

Collected Short Stories Study Guide

Collected Short Stories by Graham Greene

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Twenty-One Stories

Twenty-One Stories Summary

There are twenty-one short stories, written by Graham Greene during the years 1929 - 1954. Each one is described below.

The Destructors: A gang of young boys are based in London in one of the areas where the German bombing was heaviest, and there is a house nearby. The house was damaged by the bombing but still is erect and is occupied by a strange man the boys call Old Misery. The new boy, Trevor, announces to the shocked gang that he has been inside the house. Old Misery is going away the next day and Trevor has decided they will take on a new project: tearing down Old Misery's house from the inside out, all in one day. Old Misery comes home early and the boys trap him in the outdoor bathroom until they finish. When he opens his door, the inside of the house is completely destroyed.

Special Duties: Mr. Ferraro lives a life with strict rules and routines. He is a wealthy man, but does not have time to keep up with the good works necessary to gain entrance to heaven, so he employs a young woman, Miss Saunders, to travel about England, visiting various churches and parishes, donating money to each, and reporting back to him. One day, Mr. Ferraro checks her schedule of churches and is surprised when she is not in that town, and that there is no church by that name in that town. Mr. Ferraro discovers she has been lying all along, and now he has many good works to make up if he plans on getting to heaven.

The Blue Film: Mr. and Mrs. Carter are at a hotel in Saigon, and Mrs. Carter is complaining that Mr. Carter hasn't taken her anywhere exciting. Mr. Carter arranges tickets to some blue films, or pornography. As he and his wife are watching the second film, they both realize the man in the film is Carter, thirty years before. After the film, his wife continues to ask him about the girl, and Mr. Carter says he does not even remember her name. Although Mrs. Carter says she would never have married him if she had known about this film, she is strangely excited. They have sex when they return to the hotel, something that has not happened in years. Mr. Carter is sad, thinking he has betrayed the only woman he ever loved, the young woman in the film.

The Hint of an Explanation: Two strangers share a train compartment and begin a conversation about God. The narrator of the story is agnostic, and the other man, David, is Roman Catholic. David speaks of hints that God exists and tells a story from his childhood. He lived in a town where the town baker hated Catholics with a vengeance. This baker, named Blacker, allowed David to play with his electric train that he kept in the back of the shop. Blacker wanted David to steal one of the consecrated wafers from the Catholic church and give it to him, and in return, Blacker would give David the train. When David hesitates, Blacker threatens the boy with attack. David does steal one of the wafers, but is more terrified of what will happen as a consequence of stealing from



God than he is of getting cut by Blacker. That night when Blacker comes by his house for the wafer, David swallows it in front of him. At the end of the tale, David stands to retrieve his bag and the narrator sees that David is a priest.

When Greek Meets Greek: Two con men, Priskett, Fennick, and Fennick's niece Elisabeth, plan an elaborate scheme where they issue false Oxford college degrees to students through mailing exams and collecting tuition. One of their best marks is a man named Lord Driver, who appears to be a peer of the realm. The con increases in value when Lord Driver expresses interest in Elisabeth as a possible wife for his son. They do not know that Lord Driver is running a con of his own, wanting a free college diploma for his son, who is not in the service, but in prison. When the "classes" are over and the boy is out of prison, Lord Driver brings him to Oxford to meet his instructors. The young couple figure it all out immediately, decide they will marry, and take over the scam themselves.

Men At Work: It is a day in the life of a Civil Servant, Richard Stark, during World War II, working at the Ministry of Information, and in charge of propaganda. The committee meeting about pamphlet subjects meanders through the day and ends up doing nothing. As Stark opens the windows in the meeting room afterwards, he sees the contrails of the British planes returning from their bombing runs in Germany.

Alas, Poor Maling: Mr. Maling's stomach troubles are unusual in that instead of just rumbling, his stomach imitates sounds recently heard in its vicinity. It has a history of music, typewriting sounds, and on one night, air raid sirens. Mr. Maling was the secretary for a critical meeting of two companies one night, and the air raid sirens started. As all of the men went below for protection, Mr. Maling's stomach continued emitting the air raid sirens, but never the All Clear. The delay in returning the meeting to order resulted in one of the company's demise.

The Case for the Defense: A reporter is speaking about a murder case, where a woman's skull was crushed by a hammer. A distinctive looking man, Adams, was seen by a neighbor, Mrs. Salmon, and the trial is at the point where Mrs. Salmon is giving testimony. As she claims to recognize Adams in the courtroom as the man she saw that night, the defense attorney points out another man in the courtroom, Adams' twin brother. The case is lost, and everyone is leaving the courtroom. One of the twins gets jostled and pushed in the crowd outside the courtroom and into the street, where he is struck by a bus and his head smashed. As the man dies, his twin brother meets Mrs. Salmon's eyes.

A Little Place off the Edgware Road: Craven is an unhappy, miserable man who has dark thoughts and fears he is going mad. It is England, in 1939, and Craven is out walking in the rain, aware of his shoddy appearance, his thoughts spiraling downward as he remembers this recurring dream he has of all graves in the world being connected by tunnels and all the bodies waiting to be resurrected. He decides to distract himself by going to a cinema. A strange man sits next to him, and Craven can't see him clearly but is aware that the man is wet and sticky. The man mutters about a murder on a certain street, and when the man leaves, Craven realizes he must have been sitting next to the



murderer. Craven leaves and calls the police. The police inform him they have the murderer, but the body itself has gone missing. Craven begins sobbing and slips the next level down into madness.

Across the Bridge: A man is waiting in a Mexican border town for a meeting that has been delayed, and he is observing the drama of a fugitive white collar criminal awaiting permission to enter the USA. All of the Mexicans know Callaway is the fugitive, and that he has been denied sanctuary in several countries and will probably be denied entrance into Mexico as well. Callaway spends his days looking across the river at America, and daily kicks his loyal companion, a dog with English Setter origins. The narrator watches with interest as two policemen come looking for Callaway, and not realizing it, are sitting right next to him on the bandstand. The people of the town do not tell the policemen about Callaway, or tell Callaway about the policemen. The police finally figure it out, but Callaway has disappeared for a few days. Callaway continues his habits, and is kicking his dog one day as the taxi containing the policemen go by. The police bribe a Mexican to kidnap the dog, and they take it to the other side. Callaway is told by the townspeople that the dog just walked over to America, and Callaway is mortified by the fact his dog can go where he cannot. Soon Callaway takes the risk and crosses the bridge. He is seen by the dog and the police run after him. The dog, eager to see his owner, crosses in front of the police car and the driver swerves, hitting Callaway and killing him.

