His mother hits him, and the rabbi chastises him. It is only when they believe he threatens suicide that he has a power over them. To show his power, he forces them and others to declare a belief in Jesus Christ and in a God who can do anything. Once given the power of the Gods, Ozzie goes back to being a child.

Eddie Fenn appears in Akhnilo

In "Akhnilo," Eddie Fenn is a carpenter with a degree from Dartmouth. He was on a path to greatness before he began drinking and lost his ability to focus. Nearing alcoholism, he struggles to break the cycle and find himself again. However, one evening, he begins to imagine voices in the night air, and as he struggles to hear the voices, he finds himself losing the words they speak, much like he lost his future.

Orson appears in The Christian Roommates

Orson is a young man whose life has been privileged in terms of abilities and opportunities. He is a religious boy who attends Harvard believing he will outshine everyone as he has done his entire life. However, when his roommate appears to be stronger than he, both intellectually and personally, Orson begins to question his own beliefs. He begins to obsess over Henry and soon finds himself nearing a breakdown because of his own insecurities. In the end, he explodes and loses his faith.



James appears in The Liar

In "The Liar," James is a young man who tells lies consistently. His father has passed away, his mother is overbearing, and he uses lies as a weapon against the world, particularly against his mother. He claims to not know why he lies, nor why his lies are morbid and often involve the ailing health of his family. He is a powerful character but one with many inner issues regarding the death of his father and his relationship with his mother.



Objects/Places

Horse appears in Sonny's Blues

Horse is a term used in the story to represent heroine, a drug Sonny is arrested for selling and using.

Tusend Hjem appears in Talk of Heroes

Tusend Hjem is a group dedicated to celebrating the heritage of the Norwegian-American.

Chihuahua appears in The Fisherman from Chihuahua

Chihuahua is a state in Mexico which borders the United States and is from where Damaso claims to be. The state has a very high crime rate and is well known for its violence.

Tugjahs appears in A Poetics for Bullies

Tugjahs are men of higher castes in India who have deep, meaningful relationships with tigers.

Gypsy appears in The Lover of Horses

A gypsy is one who travels the country without commitment to any particular thing or area.

Sleep Traveling appears in Dream Children

In the story, sleep traveling occurs when someone believes they are sleepwalking, but in reality they are traveling through time and space.

Marriage Broker appears in The Magic Barrel

A marriage broker is one who arranges marriage between families to the best benefit of all parties.



Diaspora appears in The Used-Boy Raisers

A diaspora is generally referred to as the movement of people sharing an ethnic relation into scattered areas.

Vegetarian appears in The Christian Roommates

Henry, in "The Christian Roommates" is a vegetarian, but the book notes there are several varieties. In general, vegetarians do not eat meat in support of not killing animals. However, in some cases, some vegetarians may eat eggs or wear leather.

Solipsist appears in The Liar

A solipsist is someone who believes they create everything around them.



Themes

Religion

Throughout the stories in the novel, religion is a primary theme. This theme ranges from those who hold true to their faith in times of crisis to those who denounce God in the face of tragedy. In "Sonny's Blues," Sonny admits he has turned from God, in that he sees that God has done him no favors. He even comes to dislike religious songs. His mother, on the other hand, continues to praise God, even following the untimely death of her husband. Sonny's brother, too, continues to hold true to God, as is shown through his religious linking of Sonny's drink to the trembling cup.

In "Redemption," Jack cannot force himself to believe in a God that would allow the tragedy that has befallen his family. On the other hand, his father bounces between extreme, desperate faith in God to save him from his sorrow to a denouncement of God as he is forced to deal with the death of his son. In "The Magic Barrel," Leo Finkle realizes he has followed a course to become a rabbi not because of his love for God but because of a lack of love for God. This knowledge drives him to quit his studies as he suddenly realizes he does not know God. Conversely, in "Conversion of the Jews," Ozzie believes he knows God more than others and uses the power of persuasion to force his Jewish friends and family to denounce their Jewish faith and proclaim a belief in Jesus Christ.

In "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," the grandmother of the story prays to her God for mercy and attempts to save her killer. Simultaneously, her killer notes his lack of faith in God, and his belief that Jesus threw off the balance when he rose from the dead. He believes that to not follow God, one must go against God. In "The Used-Boy Raisers," the wife in the story strongly believes in the role of the Jews as thorns in the side of mankind, meant to remind them of the Jewish Diaspora and the plight of the Jewish people. However, in "The Christian Roommates," Orson leaves his faith in response to the outrageous praying of his roommate Henry and Henry's apparent saint-like status among peers. From these examples, it is clear that religion plays a powerful role in realism fiction. Whether used as a crutch for evil, used as a healing force after tragedy, used as a blame for tragedy, or simply believed in as a power in life, the use of religion in these stories allows the reader to relate to the struggles of the characters.

