

Mr. Blue Study Guide

Mr. Blue by Myles Connolly

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Plot Summary

Mr. Blue, written in 1928, is a book by Myles Connolly about a young man named Mr. Blue. Mr. Blue disobeys the establishment but he is a fervent Roman Catholic, determined to push Christian moral principles and spiritual practices to the extreme. For Mr. Blue, Christianity is not something that is a mere moral requirement; it is the supreme joy and challenge of his life.

The narrator of the book is never named, but he is an older friend of Mr. Blue's who admires him deeply but finds him wildly imprudent, reckless and impractical. The narrator is a man of means who enjoys business and is level-headed. Mr. Blue and the narrator constantly challenge each other's values and forms of life throughout the book.

The narrator met Mr. Blue through a man named Stevens who managed a tower in New York City known as Tootsall Building. At the time, Mr. Blue was living on the roof in the open when it was not raining and otherwise in a tent. He had no money to speak of, working odd jobs to make his way. Mr. Blue, Stevens said, was the happiest man he had ever met in his life - kind to a fault, his eyes brightly shining, full of Christian zeal and eager to serve humanity in any way he could. More than this, however, Mr. Blue was a kind of artist who believed in creativity, glory and noble deeds. For him, being prudent was anti-Christian and he lived a life that attempted to prove it.

The story does not have a plot to speak of, exactly. It is mostly a character portrait that the narrator paints of Mr. Blue. The narrator explains how they met, the stories Blue told him and the lessons he learned from him. He discusses some of their encounters, Mr. Blue's disappearance, his giving away of his two million dollar fortune (in 1928 dollars) and his life on the roof of Tootsall Building. Mr. Blue was one Christian man against the world, preaching love, kindness and audacity no matter the cost.

But as time goes on, Mr. Blue becomes worried about his happiness, that he couldn't earn it if he had to and that heaven was going to exact a price. After this, he becomes even more extreme in his Christian practice. He has already made a vow of poverty but decides to live amongst the poorest of the poor, helping them to awaken their souls. He aims to create a group of 'Spies of God' dedicated to reviving love in the hearts of men. The narrator is amazed but does not believe that Mr. Blue will have success. He does have some success with a group of lumberyard men but when he tries to save one of their lives, he gets hit by a car and hospitalized. In the hospital, his admirers visit him but before he could go home he gets an embolism and dies.

The narrator is distraught, wondering why a man as good, wholesome and true as Mr. Blue would die when so many scoundrels were left alive.



Chapter I

Chapter I Summary

The narrator hadn't heard from Blue for a year. He last heard from Blue in a letter from England on Blue's travels to Tyburn and the important places in the life of Sir Thomas More. He urges Blue to get a nice job or he says Blue will end up in the poorhouse. Blue responds that it would be glorious to live in the poorhouse.

Blue, not yet thirty, would have been happy in a poorhouse; he was without money and when he found it he gave it away. He lived impoverished, but 'gloriously ... and religiously' and with the air of a monk without an Order. His life was his job and he made life beautiful where he went, bringing others to be kinder and a few more generous. The narrator suspects that when he returned from England with nothing, he'd straighten-up and go back to office work.

The narrator is surprised to find Blue in a foreign-made car with a chauffeur. Blue sees him on the street, and greets him oddly, asking him what he thinks of the automobile. He had hired the car and the chauffeur and invites the narrator in for dinner. It turns out that Blue had inherited \$5 million (in 1920s terms) from an uncle. It was really only \$2 million. He converted the money into cash quickly and did some amazing things with it, such as buying three large houses and filling them full of low-class servants and helped them had a good time. The narrator initially chastises him for wasting the money.

In his library, Blue reports that he spent nine hundred thousand dollars in eight months and has a million left. He built a toy balloon factor, a passion of his. The narrator supposes that Blue has a purpose, but he found Blue naive, with the 'boyishness of a true mystic'. But he began to face his love of money and feel that making money was silly. After he ran out of money, sold his belonging and paid his servants, he vanished.

A month later in Boston Commons, the narrator finds Blue walking towards an old house where he lived. In his small room, the narrator calls him crazy, but he knows that he isn't, but that he is guided by purposes. Blue says his money was a 'trial' that Lady Poverty put him through. The conversation continues and when the narrator felt like Blue wanted to be alone he left, but as entered the street, he realized that maybe Blue needed company. Blue was praying all alone in front of a black cross in the candlelight. The narrator did not interrupt him.

Chapter I Analysis

The novella, Mr. Blue, is about a man named Blue who comes into millions of dollars and quickly gives it all away. Blue is something of a modern-day St. Francis of Assisi, living in voluntary poverty. He is a young Catholic who travels the world giving away whatever money or assets he comes into the possession of and spending his nights



praying in front of a large cross. Blue has decided to take Christianity as a profound life challenge.

The narrator, whose name the reader does not know, is a rich man who admits to quite enjoying money. He knows his heart: he loves money and he cannot see as man like Blue who is as indifferent to it as anything but insane. Blue upsets him, leading him to sometimes condemn Blue but admits secretly to being shamed by his incredible life. It is not yet clear what the relationship is between the narrator and Blue.



Chapter II

Chapter II Summary

The narrator and his friend John Stuart were sharing a drink close to Boston City Hall. John worked for the Sun and they discussed Frank Munsey, failures in the Rockefeller Institute research labs, literature departments at Universities, and so on. Their fascination was not with big failures but those pushed into a prominent place but too weak and stupid to make a difference with it.

John, apparently, is a scholastic, a philosopher following St. Thomas Aquinas. The conversation turns to true happiness when a man pipes up and tells them that he knows a man who is so happy as to be almost insane. The man, Stevens, was the superintendent of a new thirty-story building named Tootsall. Stevens introduced the narrators to Blue.

Blue was tall, young and had dark, intense eyes coupled with a relaxed and 'easy' smile. He desired to live on the roof in a tent, which baffled Stevens. Blue spoke of living on the roof of the skyscraper with such excitement that, Stevens, reported, he wanted to live on the roof himself for a moment. Stevens decided not to charge him so long as he helped out around the building and so Blue started to live there and engaged in many simple, odd activities.