A Drive in the Country: A young woman in the countryside of England, lives with her parents. She is bored and angry with her father for no real reason. He has a job, provides well for his family, has made improvements on the home. The young woman however, sees this is a boring prison and her father as a weak man. One night after her father has gone through the long ritual of securing the house, the young woman leaves and goes off in the rainy cold night to meet her lover, Fred. Fred has a car, and drives them away from home, while the young woman thinks of where they will end up, their future together. As they pull off on a side road, Fred reveals that he sees no future and wants to have a suicide pact that night. The young woman runs away from Fred, but she hears the shot that he uses on himself. She makes her way home and goes back into the safety of her home, bored no longer and with a new attitude towards her father's character.

The Innocent: Lola, the narrator's current girlfriend, wants to go on a trip to the country, so he takes her to the town where he was born and raised. As they go through the town and he sees it with her eyes, he realizes it wasn't the right place to bring her. He sees kids returning from a dance class, and his brain is flooded with memories of the dance classes he took at the teacher's home and how much he had been infatuated with a young girl his age. He had left a passionate note for the young girl in a special place in the fence. Now, thirty years later, he checks the special place and sees the note is still there. But instead of being beautiful and full of love, it is a crude drawing of a man and woman having sex. His memory of this first love seems now not to be special and revered, but obscene.

The Basement Room: Phillip is sixty years old and is on his deathbed, remembering the incident in his childhood that made him what he is today: a lonely, bitter old man who



never loved anyone. When he was seven, his parents left on holiday, and Phillip was the responsibility of the butler Baines, and his wife. Phillip loves Baines, but is afraid of Mrs. Baines, a tyrannical woman. Phillip wishes he could save Baines from his mean spirited wife, so one afternoon he asks Baines to take him on a walk. Mrs. Baines protests and says Phillip cannot go either, but Phillip leaves the house on his own, something he never does. Phillip is looking through the sweetshop window at the products, and sees that Baines and a young woman are having tea together. Phillip soon learns that this is a girlfriend of Baines, and they include him in their secret after eliciting a promise from him that he will never let on to Mrs. Baines. Unfortunately, Mrs. Baines has already figured it out and leaves for a day, allowing Baines to think she will not be back until the next night. Baines brings his girlfriend Emmy to the house and Mrs. Baines comes back early. There is an altercation, and Mrs. Baines falls to her death from the top of the stairs. Phillip runs from the house and is found by a policeman who returns him home. Baines has moved the body to their room, and Phillip can tell Baines wants him to support the story that she fell, but Phillip tells the police everything.

A Chance for Mr. Lever: A tired, older man, Mr. Lever has been forced out of retirement by a struggling economy, and has poured all of his savings into a scheme to get twenty percent commission if he can sell some heavy machinery to a company that is working in Liberia, Africa. He has come to Africa poorly equipped for the adventure, and is fighting against insects and rodents and ignorance of his surroundings and the people to find a man he knows only as Davidson. After many trials, Lever does find Davidson, but the man is dying of yellow fever and cannot endorse the sale. Mr. Lever is in despair, but finally decides to forge Davidson's signature. As he works on his forged letter of approval, a mosquito leaves the body of the dying man and bites Mr. Lever on the leg.

Brother: The proprietor of a Parisian café has remained open even though there is trouble with Communists in the area, and shots have been heard. Just as he is closing, he sees a group of six Communists, or Reds, approaching his café. They come in, and two of them, a brother and sister, slump in a booth and fall asleep. The other Reds crowd around his bar demanding cognac, and they refuse to pay. He is told the brother and sister are German, and he remembers he knows some of the language, but the only phrase he remembers is "my brother". As the Reds are in the building, he sees the French police setting up to strike the café, and he hides in another room. The police break the front window and some of the bottles, and in the process all the Reds are gone. The police come in and want drinks but they will pay for them. As the proprietor goes out to the cellar to get more bottles, he sees the brother and sister almost dead on the stairs, and in his confusion, speaks to the German man, calling him "my brother". The police captain hears and misunderstands.

Jubilee: Mr. Chalfont is an aging gigolo who is working an area of town he feels safe and comfortable in, and it allows him to believe that he is still the dignified and handsome man who has been in the escort service for years. He goes to his usual restaurant, and there is a woman at the bar who winks at him. He has his rules and reputation to care for, so he knows this woman is not his type and should not be winking at him in such an establishment. His curiosity wins over and he sits next to her at the



bar. She is a prostitute who has just made a lot of money during the holidays and offers him some. He protests, but she has him all figured out, and they leave together. As he is walking with her down the street, he realizes his days of being a gigolo are over.

A Day Saved: Robinson tells of following another man, whose name he does not know, for a purpose unknown. Robinson follows the man for some time, and is nearby when the man talks to a friend about a trip he is about to take and the friend suggests the man fly rather than take a train. This is all done to save a day, and the idea of it bothers Robinson and ultimately throws off his plans to kill the man. When they arrive in the country where the man is headed, Robinson and the man share a train ride to the next destination, then drink together and become friends for the moment. When Robinson leaves the man safely with his friends, Robinson is standing outside in the cold, hating the fact that the man has saved a day.

I Spy: A twelve-year-old boy, Charlie Stowe, the son of a tobacconist, sneaks out of bed one night to finally smoke a cigarette, after receiving a lot of teasing from his friends. The shop is just downstairs from their home, so he goes downstairs and is about to light up when he father returns home. The boy hides under the counter. There are two strangers with his father who decline to smoke because they are on duty. His father is getting his overcoat and is leaving with the two men. There is a discussion about what will happen to the shop, and who should speak to Charlie's mother. When the door closes, Charlie heads back up to bed and goes to sleep.

Proof Positive: Colonel Crashaw is President of the local Psychical Society, and is listening to a speaker he engaged just the week before. The meeting is not well attended, and the speaker has lost the audience's attention because he, Weaver, has lost his train of thought. Before he began speaking, Weaver told the crowd he has cancer, and his speech was supposed to be about the mystical world of death. Weaver says he has proof positive that the spirit can live outside the body, but his speech descends into just noise, then the man slumps back in his chair and is declared dead by the local doctor. In fact, the man has been dead for a week.

The Second Death: A man is called to his friend's side and told his friend is dying. As he sits at the bedside of his friend, after hearing the doctor say it will not be much longer, his friend begins to tremble and tell him about another time when the doctor said he was dead. He had been a young man, and his mother and the town was preparing to bury him, but someone stopped them and he came back alive. But while he was unconscious, considered dead, he was actually having terrible dreams about all the women he had been with. When he recovered, he had tried to be a better man, but lost his way. He had stopped believing it was a miracle, and went back to his old behavior. Now he was very frightened about this second death, knowing the dreams were going to be much worse and never ending this time.

The End of the Party: Peter and Francis are twins, and young boys who are dreading the upcoming birthday party of a neighbor. The two boys are very close in thoughts, behavior and appearance, but Francis is very afraid of the dark while Peter is not. The game of hide and seek holds nothing but terrors to Francis, and Peter does everything



he can at the party to keep them from playing. When the lights go off, Peter relies on his brother's thoughts to guide him to where Francis is hiding, and Peter crawls into the cupboard with him and holds him tight. He sends Francis reassuring thoughts, but the fear continues to be present in Peter's mind, emanating from Francis. When the lights come on, Francis has died.