Second Chances

Another theme in the novel is the concept of second chances. In "Sonny's Blues," Sonny is given a second chance after his release from prison, both by the law and by his brother. He takes advantage of that chance and uses it to find his way through his own struggle for survival in a world without drugs. In "Weekend," Lenore makes a lifetime of giving George second chances, and even when faced with ultimate proof of his adultery, she continues to give him chances. George, as always, takes advantage of



her kindness. In "Fever," Carlyle refuses his second chance because he is unable to handle life without his ex-wife. However, through the kindness of Mrs. Webster, he is able to see past his sorrow and to move on, allowing his family to heal. In "The Fat Girl," Louise has a second chance in life and takes advantage of it by becoming thin and having the life of which she believed she dreamed. However, in taking this chance, she essentially loses her identity. It is only by reverting to who and what she was that she is able to find freedom. In "A Poetic For Bullies," Push is offered a second chance to become something other than a bully. In his case, however, his refusal of that chance allows him to find his own strength as a bully and to become more powerful than he imagined. In "Rock Springs," Earl is set on making a new life for he and his family. However, his decisions, as always, lead him into despair as he loses his lover and his future. He is left to wonder why he is unable to take his chances and turn them to profit.

In "Redemption," Jack is given a second chance when he learns to play the French horn and learns that the power of grief can become a positive focus for musical genius. His father, too, is given a second chance after he finds his way back from sorrow following his son's death. He takes the opportunity and becomes a better father. In "Ile Forest," Galven is a murderer who knows nothing of his crimes. He is given a second chance by Poma and takes the opportunity to become a wonderful husband and father. In "Shiloh," Leroy is not given a second chance by his wife but is determined to make his own second chance and to win his wife back. He realizes his mistakes and plans to make them right. "The Wedding" is entirely about second chances and how Sam and Elizabeth use their second chance to find true love again. On the other hand, in "The Liar," Henry is given a second chance by his mother to become honest but immediately reverts back to his previous ways. From these stories, it is clear that second chances reach a chord in nearly any audience. The idea of chances, both those taken and those refused, and the consequences of our actions are powerful tools in short stories that allow the reader to identify, both positively and negatively, with the characters.

Death

Death, and how one chooses to deal with it, plays an important role in many of these short stories, as well. In "The Lover of Horses," a woman deals with the death of her father by allowing herself to be more like him. In "Redemption," Jack originally dwells on the death of his brother and allows it to control him. As he finds another outlet for his grief, however, he learns the power of death and how to deal with his emotions. His father, too, learns to deal with death only after nearly losing himself and his family from adultery and alcohol. In "Dream Children," the woman who gives birth to a stillborn child suffers greatly until she finds she can communicate through sleep traveling. Once she finds this release, she is able to again be happy. In "The Ledge," the fisherman uses death to show his son and his nephew that he can be tender and to give a heroic effort to save his son's life. In the end, he is redeemed from a life of irritation through his death. In "Murderers," young Philip thinks of the death of his family and how little it affects him. But when his friend is killed in front of him, he discovers the power of death, and how it deeply affects a person. In "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?", Connie chooses death as an alternative to the destruction of her family, as her own



selfishness causes her to become a target of a killer. In this way, death again plays a role as redeemer. In "A Good Man is Hard to Find," death takes the role of a religious reason to defy God. When the criminal is faced with the idea of God, he rebels through the killing of an entire family. "Walking Out" is a story about death and how death can affect younger children. When David shoots his father, he is aware that he has caused a mortal wound. He uses this knowledge to help push himself forward and to save his own life. He keeps the idea of his father in his mind to drive him. However, when he is finally free, he admits he knew his father had been dead for many hours. This shows clearly that death, when used correctly as a tool, can be a powerful motivator but when used incorrectly, can be the cause of evil and self-hatred.



Style

Point of View

There are a variety of points-of-view in the stories within the book, ranging from first-person to third person. In most cases, however, the stories within the book are told in third person. In these cases, the third person view is beneficial in order to see all characters and their inner workings and emotions. Because these are shorter stories, such a quick view into the motives and minds of characters is vital to keep the story moving rapidly enough to convey ideas in a brief amount of time. This view also allows the reader to accept the judgment of the narrator as an outside, uninvolved figure so there is no question about the validity of the statements made.

In other stories, the view changes to the first person view. These short stories tend to revolve around fewer characters, and thus the author, using first person view, allows the reader a deeper insight into just one character, which helps to flesh out the characters in short time. This also helps the reader understand that the descriptions of others and of surroundings are personal and are therefore subject to the biases of the character. In some cases, this shows the speaker to be an unreliable source of information, but again, such information is vital to understanding the story in such a brief amount of time and space.