Stuart was bored by Stevens's story, but the narrator was interested. Stuart thought him a mere eccentric and left. Stevens then said that Blue liked band music and loved being surrounded by exciting music. One day, Blue gave a party on the roof and invited Stevens. He was an eager host, serving Stevens, a newsstand man named Abraham Morgenthau; his little boy was in the hospital. They were the only guests. Blue gave them a surprise, bringing up a thin, 'cadaverous' Negro, over six feet tall. Abe was frightened. He introduced them to General Grant, who played the cornet for them beautifully. When Grant finished, Blue was in tears.

Then twelve Negroes all dressed like Grant came out to play music; Blue had found some money and had hired them for a 'top-of-the-world band concert'. When Stevens finished the story, the narrator told him that he didn't find Blue all that amazing. Stevens invited him to meet him. They found him on the roof. The narrator liked it up there. Blue had many ideas for what to do up there. Eventually, Stevens departs and the narrator and Blue are alone together. Blue wants the poor to live atop skyscrapers. His plan had various obvious practical difficulties.

Night fell and the men watched the city. Blue points out that 'God is more intimate here'. He asks if the narrator was a Christian and when he nodded he said that they were both lucky. Blue said that his heart would break if he didn't know that God himself had stood as a man and looked up at the sky. Blue says that Christ was 'humanized infinitude' and redeemed humanity but also kept them from 'the terrible burden of infinity.'



The universe God created with ease, yet he had hands, eyes, and a brain. Because of Jesus, Blue could know that his little bacterial life relative to God has meaning. His thoughts matter more than the whole material world because God became a part of his creation to save him.

After his outburst they were quiet for a moment. He apologized for it but the narrator told him he was impressed in a way. He doesn't want to keep such things to himself. Blue overwhelmed the narrator. The narrator left, walking a thousand steps down to the street but he didn't experience any of it, instead thinking of Blue, who made him believe 'almost anything was possible.'

Chapter II Analysis

Chapter II tells the reader how the narrator met Blue. One night, the narrator and his friend John Stuart talk about the mundane failings of those unprepared for greatness. They talk about the nature of happiness when a building manager, Stevens, tells them about Blue. John Stuart is unimpressed and leaves but the narrator is fascinated. Interestingly, the author has the narrator note that John is a scholastic, a follower of the philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas. Almost all modern scholars are Catholic but Blue is a Catholic too. The suggestion is that a brilliant mind steeped in Catholic philosophy could easily miss the profundities of the Catholic religion.

Blue is living on the roof in Stevens's building where he has all kinds of strange ideas, like hiring a band to have a concert under the stars or trying to plan to have the poor live on the tops of skyscrapers. He even hangs a hand-made flag with the word 'courage' scrawled on it in big letters from the skyscraper. When Stevens brings the narrator to meet Blue, the narrator is overwhelmed. When they are left alone, Blue goes into an extended diatribe about the profundity of nature on the Christian worldview.

Blue is stunned that God became a man. He notes that God created the universe from nothing, without batting an eye. Unless He became man, Blue says, he would feel like a mere bacterium whose thoughts meant nothing. But because God became a man he knew that man was valuable to God and that man's proper activities were valuable to God. This overwhelmed him with joy and awe, to think that God had hands, eyes, ears and a brain. Blue's innocent profundity overwhelms the narrator, who takes a liking to Blue. This conversation brings out the deep Christian theme of Mr. Blue, not only illustrating Blue's unique personality but his high degree of Christian devotion.



Chapter III

Chapter III Summary

After meeting Blue, the narrator left on a business trip and did not see him until June. He saw Blue on the roof painting a kite he had made. He was excited and the afternoon was beautiful. He wanted to fly the kite immediately but one never knew how it would behave, so he had to be careful. He released the kite and it flew upward. Blue began to sing. It was too much for the narrator to bear. They sat together as Blue flew the kite.

Blue comments that he likes musical tones, but cares like for time or key. He likes peppermints and balloons. As the sun began to set, the kite was out of view. Blue asked the narrator what happened to St. Augustine's sun and St. Francis Borgia's children and Blessed Thomas More's family. The narrator had no idea. Blue was sad that fathers and husbands rarely felt the appeal of sainthood. Once they were married, good Christians stopped expecting more than an ordinary life. Blue thought knowledge of these men would be more valuable than one thousand sermons. He then suggested that a deluxe edition of the New Testament be printed.

Blue continued to comment on religious matters which the narrator found strange for a young man from his generation. He was too happy, audacious and healthy for a religious person, as the narrator conceived of him. The narrator regretted that Blue had not found his place in a community. He sometimes tried to convince Blue to live a more ordinary life, but to no avail. Blue then began to tell him a story.

The story was of the last Christian captured by the International Government of the World and his execution. The government had worked for one thousand years to kill off the last Christian and the world rejoiced. The people were allowed to sing for the first time in centuries. The world was full of slaves in those days, with only a few masters. Most were slaves to machines, operating them from within. They were machines serving a mechanical state. The masters of the IGW were the children of the state masters and had exterminated all the rebellious races and those unsuited for slavery; those preserved were obedient and hard working (mostly Nordic peoples).

The founders of the world state had planned for centuries; six men controlling the world proved difficult. Individuals only had numbers and no families existed. Any imaginative children were murdered. No one desired to revolt and they were fed with a formula that only one man knew; but Blue said that the IGW had a weakness, as it was the Kingdom of the Anti-Christ. The capital once was New York and its weakness was a man in a vault there, 2,757,311. Blue called him White. He had a bit of light in his eyes, but not so much that he had to be destroyed. He was a good slave, however and beyond suspicion. White visited the hills and the sunlight; he made the sign of the cross in the dirt and promised the silence he would return God to the earth.



Summer came and White noticed, and so did Autumn. He brought thin white wafers back with him one day to the vault that he had made himself. He spent sleep time praying and the next day the IGW announced that they were to execute the last known Christian. As night fell, he packed up his things and waited. When the streets were empty, he walked out and went to the top of the black tower in the city. After centuries of death, he had dressed as a priest and had Christ's anointment on his soul. He then performed the Mass by himself, to bring God back to earth. The last Christian was a priest saying a magnificent mass and he had been spotted. The masses were driven to destroy him but he continued the Mass.