Twenty-One Stories Analysis

These stories were all written between 1929 and 1956, and reflect the English modern man during these times. The author's reliance on irony for a story ending is evident in *Proof Positive*, *Special Duties*, *Alas Poor Maling*, *Brother*, *A Day Saved*, and *The Blue Film*.

The twenty-one stories in this section offer some compelling young boys as characters. Trevor in *The Destructors* is a fearless leader with a bent towards madness. Phillip in *The Basement Room* is a curious young boy who is naive and open until he is betrayed by adults; he never recovers from this one incident in his childhood and dies a bitter and lonely old man. The twin boys Peter and Francis in *The End of the Party* are frail little boys who cling to each other when afraid of the dark.

The men in these stories long for lost love, as in *The Blue Film* and *The Innocent*. The women are in shadows in the stories, or glaring and ugly, like Mrs. Baines in *The Basement Room*. A woman playing a main character, as in *A Drive in the Country*, would have done better to listen to the male authority figure in her life. Mrs. Salmon, who witnessed a murderer escaping the scene, is made to be a fool when the defense attorney shows up in court with the murderer's twin brother.

In this section of stories, characters do not step too far from their expected roles.



A Sense of Reality

A Sense of Reality Summary

Under the Garden: William Wilditch has been told by his doctors he is dying. He decides to visit the house where he spent his summers as a child. His brother George owns it now. William has not been there since he was a child, and upon arriving he is reminded of an adventure he had when living there, although he is not sure if it was a dream or it actually happened. In the adventure, he is seven years old and goes to the island, where he finds a large tree with roots above the ground. He digs around the roots and finds the opening to a cave where he finds an old man and an old woman and stays three days listening to this man talk. The next day, the adult William goes out to the lake and the island of the story or of his dream and sees that the lake is just a small pond and the island is not even as big as a room.

A Visit to Morin: A man is a great admirer of the writer Pierre Morin when he is in college, and later in life, when he is traveling on business, he has the opportunity to meet and converse with Morin. Morin had written about faith, and his characters took the question of faith and belief to incredible lengths. Morin asks the narrator to come to his house, and the narrator does. Morin tells the narrator that his novels were simply his search for truth about faith and belief. Morin stopped taking communion for twenty years and has suddenly realized he wasted those years and missed out on more than the ritual.

Dream of a Strange Land: A well respected doctor (the Professor) lives in a large beautiful estate in the country. He still sees some patients, and is telling one of them, a bank clerk of modest means, that he has leprosy and must be institutionalized because of the contagion. After the bank clerk departs, the Professor is visited by an Army Colonel who intimidates the Professor into allowing his home to be used by the Army to be the location of a party, and the transformation of the Professor's house into a tropical casino begins immediately. By evening it is almost unrecognizable. In the meantime, the bank clerk has decided to go back to Professor's house again to ask him to reconsider. When the bank clerk arrives and finds the estate turned into a garish casino, he believes he has lost touch with reality and commits suicide.

A Discovery in the Woods: It is a time long ago, in a small village called Bottom. The natives of the village are all related, and their world is restricted to the village and an area about twelve miles out to sea, where they fish. Everyone in the village is small, and most of them cannot walk well because their legs are not strong. One day some of the children decide to go looking further than the village limits, tired of playing the same games like "Old Noh" and "Ware that Cloud". The children find a huge boat wrecked in the mountains. They walk around the boat and discover treasures and finally a skeleton of a man who is at least six foot tall and has straight legs. They realize they have found Noh, the man of the legends, who was in a great flood and carried many animals in his



boat. The children, especially Liz, the only girl in the group, are unhappy, and wonder why there are no giants on the land anymore.

A Sense of Reality Analysis

There are four stories in this section, all dealing with man's search for meaning in their lives, seeking a sense of reality in troubled and confusing world

In *Under the Garden*, William has just learned he is dying. Instead of being angered at the lack of information and the nonchalance of his physicians, William finds himself misunderstanding what is required of him and actually apologizing for being ill. William is in a fog, and returns to his boyhood home on instinct. He is reminded of a fantastic adventure of his childhood, and whether or not it really happened, he spends all night long thinking about it, writing down all he remembers, and in effect, re-living it. As an adult, he is a shadow of a man, with no ties to anyone, but in the underground world of Javitt and Maria, he is the object of attention, clever, and a courageous lad.

A Visit to Morin is the story of a man who wrestled with the idea of God and faith and had turned away from religion for many years, only to find he had not hurt God's feelings, nor had he removed faith from his life. His sense of reality is a realization that he has only hurt himself by removing himself from the sacraments of his church.

The children in *A Discovery in the Woods* are curious and defying the tradition of their close-knit village when they set out to see what is beyond the borders of the world they have known. Their reality is changed irrevocably when they find Noah's Ark in the foothills, and discover that the man of their legends was not misshapen and small like themselves.

Dream of a Strange Land is another twist in reality, this time for a poor bank clerk who has just learned from his revered doctor that he must lose everything he has because he has leprosy and the doctor is compelled to report him to the authorities. When the clerk decides to return to the doctor's elegant and sedate mansion to plead his case once again, he finds the house has been converted to a tropical casino. The bank clerk cannot assimilate this change and commits suicide.



May We Borrow Your Husband?

May We Borrow Your Husband? Summary

May We Borrow Your Husband?: A writer is working on a novel in Antibes, and spends most of his time watching the guests in his hotel. A homosexual couple, Stephan and Tony, arrive. Soon after, a young married couple, Peter and his wife Poopy, begin their honeymoon at the same hotel. The narrator watches as Stephan and Tony seduce Peter, and finds himself spending a lot of time with the young and neglected bride. The youngest of the homosexual couple, Tony, has the most success with Peter, and it soon becomes obvious to the narrator that Peter might soon make Poopy very unhappy. He is surprised to learn, the next day, that Poopy is excited about Tony coming to stay with her and Peter at their estate, and will be decorating their home. Stephan will continue on another job, and Peter is paying Poopy all the attention she craved.

Beauty: Beauty is an exquisite Pekingese dog that is well cared for and spoiled by his owner. The woman who keeps Beauty plans her world around the dog, and claims he cannot be exposed to any change in climate, or unpleasant food, or any damage. The narrator is walking through the bad part of town one evening on his way back to his hotel and sees Beauty getting food from the trash dumps and happily rolling around in feces.

Chagrin In Three Parts: A man is eating at a restaurant and overhears a conversation between two women. One is a widow and older and the other is younger and in the middle of a bad breakup with her boyfriend. The narrator listens to the older woman talk the younger woman out of seeking comfort in another man. The two women laugh about the miserable comforts a man can offer, and the older woman promises to care for the younger in ways she has never imagined. The women leave together, and the narrator reflects on lost opportunities.