Setting

The settings of the stories in the book stretch all over the United States, from larger cities to smaller towns and farms. In many cases, the scenery is a major part of the storyline, as the author uses description of the surrounding area to help identify the voice of the narrator, who is often a child. For example, in "Willi" and in "Verona" descriptions of the scenery help the reader to determine that the narrative is based from a child, so that the sensory perception of the surrounding area becomes the main focus of the writing. In other cases, such as the scenery in "Ile Forest" the dark descriptions of the settings are used to create a melancholy feel for the storyline and a loneliness that would be otherwise difficult to convey in such a short time frame. The settings in at least two stories, those of "The Ledge" and "Walking Out" are used to create a sense of remote, helpless locations covered in snow and cold winds. In stories such as "1/3, 1/3, 1/3," the setting is left non-descriptive to convey the idea that the plot line could occur anywhere. In all cases, the settings are vital components to the short story as they help to convey emotions and feelings.

Language and Meaning

The language of the short stories in this collection have the shared aspect of being realistic in nature. As tributes to the return of realism in literature, these stories are based in a narrative nature that use simplistic, although highly-descriptive language.



While the words chosen change with the speakers, in that children tend to speak less sophisticated than adults, and older adults tend to speak more gruffly than teenagers, the words are never high-brow, making the text highly readable. In very rare cases, the narrative language becomes complex to imply highly-educated individuals, but these areas are usually tempered with explanatory paragraphs. In other places, non-English words are used, but the words are always described by the characters in such a way that the explanation is not forced and the need for footnotes is removed.

In addition, when the narration moves to children, the wording choices tend to be more emotional and volatile. On the other hand, many of the adults speak in such a way as to minimize their emotional components, even in emotional situations. In some cases, the language used in the stories betray the narrators as they seek to maintain composure only to have their thoughts and emotions described in such a way that their torment becomes evident. The simplistic nature of the writing helps not only to convey emotions and thoughts quickly, but also to help discern characters and to describe complex situations within the short story.

Structure

The book consists of five basic components. The first is a listing of "Permissions," since the book is a collection of stories from many writers. The next section is a table of contents, listing the stories within the novel. The third section is a listing of stories within the novel in chronological order. This is presented to help the reader understand the time frame in which each piece was written to better grasp events. The fourth section is an introduction where Raymond Carver and Tom Jenks discuss with readers their reasons for including these thirty-six stories in the collection and their deeper meaning. The last section is the collection of thirty-six stories. The stories are of differing page lengths, ranging from three pages to over twenty-five. The book is 512 pages in length, excluding the "Introduction" and tables of content.



Quotes

"No, there's no way not to suffer. But you try all kinds of ways to keep from drowning in it, to keep on top of it, and to make it seem...well, like you. Like you did something, all right, and now you're suffering for it. You know?" - "Sonny's Blues", page 25.

"She was one of those eternally fragile women in their late thirties and once very pretty and the object of much attention in the road houses and beer parlors, who are now on Welfare and their entire lives rotate around that one day a month when they get their Welfare check". "1/3, 1/3, 1/3", page 71.

"I wish I were tall, or fat, or thin. I wish I had different eyes, different hands, a mother in the supermarket. I wish I were a man, a small boy, a girl in the choir. I'm a coveter, a Boston Blackie of the heart, casing the world. Endlessly I covet and case. Do you know what makes me cry? The Declaration of Independence. 'All men are created equal.' That's beautiful." - "A Poetics for Bullies", pg. 173.

"And I wondered, because it seemed funny, what would you think a man was doing if you saw him in the middle of the night looking in the windows of cars in the parking lot of the Ramada Inn? Would you think he was trying to get his head cleared? Would you think he was trying to get ready for a day when trouble would come down on him? Would you think his girlfriend was leaving him? Would you think he had a daughter? Would you think he was anybody like you?" - "Rock Springs", pg.211.

"At last I was beginning to understand what Teilhard de Chardin meant when he said that man's true home is the mind. I understood that when the mystics tell us that the mind is a place, they don't mean it as a metaphor. I found these new powers developed with practice. I had to detach myself from my ordinary physical personality. The intelligent part of me has to remain wide awake, and move down into this world of thoughts, dreams, and memories. After several such journeyings, I understood something else: dream and reality aren't competitors, but reciprocal sources of consciousness." - "Dream Children", pg. 249.

"He is leaving out the insides of history. History was always just names and dates to him. It occurs to him that building a house out of logs is similarly empty - too simple. And the real inner workings of a marriage, like most of history, have escaped him." - "Shiloh", pg 325.

"Jesus was the only one that ever raised the dead...and He shouldn't have done it. He thrown everything off balance. If He did what He said, then it's nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow Him, and if He didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can - by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him. No pleasure, but meanness." - "A Good Man is Hard to Find", pg. 392.