It was difficult for the IGW to get a clear shot at the man and they could not land on top with a helicopter. They then decided to bomb the building. The first bomb misses, as does a second, killing many below. The third bomb was prepared but before it exploded a single trumpet peal shook the world, the sun blew up and the earth exploded. The world was ending and the Kingdom of the Anti-Christ disappeared. The souls of the just and right were raised.

After Blue finished the story, they were quiet for five minutes. Blue thought it would make a good movie. The narrator thought the theology of the story was bad because the Church was supposed to persevere until the end of time, but Blue protested that it would still be a good story. The narrator claims that he only repeats the story in order to help illustrate Blue's personality.

Chapter III Analysis

Chapter III's purpose is to use Blue's story to illustrate his unique conception of the world and his unique personality. The chapter begins with Blue and the narrator out on the roof of the Skyscraper. Blue is flying a kite and rambling a bit about the things he finds beautiful - tones, but not key or time, movies but not books, and so on.

But then he transitions into telling the narrator a story of great significance. The story happens far in the future on the day of the killing of the last Christian by an International World Government. It is ruled by six men, the descendants of the initial founder of a world state which controls everyone in the world. It has exterminated all rebellious cultures and races and bred people to be servile, foolish and hard-working. All industrial and agricultural resources have been concentrated into a few hands and creativity has been destroyed, as has Christianity. One Christian is left and he is executed by the government. The people rejoice.

But there is another man, a small man who came from the countryside with just a bit of life left in his eyes. He is a secret Christian who spends his breaks praying and he promises to bring Christianity back to earth. He spends his days preparing small white wafers of bread and gathering materials so as to dress as a priest. One day, when everyone is gone watching the execution, he climbs up to the top of one of the high towers of the world capital city and begins to speak the Mass all by himself. His name is Father White and the last Christian on earth is performing the Mass in defiance of the



entire world. The masses go wild with rage and the government cannot quite reach him. Two planes try to drop bombs on him but they miss and before a third plane can drop the last bomb, the apocalypse comes, God destroys the world and makes it anew. The defiance of Father White had brought God back to Earth.

This is the best illustration of Blue that the narrator can give. A man with light in his eyes of a kind not known elsewhere on earth, whose very life is in defiance of the Kingdom of Satan on the world. His life will bring God back to earth and will focus entirely on His light.



Chapters IV and V

Chapters IV and V Summary

When the narrator returned to the Tootsall Building, Blue was nowhere to be found. The narrator took some time trying to grasp the significance of it. Stevens was gone and the new superintendent asked Blue to leave, thinking Blue would upset people. The narrator could not find him and or Stevens after some searching. Stevens apparently was a bomb-maker and had tried to explode the Mansard Bank vault, but he was caught by the bank watchman. Stevens had invented nitroglycerin and said that he was only testing the material and was going to sell it to the feds. The watchman let him go and he has not been heard from since.

Blue, however, came upon the narrator in his ebony limousine on the way to his black cross in his room on Beacon Hill.

Many deny that Blue existed, others said we have crazy, but the narrator knew him, despite having no proof, but he does have letters and one serious poem. Blue would have been happy to know that some doubted he existed because no one had more life. He was also the sanest man the narrator knew, unless carrying the principles of religion to their logical conclusion is insane. He thought nothing other than saving souls and helping others to be noble and friendly.

Blue was born a Catholic but his enthusiasm for heaven was that of a convert's. His Christian faith helped him to perceive things clearly; the things he saw made him the way he was. He invited craziness and was glorious.

It is not clear how Blue made any money, but the narrator did see him shoveling snow once. Blue seemed to see this as a form of penance but he was happy as he worked. The people at the kitchen where he worked loved him and would have done anything for him. They surely were shocked by Blue, his kindness, excitement, laughing, and solemnity. He had a vow of poverty to produce a better soul, but he could not have vowed obedience to anyone but God. He lost much for his manner of life; the narrator suggests that he may have joined an order but seems more likely to start one.

Blue hated to write, preferring to talk. He only has five letters Blue wrote him, but he has six from others. The narrator intends to publish these as a document, and he declines to quote the letters in their entirety. The letters are personal and surprisingly, Blue's writing is stiff. Periodically, however, he wrote something that would reveal himself and his character. The narrator quotes such a paragraph.

In the paragraph, Blue describes the difficulty he has focusing on practical matters when he years to find goodness in everyone, how much he struggles to focus on tough matters when he thinks he is living a true Christian story. His life is too personal for him to be impersonal. He cares nothing for being important, as the only one who is important or



could be important is the one that cared enough to be good to him. He can't be sensible because so few things are of any importance. He can't restrain his enthusiasm because he loves life too much, and so he cannot associate with the 'wise' and the 'important'.

In the same letter, Blue says that the life God gives us gives back what you put into it. Anyone who puts love in gets love out, but few humans know how to love, even if they know how to receive it. In the same letter he discusses his admiration for a friend that believed Christians should create their own customs, poems, pleasures, and manners to connect to one another.

A second letter comes to the narrator after he advises Blue to be thriftier. Blue is furious that he is preaching to him to be cautious. Blue hates the very word, he hates that he can't be spontaneously kind without suspicion of weakness or that he has to watch himself, to keep his thoughts to himself. The world is too reserved, too silent, too repressed for him. Blue prefers Love, Audacity and Faith.

Towards the end of the letter, Blue complains that historians always criticize men who want to be great as egotistical. They are suspicious of such men, preferring them to settle down. He admits that the conservatives are right to say that if you play it safe, you'll avoid harm, but this is a form of failure - living comfortably ruins the soul.

The narrator regards the third letter as strange because it is a mere scrap of wrapping paper with a few lines. The poem came to him in a napkin but the wrapping paper lines are different. Blue claims that humans are terrified to suffer and even at the thought of suffering, but only suffering produces wisdom and even the greatest understanding. If one doesn't suffer, acquiring the heavenly kingdom is very, very difficult.