The Over-Night Bag: A man on an airplane handles his overnight bag very carefully, as if it contained fragile glass. When asked about it by his fellow passenger and the cab driver, he explains that there is a dead baby inside of the bag. No one is alarmed, and no one turns him into the police. He goes on his way, home to be cared for by his mother.

Mortmain: Carter has just married Julia, after a bad breakup with Josephine. He is very happy with Julia and looking forward to a wonderful future with her, but Josephine is not ready to let him go. Instead of being jealous, she is overly sweet to his new wife, and leaves the most innocent of notes in the apartment she used to share with Carter. Julia is surprised when Carter gets angry at the nice notes, and cannot see that Josephine is very deviously trying to take them apart by constantly reminding him of their time together.



Cheap in August: An English woman takes a vacation alone in Jamaica while her husband is on business in England. Her hope is to finally have an affair with a stranger. She is in her late thirties and expects to attract a handsome foreign man and have a sensual fling. Instead, she meets an obese lonely man who is down on his luck and spends his time drinking in his room. She shares conversation, drinks and eventually his bed.

A Shocking Accident: Jerome's father was killed in Italy in an accident involving a pig falling off a balcony and striking Jerome's father in the head. As Jerome grows older, he tries to find ways to tell the story without eliciting laughter or causing the hearer to suppress laughter, but he is never truly successful. He finds happiness when he meets a wonderful woman who learns of the story and does not laugh.

The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen: A man in a restaurant is eavesdropping on the conversations of two tables. One is a group of eight Japanese gentlemen, and the other is a young couple. The girl is convincing her boyfriend that they can marry right away because she has been given a huge advance for her book and that her editor thinks she will be successful because she is the most observant girl in the world. The Japanese men leave their table and pass right by the young couple. The boyfriend makes a comment about them, but the most observant girl in the world never notice the Japanese men at all.

Awful When You Think of It: A man on a train is asked by a mother to watch her baby while she steps out of the car for a moment. The man has a long conversation with the infant, who speaks back to him. They talk about stocks, and which ones the baby recommends. It is as if the two are sitting at a private club, old pals. When the mother returns, the man starts to flirt with her, but receives a hard look from the baby.

Doctor Crombie: Doctor Crombie is an eccentric school doctor whose life has been one misunderstanding after another in his attempts to teach the schoolboys about personal hygiene and sex. Dr. Crombie is finally asked to resign because he is now telling the boys that prolonged sexual relations, as between a husband and wife, also causes cancer. The narrator is now an old man, married four times, and is dying of cancer, but he attributes it to cigarette smoking.

The Root of All Evil: A young boy is listening to his father tell a story about the men in a town. The women liked to get together and knit and talk about their grandkids, and the men would gather at one of the houses and drink beer. A new couple joins the group, and the man was unbearable. The men decided to avoid him, and began meeting in one man's basement. The new man, Pulcher, was determined to find them, and when he did, they would move the location. Pulcher turned them in to the police, citing an illegal secret society. The boy's father says this illegal society led to other sins when one of the men sought refuge in a brothel when being pursued by Pulcher, and another man dressed as a woman to avoid him. Pulcher and the police finally devise elaborate schemes to overhear the conversation in the group, but find it is nothing more than talk of the weather and town gossip.



Two Gentle People: Two people meet on a park bench and begin a shy conversation that takes them next to share dinner in a restaurant. They have an instant liking for each other, but since they are both married to other people, they cannot bring themselves to take it any further. The woman returns home to a playboy, and the man returns home to a witchy jealous woman. They have both been faithful, but they are miserable.

May We Borrow Your Husband? Analysis

There are twelve stories in this section, most of them dealing with the pursuit of sex, the condition of marriage, and two strange stories involving babies.

May We Borrow Your Husband, Chagrin in Three Parts and Cheap in August are three tales of seduction. Two Gentle People is a seduction that is not carried through, and Mortmain of a marriage destined to be unhappy because of a jealous ex-girlfriend.

Beauty, A Shocking Accident, and The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen are very short stories with an ironic surprise ending. There are no happy marriages in these stories, only desperately unhappy people trying to make it through life. The theme of women being somehow inferior to men runs through all of these stories. Misunderstandings about sex, about sexual preferences, and lost opportunities abound.



The Last Word and Other Stories

The Last Word and Other Stories Summary

The Last Word: An old man has lost his memory, and now he is in a town where he knows no one, is ignored by the people and guarded for some reason day and night. He has an old crucifix, but does not know what it means. One day he is taken courteously to a place where he is told he will meet the General. He is given his old uniform to wear, and it is the garment of the Pope. He meets with the General, and is told that his religion is dead and all Christians are dead. Today, he will be killed, being the last one of his kind. The Pope takes the offered last drink, and says the blessing in Latin before he is shot.

The News In English: During the war with Germany, young Mrs. Bishop and Old Mrs. Bishop listen to the radio at night. David Bishop had been a math professor but was missing, and one night young Mrs. Bishop realizes it is her husband who is speaking on the radio, delivering propaganda from the Germans. Both Mrs. Bishops are horrified, but the young Mrs. Bishop soon figures out it is not propaganda only, it is a code. She goes to the police. They agree with her results, but tell her she cannot tell anyone or the Germans will kill David. She asks the police to help David escape, and she listens to the radio to see if he will, but the code this night says goodbye to her and she tells the Old Mrs. Bishop her son is not a coward but a hero.

The Moment of Truth: Arthur is a waiter at an English restaurant, and an American couple have become regular customers during their trip. They always like the same table, and prefer Arthur as their waiter. Arthur is very touched, and one evening tells them he won't be there the next day because he has to go to hospital. They are properly concerned and wish him well. Arthur feels very close to the couple, especially the woman, and believes that when he comes back from hospital they will be eager to hear of his condition, and be of comfort to him. He goes back to the restaurant before his operation and finds they had come in while he was absent and left him a note. As he lies in his hospital bed and reads the letter, it is not the note of comfort and concern he expected, but just a little thank you and an extra tip.

The Man Who Stole the Eiffel Tower: A man has arranged to remove the Eiffel Tower from its base so it can have a holiday in the country. At first no one even misses it, and the employees of the Tower do not wish to draw attention to the fact the source of their income has disappeared. Tourists are happy to go to another monument, and the cab drivers do not even notice it is missing. The man returns it a few days later, and nothing is ever said.

The Lieutenant Died Last: Purves is an old poacher who lives in a little town called Potter, during the war with Germany. One night as he is setting his traps for rabbits, he sees a number of Germans parachute into a field near town. No one else notices because they are all in the pub. Purves uses the rifle and the training he had from WWI



and picks off all of the Germans, then saves the people in the pub who were being held hostage by some of the Germans. Still, he has been poaching, so the local sheriff throws him into jail.