"I believe in the Diaspora, not only as a fact but a tenet. I'm against Israel on technical grounds. I'm very disappointed that they decided to become a nation in my lifetime. I believe in the Diaspora. After all, they are the chosen people. Don't laugh. They really are. But once they're huddled in one little corner of the desert, they're like anyone else: Frenchies, Italians, temporal nationalities. Jews have one hope only - to remain a remnant in the basement of world affairs - no, I mean something else - a splinter in the toe of civilizations, a victim to aggravate the conscience." - "The Used-Boy Raisers", pg. 397.

"He did not care anymore about being warm. He wanted only to reach the jeep, and to save his father's life. He wondered whether his father would love him more generously for having done it. He wondered whether his father would ever forgive him for having done it." - "Walking Out", pg. 437.

"My belt I believe is a form of plastic. My wallet was given to me by my mother years ago, before I became a vegetarian. Please remember that I ate meat for eighteen years and I still have an appetite for it. If there were any other concentrated source of protein, I would not eat eggs. Some vegetarians do not. On the other hand, some vegetarians eat fish and take liver extract. I would not do this. Shoes are a problem. There is a firm in Chicago that makes non-leather shoes for extreme vegetarians, but they're very expensive and not comfortable. I once ordered a pair. They killed my feet. Leather, you see, 'breathes' is a way no synthetic substitute does. My feet are tender; I have compromised. I apologize. For that matter, when I play the piano I encourage the slaughter of elephants, and in brushing my teeth, which I must do faithfully because a vegetable diet is so heavy in carbohydrates, I use a brush of pig bristles. I am covered with blood, and pray daily for forgiveness." - "The Christian Roommates", pg. 473.

"He is honorable and irritable. if not as much loved as his father, he is perhaps even more respected. In one particular only -a kind of scar he carries without pain and without any clear memory of the amputation - does the man he is differ from the man he assumed he would become. He never prays." - "The Christian Roommates", pg. 486.

"Things were never easy between my mother and me, but I didn't underestimate her. She underestimated me. When I was little she suspected me of delicacy, because I didn't like being thrown into the air, and because when I saw her and the others working themselves up for a roughhouse, I found somewhere else to be. When they did drag me in I got hurt, a knee in the lip, a bent finger, a bloody nose, and this too Mother seemed to hold against me, as if I arranged my hurts to get out of playing. Even things I did well got on her nerves." - "The Liar", pg. 499.



Topics for Discussion

Religion and a turning away from religion is a constant theme throughout the novel. Choose two scenes from two separate stories that show this theme clearly. What was happening in each scene? Who are the characters involved? What caused their questions in faith or their strengthening of faith? Why?

The thoughts and emotions of children are presented throughout the book in a much more passionate and clear way than those of adults. For example, Willi's emotions on seeing his mother's infidelity rage from anger to hatred to jealousy to grief; whereas, Gay's feelings of his wife's possible infidelity seem more muted. Why do you think the author's use such strong emotional confusion in children? How does this help the storyline? Can you think of other examples? What are they?

In several stories in the novel, such as "Walking Out," "The Ledge," "Murderers" and others, the death of children or adults is a major part of the story line. Why is death such an important part of realistic narrative writing? What emotions does death bring on that very few other topics can? Why do writers want to evoke these emotions in readers?

In "Rock Springs," Edna decides to leave Earl because she can no longer live the criminal life. In "Shiloh," Norma Jean decides to leave Leroy because she cannot stand his constant presence. In both stories, the men are kindhearted and willing to give for their loved ones but make mistakes that cause them problems. Do you think either individual deserves a second chance? Do you think such chances are possible in real life? Why or why not?

Nature plays a vital role in the descriptions within many of the stories in the novel. The descriptions of the weather in "The Ledge," for example, foreshadow the death of the characters, and the descriptions of the night sounds in "Akhnilo" actually become a language to the character in the novel. Why do you think nature plays such a powerful role in realism? What is the purpose of such descriptions? Do they serve to convey or evoke emotions or simply to set the scene? Be sure to use examples from the book in your answers.

Love is another important theme throughout the novel and is used in a variety of ways. Choose a story in the novel where a primary focus is the emotion of love. Who are the characters involved? How is love a factor in the story? What is the purpose of that emotion in the story? In what way would the removal of love alter the story?

In "The Amish Farmer," Vance asks his students to discuss how the story would be different if told from another point of view. His students find the story would be drastically different. To show the power of point of view, choose another story in the book and discuss how a change in point of view would affect the outcome of the story. Would it change the tone or end result of the story? How? What would be the primary differences? Be sure to be very detailed in your answers.