The fourth letter is a response to the narrator who had complained to Blue about his criticisms of the world. Sometimes, the narrator argued, the non-conformists really are crazy. Blue responds indirectly, saying that most people enjoying pretending to be something they aren't. They suffer because they are fake, but being fake has benefits. It requires imagination and the fakery elicits humility in others. Posers do not always deserve to be called hypocrites - individuals who pretend to be saints or heroes may merely have grown tired of who they are and want to change. He tries to be noble and further, without posing ourselves, we couldn't ferret out posing when we confronted it.

The fifth letter concerns Blue's desire to find a moving description of the world's end, the apocalypse. In the letter, he inquires about what follows the end of the world. He imagines that the day will have no stars, with a black sun. The winds will hit nothing, but that somewhere else people will be together and happy. Blue calls this the 'glorious Somewhere' where he images Mary talking to mothers about their children, Saint Joseph speaks to the poor, Suarez and Aquinas argues, and on and on. This is Paradise or Home. Blue argues that only the Catholic Church would allow him to hope to enter such a place.

The narrator speculates the Blue probably has lots of friends due to how generous he is, but few were close to him. Friendship is one of the great things of life, yet Blue didn't



see it that way. His friendship came from charity alone, but when a man betrayed him, he only loved him more.

The narrator then recounts encountering Blue traveling with a small, snobbish man who had inherited money. The man immediately annoyed the narrator because he seemed entitled to money he didn't earn and his manners were excessively good. He speculates that the man was using Blue and Blue laughed. Blue upbraided the narrator for being a bad Christian and that he became the man's friend to be kind. Blue said that the Christian must love the unlovable and suggests that the narrator try it. The narrator responded by saying that he couldn't get himself to like someone he disliked, someone small. Blue said that this was because the narrator thought too much of himself. He could love an enemy he considered his equal, after all. So it is merely a matter of understanding how low you truly are. Being unable to love a petty person means that one is vain.

The narrator recounts other stories that illustrate Blue's unique take on life. In one part, Blue explains how the printed word can no longer inspire and that moving pictures are needed to inspire men. Movies can help people to love a fallen world. But Blue couldn't love everything. What he could not tolerate was bigotry - against a color or a belief. A Jewish friend of his forwarded a letter on that topic. In it, Blue argues that there are natural virtues and vices, but that while many believed in supernatural virtues, few reflected on the possibility of a supernatural vice. Bigotry is a supernatural view, for it is so cruel and devastating that it goes beyond the ordinary weakness of the world to the side of Satan himself.

In another letter, Blue defends his talkativeness because anyone who really loves things outside of himself cannot bear not to speak of them. Talking helps people to get over themselves and connecting with others. Yet silence is also needed for good conversation despite its use by the proud. A later letter comments on the nature of laughter and its history and another about how much he liked Thoreau's famous passage from Walden called 'What I Lived For.' The narrator then recounts an Irish woman who knew Blue as a very young man; he puzzled her but she was impressed by him. The woman gave the narrator a letter that Blue wrote to 'My Good Dear Mother' who he never met. It is something of an ode to her. In the letter he hopes that people will say of him when he dies: 'Never was there a worse sinner, And never was God kinder to one.'

The narrator ends the chapter reflecting on Blue's extraordinary sincerity but the Irish woman, Mrs. Murphy, found him rather useless and didn't understand how he paid the rent. This recounts the last of the eleven letters. Blue had faults - he was imprudent, erratic and impractical. He might have achieved great things but only left behind letters.

Chapters IV and V Analysis

This brief chapter describes Blue's disappearance. Stevens had disappeared after a foiled bank robbery and the new building superintendent had asked Blue to leave. There



was no finding Blue or Stevens. The narrator eventually learned Stevens's story, but the next time he even heard of Blue again was a year later when Blue pulled up next to him in a limousine.

Chapter V is the narrator's commentary on eleven letters Blue wrote that he has collected, once hoping to publish them. However, the narrator declines to reprint the letters in full, as many of them concern personal matters. Instead, he discusses various aspects of them and quotes paragraphs selectively in order to give the reader a deeper impression of who Blue was.

In the first letter, the reader finds a paragraph where Blue complains about how hard it is for him to be reserved and practical when he finds the love of life and the hope for tenderness and beauty so overpowering. In the letter, Blue comes across as a man almost oppressed by his love and care for others.

In the second letter he upbraids the narrator for suggesting that he be more prudent and cautious. He attacks the very idea of caution as weakening the human and making him complacent, preventing him from achieving great things. He finds that Love, Audacity and Faith - his values - are incompatible with caution and that be cautious kills the soul. Therein the reader can discover Blue's defense of his own imprudence - caution is incompatible with his values, which he believes to be good ones.

The third letter contains a poem and a few lines written on a piece of wrapping paper where Blue laments the fact that most men are not only afraid of suffering but afraid at the very thought of suffering. Blue believes that suffering is required in order to acquire wisdom and to enter heaven. Blue, we see, will endure anything to know and be with God.

The fourth letter responds to a complaint the narrator made about how many non-conformists really are crazy. Blue responds by discussing the fact that most people are posers but that posing has various positive qualities. It is not clear how the discussion is a response to the narrator's concern, save perhaps the intimation that the crazy non-conformists are posers, but aren't so bad after all.

The fifth letter is Blue's final letter to the narrator, where he describes the nature of the end of the world. In it he describes his view that even at the end, people are together, happy somewhere out there.

The sixth letter was written to Mr. John Stone, where Blue complains that the written word has lost its ability to inspire people to love others. The seventh letter, written to a Jewish friend, Mr. Casril Wein, is a diatribe against bigotry, where Blue expresses his view that bigotry is a supernatural vice. Both letters bring out Blue's desire that people love others and his sadness and anger when they are cruel.

The eighth letter, written to Mr. Wein as well, defends Blue's habit of being talkative on the grounds that when people really love something good, they have to talk about it, and that talk helps people not to feel alone. The ninth letter, written to Mr. Albert Considine, praises the virtues and history of laughter, and the tenth letter, written to Dr. Frederick



W. O'Brien, concerns a passage from Thoreau's *Walden* about the profundity of truth. Each of these letters has Blue defending another of his values: his talkativeness, his penchant for laughter and his relentless truth-seeking.