A Branch of the Service: A man is chosen to be a restaurant reviewer/inspector for an association, and after some years of working for them he learns the organization is working closely with MI6 to overhear conversations that might be subversive. The narrator has been promoted to work in this field and does very well, but one night is forced to match a suspect course for course at a restaurant and the narrator quit the service rather than be forced to put his stomach and bowels through a similar incident.

An Old Man's Memory: The narrator writes from the future about the final completion of the tunnel connecting France and England. He has read this morning that the tunnel was going to be rebuilt, and remembers that when it was originally opened, terrorists had used the four years of construction to lay bombs in it, and the opening ceremony was marred by the bombs going off. He wonders how anyone would have the nerve to enter it when it is finally done.

The Lottery Ticket: A man who studiously avoids the regular tourist attractions and sites chooses a dismal little Mexican town for his vacation. He enters the town during some sort of election. He buys a lottery ticket and finds out the next day he has won a tremendous amount of money. Seeking only his life as it is, he decides to give the money to the town instead. When he does, he finds out he has been tricked, and the money is causing riots and death for the opposing party.

The New House: Mr. Josephs is from London and has purchased a tract of land in the country. Handry, the local architect, has dreamed of a house on that land for over twenty years and has lovingly created a drawing of a beautiful house that blends with the scenery and the landscape. However, Mr. Josephs wants a monstrous landmark that can be seen for miles. At first the architect refuses to be a part of it, but money and his nagging wife win. Many years later the house sits unused and an eyesore to the town.

Work Not In Progress: Twelve bishops are singing about being thirteen bishops on their way to a convocation when a reporter points out there are only twelve. One has been kidnapped, and the rest are soon kidnapped and replaced by a criminal gang, and the head of the group is a woman. She becomes the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Melbourne comes to England to sort it all out. He quickly falls in love with the Archbishop and discovers the ruse. He does not turn her in, though. The author admits that this is an unfinished musical and he has not devised an ending or the appropriate songs.

Murder for the Wrong Reason: A police inspector finds the body of a man named Collinson and calls for another detective to come to the scene. In the meantime, he has the local constable join him at the scene of the crime. The inspector, Mason, quizzes the poor constable, telling him one story after another about the victim, his lover Rachel, and another man, Callam. It is obvious Mason knows all of these players very well. At



the end, Mason confesses it is he who killed Collinson out of love for Rachel, who has been dead for ten years.

An Appointment with The General: A woman reporter is sent to a Latin American country to interview a General. She is so busy thinking about the end of her marriage that she is ill prepared for the interview and falls back on her knowledge that the General likes beautiful women instead of asking the intelligent questions.

The Last Word and Other Stories Analysis

There are twelve stories in this section, with all but one dealing with bravery and cowardice. The courage of the Pope in The Last Word, using his last moment to make a point about religion; David Bishop using his position as a propagandist for Germany to relay troop movements to the British, and his wife's courage to stand up against the whole town and her mother-in-law to defend her husband and prove him not a traitor. The Lottery Ticket is the story of a brave and benevolent act, when Mr. Thriplow wins the lottery and tries to give it away, only to find out it has been used for evil. Examples of men who were afraid to stand up for their beliefs are in The New House, with Handry the frightened architect, and An Appointment with the General, with the female reporter who is too afraid to ask the right questions. The Work Not In Progress story does not fit in this section, but does not fit in any other section either. It is a half finished work probably meant to be found humorous by the reader and offer a brief respite from the heavy messages of the other stories.



Newly Collected

Newly Collected Summary

The Blessing: A reporter is assigned to cover the story of an archbishop blessing some tanks and ships. Pacifists will be demonstrating and the reporter's editor thinks a riot or violent protest will happen. The reporter stands in the crowd, watching the archbishop bless the tanks, and begins a conversation with an old man who is standing next to him, crying. The reporter remarks that it is ironic to be blessing weapons, and the old man explains that blessing something is what you do to it when you cannot love it or fix it.

Church Militant: A reporter is accompanying a priest, Donnell, on his rounds in Africa. As they drive towards one of the missions, they see the archbishop in his Cadillac. Donnell arrives at the mission before the archbishop so he can tell them the boss is coming. Father Donnell makes a joke with the older priest there. When the archbishop arrives, he tells the older priest that he has brought two women with him who want to work the land nearby. The older priest says it is suicide because the natives will kill them. The archbishop says there is nothing to do, it is the women's calling.

Dear Dr. Falkenheim: A man is writing to a doctor about his son, who is twelve. His son comes home from boarding school every Christmas with signs of being beat up by the other boys. When his son was six, they lived in western Canada, and at Christmas time, the local shopping mall arranged to have someone dressed as Father Christmas arrive in a helicopter. When the helicopter lands, the costumed man gets out and all the kids see him decapitated by the helicopter's back rotor blade. From that time on, the man's son is convinced that Father Christmas is real, because he saw him die.

The Other Side of the Border: Morrow is a man who has resigned from his assignment with the New Syndicate Corporation because of a disagreement with his boss, Hands. He is trying to tell Danvers, the owner of the company, that Hands was the wrong person to send on the mission to Africa to get gold. Time reverts back to before the mission begins, with Hands sending out letters to companies explaining that he knows how to work with natives and knows where to find gold in Africa. These letters and the claimed knowledge is all a ruse to show his father he is actively seeking work, when in fact, Hands knows nothing about Africa or its natives. Colley is another member of the expedition and he has some experience in Africa, but not too many successes. Billings is a man who actually does have some experience, but has been out of the game when he found religion. The story ends with Billings, Colley and Hands meeting at Billings' small shack, talking about how they don't like Morrow, the only man who is truly capable, because he is too priggish.

Newly Collected Analysis

The last four stories do not have any reason to be included together other than perhaps their chronological order of production. The Blessing is a sweet message about religion and acceptance. The Church Militant is another slice-of-life story meant to portray the life of a priest in Africa. Dear Dr. Falkenheim is an ironic tale about Father Christmas, and is written in the form of a letter to a psychiatrist. The Other Side of the Border is not a short story at all, but the beginning of a book that the author failed to finish.



Characters

Trevor appears in *The Destroyers*

Trevor is a young boy who lives in England after the war with Germany. He and his family have been forced to move from their usual neighborhood because of financial difficulties to one where there has been considerable bombing, and his play area is now among the ruins. He joins a gang, and even though he is new, he soon takes over leadership. He is proud and ambitious, but reserved to his mates. When he proposes the destruction of Old Misery's house, it is the force of his personality that propels the gang to new heights of vandalism.

Although his given name is Trevor, that name is a little too high brow for the leader of such a gang, so the boys refer to him as T. During the entire story, T is on the edge of becoming an object of ridicule, but is supported by the previous leader, Blackie, to achieve his goal.