The final letter was given to the narrator by Mrs. Murphy, an Irish woman Blue knew as a younger man. The letter, however, was written to the mother Blue never knew where he expresses his love for her and the fact that he feels close to her. In it, he expresses a desire that people remember him as someone God loved enough to forgive his mighty sins. The final letter expresses the very idea that motivates and animates Blue - the shocking fact of forgiveness.



Chapter VI

Chapter VI Summary

The chapter opens with Blue and the narrator hiking around two reservoirs known as lakes. They are near Boston College and it is dark. Blue comments that he has been in an 'autumn' mood, signally either adolescence or old age. He is struck by the enduring Gothic, which represents the eternal nature of the church. He argues that even though the Gothic could be physically destroyed, 'no great cause can ever be forgotten.' The great achievements endure in the memory of the universe.

Blue continues to maintain the reading print has ruined the human mind, giving the foolish the same power as the wise. The mind is jumbled and Christ wrote nothing save words in the sane. The narrator disagrees, saying that Blue is merely preaching. Blue admits that he likes the sound of his own voice. He wants people to be true artists, not mere recorders. He wants the narrator to find the true spirited, artistic men and give them dynamism. Art dominates the age and can express faith but no longer does.

Blue goes on and on as they circled the lakes. The narrator strongly disagreed about the Gothic but he preferred not to argue. Blue did give him ideas, though, such as that American Catholicism cannot be very vibrant since it has not produced great art or architecture. Blue was also worried about scientific agnosticism, which he believes will be around forever because it is a vain state of mind which is hard to defeat with reason. It can only be destroyed by another state of mind, which is where good art comes in. The narrator reproduces these words to show that Blue was a deep thinker, although not terribly profound. For instance, he saw reading as a kind of 'parasitism' on the thoughts of others.

They go to dinner at an oyster house and Blue continues to be serious. He says that he has been so happy that he is scared by it. The narrator encourages him to rejoice that heaven has given him this happiness but Blue believes that the best gifts are one heaven makes you earn. He knows he will pay the price and says that he doubts he could earn it. The narrator, however, was through with the conversation.

They left dinner and got on the subway, but Blue was lost in thoughts. They see a girl walk by and the narrator asks him why he doesn't find a woman. Blue found a religious card in his pocket and gave it to the narrator. He then walked off. The card said 'The cross is the gift God gives his friends.'

Chapter VI Analysis

Chapter VI describes an evening walk and dinner that Blue and the narrator shared. Blue is incredibly serious and rants on and on about many different matters, complaining about how the written word has ruined the human mind, about how great achievements cannot be destroyed, about how those who read are parasites on the

thoughts of others, and so on. The narrator strongly disagreed but grew tired of arguing due to Blue's relentless energy.

When they reached dinner, the narrator worried aloud that Blue was too serious for the happiest person on earth. It turns out that Blue is frightened due to his happiness. He feels as if heaven makes you earn the gifts it gives you and he knows that his happiness has been a great gift. He doesn't know if he is capable of earning the gift and fears that he will have to pay an awful price. Something of a plot line arises here, as Blue anticipates losing his happiness or at least only retaining it if he suffers massively. We also see a bit of his early-20th century anti-modern Catholic sentiment and culture rising to the top, with his views about earning heaven's gifts, and about how common reading made it difficult for the wise and good to dominate the public sphere.



Chapter VII

Chapter VII Summary

In early November, the narrator is in Boston. Snow came and the narrator worried about Blue, and tried to find him. He notes that Blue was loyal to Boston and that he would find him there. Blue was also loyal to heaven. The narrator then goes on to describe how Blue appreciated the earth as a home.

The narrator finds Blue and he looks thin. He had not been eating enough, and his poverty in Boston was part of it. Those who vow poverty ordinarily do not have to beg or sleep in the cold. Blue embraced poverty no matter how it came, however. The narrator had a different view and he chose not to argue, as it was hard to argue with Blue. He was concerned for Blue's health, however. Blue maintains that there is still charity in the world and that he will find it.

Some time into the walk, Blue stops and tells the narrator that he is a good friend and will tell him something about himself. Blue claims that he had found his vocation and it is to live in poverty among the poor. He'd only live with them, not even in his attics. He was going to live in the worst slums and that his life had been his training. He believed it was Christ's story and his eyes shined as he said it. He has found two converts among the poor already and was excited about the future. The narrator says that he never saw a man so happy and for a moment was tempted to join him, despite his old age.

Three weeks later the narrator sees Blue again. They went to lunch and the narrator left him. He seemed to want the narrator to join him. Blue wanted to produce 'Spies of God' that would sneak into workplaces around the city and preach the Gospel along with other projects and the narrator thought maybe Blue could do it. However, the narrator thinks that 'business ... is the backbone of our civilization' coupled with science. The narrator wants to make a lot of money and he likes good things in life. He feels no call to do as Blue does.

The narrator left Blue and traveled to New York to spend a few weeks. Blue had not been to his housing for ten days when he returned. No one knew where he was and no one cared. The narrator felt guilt for being cold on his last visit.

Three days later, a Boston City Hospital nurse sent him a note that J. Blue was her patient and wanted her to contact him. He left for the hospital immediately and found Blue on his cot. He was a mere skeleton. People were laughing at and watching him. Blue knows that the narrator thinks he has pulled an irresponsible stunt and says as much. The narrator doesn't argue because it is useless. When the admirers disappeared, they were alone. Blue had found a job doing lumber yard work in the narrator's absence. The group of laborers was something of a gang but Blue befriended them. He helped some of them 'remember their souls'.



Blue's program was progressing and he told the narrator about them. He was doing what he loved - giving the cross of God to others. He saw his failings and suffering as a success. Blue had ended up in the hospital by saving a large, drunk laborer named Joe from a car by throwing himself in front of it. He was pleased that this made him a hero in the lumberyard because it would help his influence, but the narrator chided him for being reckless. Blue was not afraid of death and had been seriously injured.

Blue's doctor thought he might get pneumonia but he didn't get any. He was supposed to leave within a week. As the narrator left, two of the lumberyard workers came to visit Blue. The narrator thought of Blue all night and admired his project but he never thought that Blue would help accomplish it. He was in awe of Blue's faith.

The next afternoon, the narrator goes to the hospital, but Blue isn't there. He had died.

The narrator wrote the book two years after Blue died. He still can't believe Blue died - how could the world still be beautiful without him? Why is anyone still around with Blue gone? The narrator says that no one could make him believe that Blue was dead.

Chapter VII Analysis

Chapter VII is the last of the book. Blue has decided that he has a vocation to live amongst the poor, showing them the cross of Christ and converting them to his cause to be 'Spies of God' infiltrating ordinary workplaces and spreading the Gospel. The narrator admires Blue for his plan but finds it impractical. Blue wants him to join but the narrator admits to himself that he likes money and wants to be rich. This is significant because it becomes clear that the narrator's worldly attachments prevent him from being as happy and free as Blue is.

Later the narrator finds Blue in the hospital, having been hit by a car after saving a co-worker. He had taken a job with a rough group of men in a lumberyard and had won them over. He had one or two converts and was excited about expanding his ministry. He had lost a lot of weight and had been seriously hurt. The narrator is furious with him for being so reckless, but Blue brushed him off and spoke to the narrator only of his successes. Blue continues to have absolute confidence in his values and in the rightness of his cause. He accepts suffering willingly, continuing to live out the ideal of the Catholic Christian as he understands it.

When Blue dies, the narrator reacts with denial. No one deserved to be on earth more than Blue; it made no sense that he had died while the narrator and so many other worthless people were still around. He refused to believe that Blue was dead. This observation that ends the book continues to build on the idea of earning a place in heaven or goodness and mercy from heaven, which connects with the idea of deserving divine favor. It is a heavily Catholic theme, the idea of merit before God, and it is on this theme that the book ends.



Characters

Mr. J. Blue

Mr. Blue is the main character of the book after which he is named. The reader never learns his first name, only his first initial J. One wonders if this is not to intimate that his name is Jesus because he attempts to imitate Christ in the best way he knows how. Mr. Blue is constantly described as the happiest man in the world. He also does not fit into the world because he approaches it with audacity and a refusal to conform to ordinary matters.

Mr. Blue does not think of his health, housing, money, or even food. He lives day by day, trying to share the cross of Christ with others, to reawaken their souls, to show them love and kindness in any way that he knows how and to repent for his sins as he comes to them. He takes Christian principles to their logical extreme, attempting to love his neighbor as himself in the most literal sense of the dictum. His piety is also particularly Catholic, with his largely monastic behavior.

Mr. Blue does not have terribly close relationships with others. He is erratic and disappears at the drop of a hat. He leaves for a year without telling his good friend the narrator where he is going only to come back having inherited two million dollars and giving it away as fast as he possibly can. The only time Mr. Blue is worried is when he is worried that he does not deserve to be as happy as he is. Towards the end of the book, he founds his own quasi-Order of Christians that he calls the Spies of God but he dies soon afterward.

The Narrator

The narrator is the second main character of the book. Mr. Blue - the novel - is a character portrait. It does not really have a plot. The character portrait is painted by the narrator.

The reader learns little about the narrator throughout the book, not even his name. All the reader learns is that the narrator is a man of means, older in years, somewhere between middle age and being elderly. He is a businessman, enjoys making money and believes that the backbone of civilization is commerce. He likes material comforts and does not well understand those who are indifferent to them. He is also an exceedingly practical man, one who thinks that men should settle down, save money and live a respectable life.

Despite this, he approaches Mr. Blue with a sense of reverence, awe and fascination. Mr. Blue is not like anyone that the narrator has ever met and in many ways has a value system that is largely the opposite of the narrators. Mr. Blue is audacious rather than restrained, he is erratic rather than controlled, he is talkative rather than reserved. Mr. Blue cares nothing for money, giving it away as fast as possible. The narrator enjoys



creature comforts but also believes that he can do great good by accumulating money and then using it wisely. The narrator and Mr. Blue are always arguing. Despite their friendship, their value systems clash in argument almost every time they meet.

Despite this, when Mr. Blue dies, the narrator is stunned and refuses to believe it because the world could not be such a place as to not have Mr. Blue in it despite having so many scoundrels.

John Stuart

The narrator's Scholastic friend who declines to meet Mr. Blue.

Stevens

The building manager who introduces the narrator to Mr. Blue and allows Mr. Blue to live on the roof of Tootsall Building.

General Grant and His Band

Mr. Blue entertains the narrator and Abe on the roof of Tootsall with a cornet player named General Grant and his band.

Abraham Morgenthau

A friend of Mr. Blue's that Mr. Blue invited to his roof to be entertained, along with the narrator.

Christ

The central religious figure in Christianity, Mr. Blue is unusually devoted to him.

Father White

The last Christian on earth in Mr. Blue's story in Chapter III. He performs the Mass as the world ends.

Blue's Friends

Mr. Blue made many friends in his days. The narrator collects letters from several of them that Mr. Blue wrote to them.



Mrs. Murphy

An Irish woman who knew Mr. Blue as a teenager and housed him for a time.

The Lumberyard Workers

Mr. Blue gets a job at a lumberyard when he tries to form the 'Spies of God.' He befriends the lumberyard workers despite the fact that they were a rough bunch.

Joe

The large black coworker of Mr. Blue's who Mr. Blue saves from getting hit by a car.

Blue's Nurse

The nurse who cares for Mr. Blue and tells the narrator that Mr. Blue has died.



Objects/Places

Blue's Inheritance

Blue received two million dollars from one of his uncles as inheritance. He gave it away as quickly as possible.

Blue's Kite

Blue made a kite to fly from the roof of Tootsall where he lived.

The Tootsall Building Roof

Where Mr. Blue left until Stevens stopped being building manager and the new superintendent asked him to leave.

Beacon Hill Attic

The room where Mr. Blue lived during much of his time in Boston.

Boston

Mr. Blue's city of origin, he was very loyal to the city.

The Boston Gothic

Catholic architecture at Boston College that inspires Mr. Blue not because of its structure but because of its ability to endure.

The Slums

Mr. Blue decides late in the book to live among the poorest of the poor in Boston's slums.

The Eleven Letters

The narrator collects eleven letters that Mr. Blue wrote to document his life and personality. Five letters were written to the narrator, six others to other friends.