William Wilditch appears in *Under the Garden*

William is a middle aged man who has traveled much in his lifetime and comes home only when he is told he is dying. He aimlessly wanders the halls of his boyhood home where his brother George now resides, until he begins to remember a fantastic adventure when he was a child.

It is unclear whether he dreamed this adventure, created it as a story for a school magazine, or it actually happened. In it, William is a resourceful and courageous seven year old boy who spends three or four days under a tree in the garden in a fantastic warren of rooms and tunnels, occupied by an ageless old man and a squawking woman. William is able to escape, but not after hearing wondrous stories and learning all the secrets of life.

The story of the young boy reveals the character of the man. Faced with the news of his impending death, William is confused but stoic. It is only when he returns home to his childhood play area and relives the adventure that he begins to feel the sadness of all that he has lost in his life.

Mary Watson appears in *Cheaper In August*

Mary is a thirty-nine year old woman who is bored with her marriage and her life and has decided to have an exciting affair in Jamaica. She pictures herself with a young virile man, creating a romantic memory she can carry with her into old age. She rejects the other women at the resort in Jamaica, preferring to leave herself available to a suitor.



Mary claims to love her husband, but she feels she is getting older and wants to be taken somewhere emotionally and physically that her husband can never take her.

After three weeks in Jamaica, she meets an overweight unhappy man named Henry and begins to spend time with him, out of pity. She finds out about his life, and is eventually seduced by this pity. At the last, she has sex with Henry, and is happy that it was not exciting and she feels no guilt.

Mary Bishop appears in The News In English

Mary is a young bride whose husband has gone missing during the war. She is living with her mother-in-law. When her husband's voice is recognized as delivering propaganda during radio broadcasts, she refuses to believe, as her mother-in-law does, that David is a traitor.

Her staunch belief in her husband, and her courage to go to the authorities and convince them that David is actually speaking in code to provide vital information regarding German troop movement, makes Mary Bishop the only woman in the collection of stories who is intelligent and forceful.

Mr. Chalfont appears in Jubilee

An aging gigolo whose appearance means everything, Mr. Chalfont carefully arranges his days and his wardrobe to reflect the air of a retired military man. He is careful not to show a frayed sleeve, or be seen at the wrong establishment at the wrong time. Mr. Chalfont even avoided the Jubilee celebrations so he would not be seen by some of his previous clients, ladies with money who had paid for his attention.

He calls his work "the game", and for many years he was very good at his work. He is deflated when a young savvy prostitute befriends him and gives him money out of pity instead of for services rendered.

The Pope appears in The Last Word

The man knows he was someone important at one time, but his memory is gone. He lives a simple life, out of habit, and talks to a statue he has saved out of the same habit. He considers the man on the crucifix to be a friend, although the meaning of the figure is lost to him.

At the end, the old habits are so strong and deep within him, he begins to speak Latin at the moment of his death. The Pope is a very strong character who continues to have a form of faith even though he no longer remembers what he is faithful to.



Mr. Thriplow appears in The Lottery Ticket

Mr. Thriplow intentionally seeks locations for vacations that will make him happy to return home. He is not a person who desires pleasure of any sort, whether it is money, women, fame, or even nice scenery. He is a simple, almost unbelievable man who is just existing in life.

Handry appears in The New House

Handry has spent twenty years of his life creating a beautiful structure on paper and finally he has a chance to build that structure for Mr. Josephs. When Josephs doesn't like the drawing, Handry is too weak of a man to fight for his dream and convince Josephs to see his vision. Instead, Handry changes his life's work and builds the monstrosity Josephs wanted. Handry spends the next twenty years trying to see Josephs' vision instead.

William Harris appears in May We Borrow Your Husband?

Harris is a middle aged writer who is on the fringes of a drama in this story, and chooses to listen and watch rather than offer advice beyond a few well chosen words to Poopy. He reports the action, sees what is going to happen before the participants even do, but removes himself from the story by choice.

Harris is a professional biographer, so it is probably habit for him to observe only, and not participate in the lives of others.

Poopy appears in May We Borrow Your Husband

Poopy is a woman on her honeymoon, and she has so little knowledge of the world she cannot see that two homosexuals, Tony and Stephan, have targeted her new husband as a potential lover. She blames their sexual problems on herself, and her solution is to cry all the time. She is made happy again when her husband, fresh from a sexual liaison with Tony, lets her know Tony is coming to live with them for a time to decorate their house.

Poopy is similar to many of the other female characters in this collection of short stories, and stays true to form by being concerned only about appearances.



Objects/Places

Crucifix appears in The Last Word

A statue of Jesus on the Cross that the Pope has hidden from his captors. Even though he has lost his memory, the man knows this figurine is the most important thing in his life.

The Ark appears in A Discovery in the Woods

Peter and his gang find this gigantic boat and experience a discovery unknown to his parents or grandparents, or anyone else in his village. The discovery of this ark gives credence to a legend and shows the children a world they have never known.

Javitt's Tunnels and Rooms appears in Under the Garden

These elaborate tunnels and rooms exist under an island and extend to under the lake and under the town in William's adventure. Some rooms are filled with treasure, some with junk, but all are fascinating to William as he spends several days exploring and listening to Javitt.

Park Bench in Paris appears in Two Gentle People

It is on this park bench that Henry and Marie-Claire meet one afternoon, and it is the beginning of a memorable evening for them.

Eiffel Tower appears in The Man Who Stole the Eiffel Tower

The most memorable landmark in Paris is not even missed when the narrator takes the structure for a short holiday in the country.

Herr Professor's Home appears in Dream of A Strange Land

A sedate and lovely old home is transformed from a retired doctor's residence to a glittering Mediterranean casino one night for the benefit of a General. Seeing this transformation is too much for the bank clerk, which results in his suicide.



Lucas Crusher appears in A Chance for Mr. Lever

The hope of commission on the sale of this piece of heavy machinery is the impetus for Mr. Lever departing from England and his wife in order to travel to dangerous Africa.

Old Misery's House appears in The Destroyers

This house is one of the few left standing after the bombing of London in the neighborhood where Trevor and the gang live. They resent it because it represents old England and reminds them of how things were before their parents had to endure the war.

The note appears in The Innocent

This is a note that the narrator sent to a young girl he admired in school. It was a drawing of a man and a woman having sex, and in his memory it is a lovely representation of his love for her, his hope of them being together. When he sees it twenty years later, it just looks obscene.

Beauty appears in Beauty

Beauty is a beautiful pampered dog who likes to get away from his master and roam the trash dumps of Antibes.



Themes

Alienation and Apathy

Most of the characters in these stories are men who are unhappily married, desperately lonely, on the path to madness, or have dully accepted their fate in life. They look to the past to see where they have gone wrong, and some have such traumatic experiences in childhood they are unable to live a normal life afterwards, as in Phillip of The Basement Room.