The Last Christian on Earth

The Last Christian on Earth is a story Mr. Blue tells the narrator in Chapter III, which Mr. Blue thinks would make an excellent movie.

Heaven

The Paradise of Christianity, Mr. Blue believes his happiness comes from there and he speaks of it often.

Blue's Black Cross

Blue has a black cross in his Beacon Hill Attic that he prays before often.

The Spies of God

A group of converts who would preach the Gospel to the poor which Mr. Blue only just began to form when he died.

Books and the Written Word

Mr. Blue despises the written word since it gives fools the ability to speak on the level of the wise and dumbs down people's thinking, allowing them to be parasitical on the thoughts of others.

Colors and Tones

Mr. Blue enjoys simple experiences, such as of colors and tones, but not of more complicated matters like modern art, and music with detailed melodies.

The 'Courage' Flag

Mr. Blue makes a flag with the word 'Courage' scrawled across it that he hung on the roof of Tootsall Building.

The Mass

The Catholic worship ceremony, Mr. Blue loves the Mass and has Fr. White say the Mass beautifully in his story.



Themes

Meriting Heaven

Mr. Blue is not merely a Christian, he is a committed Roman Catholic, and as such exhibits many of the unique distinctive qualities of a Roman Catholic Christian. He is strongly monastic, apparently celibate and has taken on a vow of poverty, something many Protestant denominations scorn. He often wonders about the lives of the saints and speaks of them admirably, again, another Catholic distinctive.

But perhaps the most uniquely Catholic of his attitudes is his understanding of theological merit. He believes that heaven has given him happiness beyond any other living human but he is frightened because he knows that he could not earn this happiness even if he tried. He believes that heaven will exact a price for his gift because he could not earn the gifts of God. A Protestant would reject this attitude, arguing that all of God's gifts are essentially unmerited but as a Roman Catholic, the tie between merit and a relationship with God is reasonably (but not wholly) tight.

Mr. Blue's worries about merit lead him to practice increasingly extreme Catholic forms of piety. It also leads him to rejoice in his suffering as paying for the happiness he experiences. He often expresses admiration for the extreme monastic practices of Catholic Saints like St. Francis of Assisi. He knows that God has given him a gift but he fears that he must become the sort of person that deserves the gift or it will be taken away from him.

Supreme Happiness

Mr. Blue is routinely described in the book as the happiest man in the world. Stevens first describes Mr. Blue to John Stuart and the narrator as 'the happiest man I ever met.' The narrator confirms this, strongly believing him to be the happiest man in the world. Mr. Blue is also excited about something; he is innocent and mesmerized but the simple beauty of the world. He looks for the good in everyone and desperately tries to practice the Christian dictum of loving one's neighbor as oneself.

He is also completely indifferent to the ordinary concerns of life, such as housing, health and food. This leads him to become increasingly thin and to risk his life to save a co-worker. He also willingly lives in the streets towards the end of the book. He attributes his happiness to his wonder at the good people are capable of and the profound mercy that God had on him, to forgive his sins and to have deigned to honor man by becoming a man Himself.

The only time Mr. Blue does not seem happy is when he becomes worried that his happiness comes with a price and that God will force him to pay it because he is not the kind of person that could deserve this much happiness. This worry makes him very serious but after a time he regains his happiness when he decides that he has



discovered his vocation of living amongst the poorest of the poor and assembling a group of converts he calls the 'Spies of God.'

The Christian Life

Mr. Blue is a Christian novel through and through. God features prominently in the book. Mr. Blue is a fervent Catholic Christian and is always speaking of theological and spiritual matters, much more than the ordinary Christian layman. When the narrator meets Mr. Blue at his home on the roof of Tootsall Building, he ends up telling him about his complete wonder at God. God created the entire universe without batting an eye.

If one puts humanity in perspective, man is but a bacterium in comparison to God. And yet God dared to become a man, to shrink himself down to nothing just in order to save what would otherwise be a worthless part of creation. This gives Mr. Blue the profound sense of the dignity of humanity. If God deemed humans worthy of saving, if he thought them capable of good and noble love and acts, then Mr. Blue would seek out this love in everyone and return only love for anything that was given to him by others.

Mr. Blue's conception of the Christian life is thoroughly that of a monastic Catholic. The narrator often sees Mr. Blue as a monk without an order or that Mr. Blue is the sort of man to begin his own order, like St. Dominic, St. Francis, or St. Ignatius of Loyola. When he takes his vow of poverty so seriously as to live with the poorest of the Boston poor, he in one way creates an order, a group of converts that he calls 'the spies of God.'

Style

Point of View

The point of view of Mr. Blue is the first person. The narrator of the book is not the same person as the author, Myles Connolly and he also never named himself. All we know about the author is that he is a good bit older than Mr. Blue, sometime passed middle age. He is a businessman and believes that business is the backbone of civilization. He likes money and realizes this yet he finds Mr. Blue irresistible and cannot help but become his close friend.

The narrator is an exceedingly practical man. He always encourage Mr. Blue to calm down and be more practical. He gets particularly upset with Mr. Blue for throwing himself in front of a car to save his co-worker Joe and landing himself in the hospital and encourages Mr. Blue not to waste the \$2 million he inherited. However, he finds arguing with Mr. Blue frustrating because Mr. Blue is absolutely convinced that his views and values are correct.

The narrator is constantly in awe of Mr. Blue's faith. He is a middling sort of Christian, a believer, but someone afraid to take Christian principles as seriously as Mr. Blue does. He admires many of Mr. Blue's qualities but disagrees with him on many matters. So he presents Mr. Blue to the reader in this light, through the eyes of an older, more seasoned man of business and learning, who is something of a 'compromiser' with the fallen world that Mr. Blue refuses to submit to in any way.

Setting

The setting of the book is in 1928 and 1929. It is an era of prosperity, business achievement, refinement and consumption. The young people of Mr. Blue's generation are, in his opinion, excessive self-restraint and conformist. The book is located primarily in places around New York City and Boston. Mr. Blue is a native Bostonian and quite loyal to the city.

In the beginning of the book, when the narrator meets Mr. Blue, they are in New York City in a tower down Broadway known as the Tootsall Building. This building is managed by Stevens, a man who later turns out to be something of an amateur explosives artist and bank robber. Mr. Blue lives on the roof of the building out in the open. When it rains he lives in a tent on the roof. Much of the story is tied to the roof home of Mr. Blue. There Mr. Blue recounts his story in Chapter III, he flies the kite he made and he entertains Abe and the narrator with General Grant's band.

In Boston, Mr. Blue lives in several different places. He lives in a small room in Beacon Hall for a time but when he makes his vow to live with the poor, he moves between poorhouses, the street and the lumberyard where he works. He also spends time in the hospital towards the end of the book.



Language and Meaning

The language and meaning of Mr. Blue reflect the author's intent of drawing a character portrait rather than telling a story with a plot. While there are important events in the book, such as the narrator meeting Mr. Blue, Mr. Blue's disappearance and reappearance, his vocation amongst the poor and his death, the point of the book is to discuss this extraordinary man and his qualities. For instance, Chapter III consists almost entirely of a story the Mr. Blue made up about the last Christian on earth which the narrator repeats because he thought the story represented Mr. Blue's worldview and his understanding of himself in relation to the world.

In Chapter V, the narrator analyzes eleven letters that Mr. Blue had written during his life, five to him and six to other friends. The narrator uses the letters to illustrate Mr. Blue's unique qualities and his defenses of his peculiar behaviors in different contexts. The narrator will excerpt the letters, say by listing a particular paragraph, and then he will make various comments on it.

Much of the book's language is appropriate for a well-educated adult audience and contains many advanced vocabulary words but has no real jargon to speak of. The meaning of the text is contained primarily in the narrator's internal observations and his recounting the dialogue with and monologues of Mr. Blue. Mr. Blue often speaks in a very lyrical manner, as if he were giving a soliloquy, so there is an opportunity for unique language here.

Structure

Mr. Blue has seven chapters, none of which are named. The story of Mr. Blue is not told in chronological order but begins with the story of how the narrator encountered Mr. Blue after a year of not seeing him. This leads him to explain how he met Mr. Blue and to recount various experiences with him, stories that Mr. Blue told him and Mr. Blue's eventual decision to live amongst the poor and create the 'Spies of God'.

Chapter I introduces Mr. Blue in his encounter with the narrator after inheriting \$2 million. He hasn't seen the narrator in a year and the narrator is shocked to discover that Mr. Blue has already spent half of his inheritance helping the poor. Mr. Blue could not give money away fast enough. The reader is also introduced to Mr. Blue's deep piety. In Chapter II, the narrator recounts how he met Mr. Blue through a building manager named Stevens and out of interest went to visit Mr. Blue on the roof of Tootsall Building. They had many extraordinary conversations there, with Mr. Blue going on and on about his thoughts, talking excitedly about the majesty of God and the shock and awe he felt at the love embodied in the Incarnation of God as Jesus.

Chapter III consists primarily in an incredible story Mr. Blue told the narrator about the last Christian on earth in the future when the world is ruled by an international government controlled by six men intent on destroying all independence, creativity, rebelliousness and religiosity in the world. One man, Fr. White, performs the Mass,



provoking the world government to attempt to kill him. Before they can, Jesus returns to earth. Chapter IV is quite brief and describes Blue's disappearance.

Chapter V is the tale of eleven letters that Mr. Blue wrote which the narrator had collected. Five were written to the narrator and six to other friends of his. These letters are excerpted in order to help the reader get a better sense for who Mr. Blue was. Chapter VI recounts Mr. Blue's increasing concern that his extreme happiness would come with a price and Chapter VII tells the story of how Mr. Blue decided to undertake extreme poverty and live with the poorest of the poor. When he tries to bring the Gospel to some lumberyard workers, he attempts to save one of their lives and gets hit by a car. This leads to his death.



Quotes

"That will be glorious. I have long known the magnificent possibilities of living in a poorhouse. I will become the troubadour of the poorhouse." (15)

"And yet, I must confess this madcap Blue put the stuff in a rather bad light, and made one feel that making it was a ridiculous and nonsensical business. I suppose it is a bit foolish to spend the few years one has here accumulating any commodity." (20)

"I know a gent who's so happy he's almost crazy." (27)

"Poor people with these horizons! Poor people with the whole beautiful world beneath them! Poor people up here in the skies!" (37)

"Blah!—for those who would have me a microcosm in the meaningless tangle of an endless evolution! I'm no microcosm. I, too, am a Son of God!" (41)

"'I shall bring God back to earth,' White told the silences beyond the western river." (58)

"On my next visit to the Tootsall Building Blue was gone. ... It was almost a year later before I saw Blue again." (67)

"Human love is blind—But how strange the love must be/Of the good and gracious God/Who died for the like of me. So herein let us have hope/That our squalor find disguise/In the splendor of His heart/In the glory of His eyes ..." (68)

"Almost all of us have a capacity for being loved. But few of us have a capacity for loving." (72)

"Truths are like the stars." (84)

"Never was there a worse sinner, And never was God kinder to one." (90)

"Why should you be serious? You are the happiest man in the world." (98)

"The cross is the gift God gives his friends." (102)

"Blue, it seems, had found his vocation. That was the way he put it. He was going to pledge himself to poverty and live among the poor." (107)

"Business, I believe, is the backbone of our civilization, business regulated and run with the co-operation of science. That, I think, is my vocation. I want to make a great deal of money. I like the good things of life." (111)

"If that man was not a living demonstration of faith, no man was." (117)

"Why are all of us here, and not Blue?" (119)

"You can't make me believe that Blue is dead." (119)



Topics for Discussion

To what extent does Blue represent the ideal Christian?

To what extent is Blue's ideal a specifically Catholic ideal rather than a broadly Christian one?

What is Blue's relationship to money?

Why does Blue like the things he likes? Explain with three examples.

What is the relationship between Blue and the Narrator?

What does the Narrator admire in Blue?

Why doesn't the Narrator join Mr. Blue's group?

Why does Blue enjoy suffering?

Name and discuss three defenses of Blue's attitudes and activities that come through in his letters.

What do you think of Blue's character? Is he a saint? Merely reckless? Something in between? Explain in detail.