Even the children seem to be disconnected from reality. The twins Peter and Francis, in *The End of the Party*, are almost one soul in two bodies, and that soul is detached from the other children. Trevor of *The Destructors* is driven by inner demons to destroy something beautiful. William of *Under the Garden* was a marvelously creative child who grew up to be a boring self-centered man. Each story features a solitary soul who is living in quiet desperation on some level of their lives.

The married couples suffer the same lonely outlook, and if they are happy at some point in the story, the author assures the reader this happiness will not last long. Carter and Julia return from their honeymoon to find their apartment covered with notes and reminders from his ex-girlfriend, and although Julia has yet to figure it out, Carter sees the marriage ending. The Baines marriage in *The Basement Room* is a disaster; the couple in *The Blue Film* are mismatched and dreary, and the couples in *The Root of All Evil* spend as much time apart from each other as possible. Poopy and Peter in *May We Borrow Your Husband* are destined for failure because Peter is a closet homosexual.

The characters in each story reflect the relentless search of man to find fulfillment and companionship from his fellow human, and, in this collection of stories, the failure to do so at every turn.

In *The Man Who Stole the Eiffel Tower*, *The Over Night Bag*, and *Men Not at Work*, the characters are blissfully unaware of a huge structure going missing from downtown Paris, a man carrying a dead baby around in a bag, and a world war happening. These stories highlight the apathy of a busy world with everyone seeing only what they want to see, and caring only for their own selves.

Women are Inferior to Men in Intelligence and Strength

The female characters in these stories is not a strong one. The female characters' names are usually Mary, or a derivative of Mary, i.e. Marie, Maria. It is symbolic that the name Mary is Catholic and represents the Virgin Mary of Jesus, a role few human women could emulate.

There are two stories of the fifty-three where the point of view is told by a woman, and in neither does the woman represent either strength or intelligence. In *Cheap In August*,



the author is insinuating that not only are the rooms cheap, so is the heroine, Mary Watson. In *An Appointment With the General*, Marie-Claire is a female reporter who is easily intimidated and vulnerable around the military men she encounters, and is not intelligent enough to approach the General with any questions other than his affection for women.

None of the female characters have dialogue that is memorable. Their role is to be a man's object of attention because she is pretty, or object of misery because she is not. In *A Discovery in the Woods*, the only girl allowed in the gang is Liz, and although she keeps pace with the boys and climbs as well as them, she is the one regulated to carrying what they find. In *Under the Garden*, only the man Javitt can speak eloquently to William, because the woman Maria is just there to cook. In this story, the woman is conveniently a mute, so she cannot accidentally say something wise.

The character of Poopy is the best example of this theme. With such an ignoble nickname, the woman cannot be taken seriously. Poopy fails to see what is obvious to all the men, that her husband is gay. Rather than confront him with the problem of his inattention, she blames herself and dissolves into tears. When promised a lovely house and a semi-permanent guest, Poopy is happy once again.

Where men are thoughtful, studious, clever and brave, the female character in the majority of these stories is foolish, misdirected, and just interested in appearances. This theme was probably innocuous during the time the stories were written, from 1929 to early '60s, but would have a difficult time gaining acceptance with the modern reader.

Man's Search for God

There are several stories in this collection dealing with man's search for God, and for the meaning of the religion in their lives. In *The Hint of an Explanation*, a man talks about Satan coming into his life in the form of a baker in his town. *A Visit to Morin* is a conversation with a man who has rejected religion only to realize he never rejected it at all. *The Last Word* is a futuristic story where all religion has been eliminated and the Pope is the last to go. *Church Militant* is a peek into the lives of a priest, and *The Blessing* has the strongest message of all of the stories concerning religion: if you can't love it, bless it.

As the discussions between the main characters in each story evolve, the theme of religion is always presented as a positive force. None of the characters are atheist, although some have moved quite a distance from God. The author always defines the religious characters as either Roman Catholic or Anglican, so the distinction must have been important to his personal life.

The author's stories do not seem to be a struggle of man wondering if there is a God, but with the deliberations a man has with himself concerning the role of religion in his life. The character of Morin is obsessed with whether or not he should take the

sacrament offered by the Catholic church. The character of Blacker in *The Hint of an Explanation* is willing to risk everything just to have a taste of the sacrament.

The stories that involve man's search for God in this collection are the more serious and thoughtful, but use less character development in order to get the message across.

Style

Point of View

In this collection of stories, the author employs first person narrative, third person narrative, third person subjective, and third person omniscient. In one story, *The Other Side of the Border*, he uses alternating person view, moving the plot forward from the view of Hands, Morrow, Billings, and Colley.

The stories that are written in first person narrative are usually the thoughts of a man who is a reporter or a writer. Sometimes the reader learns his name, and sometimes not. The exception to the male first person narrator in *Cheap in August*, when the narrator speaking in first person is a woman named Mary Stewart. There is one other story in the collection where the main character is told by a woman, *An Appointment With the General*, which is told in third person subjective.

Many of the stories are told in first person narrative, yet relate a conversation overheard at a restaurant on a rainy English night. Examples of this type are *The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen* and *Chagrin in Three Parts*. The story begins with why the narrator is near the subjects, then is a series of observations of the speakers and their dialogue. The story ends with the narrator's final reaction to the words and actions by these unknown people.

The stories written in third person subjective are seen through the eyes of a main character. In *A Discovery in the Woods* there is a gang of children, but Peter is the one who drives the plot. The main characters are predominantly men interacting with other men, with the females as minor characters.

Setting

The locale for most of the stories is England, and the time is early to mid twenty-first century. *A Discovery in the Woods* is set wherever Noah's Ark finally landed, and the time is about two or three hundred years after the Ark was emptied of its occupants. *The Last Word* is set in the future, in an unknown location.

The Blue Film is set in Saigon. Stories set in Africa are *A Chance for Mr. Lever*, *Church Militant* and *The Other Side of the Border*.

Brother and *A Visit to Morin*, *Two Gentle People*, *The Man Who Stole the Eiffel Tower* are set in France. Also set in France, specifically Antibes, are *May We Borrow Your Husband?*, *Beauty*, and *Chagrin in Three Parts*.

Cheap in August involves a Englishwoman on vacation in Jamaica. *The Lottery Ticket* is about an Englishman who takes a vacation in Vera Cruz, Mexico. *Dear Dr. Falkenheim* is about an English couple who now live in Western Canada.



Dream of a Strange Land is either set in early Nazi Germany or in a fictitious land predominated by the military. An Appointment with the General is set in an unnamed Latin American country. The Blessing is not set in England, but the main characters are British reporters in an unnamed country.

The author employs the weather, the surrounding architecture, and the mode of transportation, especially trains, to convey the mood of the story. Whenever his characters are up to no good, or secretive, they are underground, as in Under the Garden, or in the basement, as shown in The Basement Room and The Root of All Evil.

Stories with a strong sexual overtone are based in France and Jamaica. Stories involving desperate acts with hints of extreme violence are based in Africa.

Language and Meaning

The stories were all written in English, the author's native language. The vocabulary is wide ranging, and the dialogue usually presented without accents or an abundance of slang. Some British terms such as "taking the piss" or "in the van of progress" are used without further elaboration.

When the author's story is about men from Oxford, the military, or the story of a professional man, the vocabulary changes to fit that of a person of a higher education. The dialogue is direct, easy to follow, and does not include lengthy explanations. The dialogue moves the story forward while further defining the character.

The titles to each story are sometimes sarcastic or whimsical. The story about a man having a conversation with an infant is named Awful When You Think of It. The titles become more than merely a handle for referring to the story, becoming part of the content as well.

The author uses the same terms to convey a person's character or station in life. A man with a frayed sleeve is known to be financially distressed, and the dark stranger is always Algerian. The characters all smoke and most of them drink, which was common in England in the time period of the author.

Many of the stories involve men questioning or reaffirming their faith. At times, the reader gets a sense that the characters are voicing the concerns and working out the questions that the author himself has struggled with over the years. People of religion are immediately defined as either Catholic or Anglican, and many of the characters are men of cloth, as in The Church Militant, The Last Word and The Hint of An Explanation.

The author's style in some of the stories is heavy with irony, providing the lead up to a surprise ending. The End of the Party and The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen are examples. Often, the stories are sad, laced with melancholy settings and incidents, and the ending is not uplifting.



Sometimes the author chooses character names that give the reader a hint about the role that person will play in the story. Richard Skate is a man who "skates" through the war as an ineffective but untroubled civil servant. Lola, in *The Innocent* is a loose young woman who has just met a man and is on holiday with him. Mr. Lever in *A Chance for Mr. Lever* is a man who once was an effective salesman but has lost his position of power. Poopy in *May We Borrow Your Husband?* is a simple minded woman who is old enough to get married but continues to allow people to call her by this childish and unflattering nickname.

In some of the stories, it is difficult to understand a reference to an author who is no longer popular or known well outside of England, or the city referred to in the story is not immediately known, although the author was obviously using these names and places to convey a message to the reader.

The stories are short enough to hold attention and the characters well defined enough to give the author a vehicle for his messages.

Structure

Complete Short Stories by Graham Greene contains fifty-three stories of varying lengths, covering 594 pages. The fifty-three stories are divided into five sections

There is an Introduction written by Pico Iyer, Suggestions for Further Reading by Michael Gorra, and then the stories begin.

The Section entitled *Twenty-One Stories* has twenty-one stories, *A Sense of Reality* contains four, *May We Borrow Your Husband?* contains twelve. *The Last Word and Other Stories* has twelve stories, with *Newly Collected* containing four.

The stories were all written between 1929 and before the author's death in 1991. All of the stories in *Twenty-One Stories* are attributed to a specific year; the remaining stories are not.

Some of the stories are much longer than the others. *Under the Garden*, *May We Borrow Your Husband?*, *Murder for the Wrong Reason*, and *The Other Side of the Border* are examples. Most of the stories have a clear beginning, middle and end, but some are the slice-of-life format. In the slice-of-life stories, such as *Awful If You Think of It*, the reader is supplied with the thoughts of someone during a specific moment that is not plot driven, more of a character development piece.

Most of the stories are written in traditional story format, but *Work Not In Progress* begins with a note from the author that this story is not finished but is part of a musical comedy he once worked on. The author is again part of the story in *The Other Side of the Border*, where he admits this was originally intended to be a novel, but important parts were inserted into other, later novels.



Quotes

"I'm sorry. I can't help it, Mr. Thomas. There's nothing personal, but you got to admit it's funny." *The Destructors*, p. 18

"I want to see what your God tastes like." *The Hint of an Explanation*, p. 36

"Skate agreed. He didn't know what it was all about, but that didn't matter." *Men at Work*, p. 59

"I don't think Mr. Calloway was looking for his dog, but his dog certainly found him." *Across the Bridge*, p. 85

"Endurance was a virtue of one's fathers." *A Drive in the Country*, p. 97

"He wasn't going to keep any more secrets; he was going to finish once and for all with everything, with Baines and Mrs. Baines and the grown-up life beyond him." *The Basement Room*, p. 130

"I tried not to smile at that, but it wasn't easy to keep a straight face. There's always something a bit funny about a sick man's morals." *The Second Death*, p. 178

"All that is required now,' he said, 'is a suicide. The atmosphere is imperfect without one.'" *Dream in a Strange Land*, p. 275

"But I was just as bad for her as he was. If he had the wrong hormones, I had the wrong age." *May We Borrow Your Husband?*, p. 331

"This was not just the physical restlessness of middle age, she argued; it was the universal desire to see a little bit further, before one surrendered to old age and the blank certitude of death." *Cheap in August*, p. 367

"There is a man's atmosphere and a woman's atmosphere, and they don't mix except in the proper place, under the sheets." *The Root of All Evil*, p. 408

"I do a lot of blessing myself,' the old man said. 'It's when you want to love and you can't manage it. You stretch out your hands and you say God forgive me that I can't love but bless this thing anyway.'" *The Blessing*, p. 551



"He knew what was wrong; you can always disguise a frayed sleeve; no one can see much of your socks and your shirt's well out of sight; it's the shoes which give you away. That's why strange women always look at your shoes." *The Other Side of the Border*, Page 580



Topics for Discussion

Discuss "Under the Garden" with its similarities to Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland". How do they compare? How do they differ? What did Wilditch learn from Janiff?

Discuss the roles women play in these stories, especially in "The Innocent", "The Blue Film", and "An Appointment With the General". Do the author's female characters exhibit any redeeming qualities?

Discuss the references to indigenous peoples in "A Chance for Mr. Lever", "The Blue Film", "The Church Militant" and "The Other Side of the Border". How has this attitude changed since the mid-twentieth century when these stories were written?

When the author has a character who is a young boy, the age is between seven and eleven years. Why do you think the author considers these to be formative years for children?

Discuss the homosexuality in "May We Borrow Your Husband?" and "Chagrin in Three Parts".

Read "Cheap in August" again, this time defining what the author is referring to in the title. Is it the hotel rooms, the liquor, or the female character?

Discuss the symbolism of the young woman's father locking up the house in "A Drive in the Country". What does her return to the home and subsequent locking of the door signify?

"A Discovery in the Woods" is a fantastic and unique look at the earth after the Great Flood of Biblical legends. Why do you think the people of the village of Bottom were deformed? Why would there be an attitude of isolationism amongst the survivors of the Flood?

In "The Last Word", the Pope is allowed to live while the other Christians are destroyed. He is then brought to the General to be shot. Why?

The author likes to create humor by creating characters who do outrageous things, as in "The Man Who Stole the Eiffel Tower." What are other examples of the author poking fun at his countrymen in this collection of short stories?