

The Penguin Complete Saki Study Guide

The Penguin Complete Saki by Saki

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Contents

The Penguin Complete Saki Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Reginald.....	3
Reginald in Russia.....	5
The Chronicles of Clovis.....	7
Beasts and Super-Beasts.....	10
The Toys of Peace.....	13
The Square Egg.....	16
The Unbearable Bassingtons.....	18
The Death Trap.....	22
Characters.....	24
Objects/Places.....	27
Themes.....	29
Style.....	31
Quotes.....	34
Topics for Discussion.....	36



Reginald

Reginald Summary

In the story called "Reginald," the author admits that he invited Reginald to attend the garden party at Mrs. McKillops. He tells Reginald that he wants to be "in with Mrs. McKillops just now." Reginald recognizes that the author wants one of the Persian kittens Mrs. McKillops has, and says that someone will ask if he was there when the Allied forces marched into Paris. Reginald says that someone is always waiting to dredge up the past. Despite this prediction, he agrees to attend. At the event, Reginald almost immediately angers a man known as the Colonel, saying that the man has just admitted something that gives away his age. Before the author can intercept Reginald, he walks away and begins showing "the youngest Rampage boy" how to create an alcoholic beverage, despite the fact that the boy's mother is "prominent" in the Temperance movement. The party soon breaks up with Reginald at the cause.

In "Reginald on Christmas Presents," Reginald says that it is difficult to teach people how to give good presents. He cites some options that are always good such as bottles of liqueur. He says that aunts are especially problematic because they are already older by the time they become aunts, meaning they are not particularly easy to teach. He says that the best option with aunts, if it is not possible to choose the aunt is to choose the gift and just send the bill to the aunt.

In "Reginald on the Academy," Reginald engages in a debate on the things that should be accomplished before one dies. When a man says that every man has to be a success by age thirty or it is never going to happen, Reginald counters with the statement that anyone who reaches thirty has "failed in life." In "Reginald at the Theatre," Reginald gets into a debate with a woman who accuses him of having read Nietzsche and then says that boys used to be "nice and innocent." Reginald says that boys now are just nice.

In "Reginald's Peace Poem," Reginald decides to be a poet after getting a new fountain pen. In "Reginald on Worries," Reginald says that he has an "amateur aunt" who worries about many things, including Reginald. Reginald says that on the subject of his education, he does not see that there's anything to worry about because anything worth learning is learned.

In "Reginald on House Parties," Reginald says that it's difficult to know all there is to know about the host or hostess and cites the reaction of a recent host when Reginald shot a bird that turns out to be a peacock. He says that his hostess's insistence that it was a tame bird is "silly" because the bird was extremely wild after the first gunshot. In "Reginald at the Carlton," the "Duchess" tells Reginald her thoughts on various subjects. She says that young people have goals that never happen and old folks have memories of events that never happened, meaning the middle-aged are the most realistic about "their limitations."



In "Reginald's Rubaiyat," Reginald says that he was making "bad resolutions for the New Year" when he decides to be a poet. He says that the only requirement for becoming a poet, as far as he can tell, is to be born, and that he has checked his birth certificate in order to prove that he meets that requirement. He comes to the conclusion that he might have "more talent for electioneering." In "The Innocence of Reginald," Reginald says that he has told friends that he has written a book, leaving out nothing of his life. He says that since he made that announcement, people have been demanding that he leave out particular events that he had forgotten.

Reginald Analysis

It is not revealed why Reginald is in such high demand at Mrs. McKillops' garden party when his manners are obviously atrocious. It could be that Reginald is usually different though in this particular instance he's simply angry at having been convinced to come and is showing it by acting out. It seems more likely that he's one of those people in the upper edge of society that are sought out despite the fact that he is rude.

It seems plausible that Reginald is the author's alter-ego. This is borne out by Reginald's attitude regarding education. "Reginald" says that he believes education is overrated. He says that students do not take their education seriously while they are in school and under the direct supervision of the teachers. The author himself attends school for a period but his father eventually takes over his education, traveling a great deal as the basis for the learning process. "Reginald" goes on to say that "anything that is worth knowing one practically teaches oneself." This could be his reference to his own efforts to learn without the structure of a formal educational setting.

The "Duchess" introduced in "Reginald at the Carlton" gives a particularly stinging story of a girl who "nursed a wealthy uncle through a long illness, borne by her with Christian fortitude." This is already setting up the story for the contradiction to follow. The fact that the uncle is wealthy would not play into the story at all unless the distribution of the money upon his demise is going to be part of the story. The fact that the girl nurses her uncle "with Christian fortitude" should be an indication that the girl does not want the money, but it seems unlikely and the Duchess goes on with the story, explaining that the money was at the heart of the story. She says that the uncle dies, leaving all his money to a "swine-fever hospital," which obviously upsets the girl. The Duchess goes on to describe how the girl has become vindictive over the situation, and that her vindictive nature has taken the form of "drawing room recitations." This is typical of the humor throughout the book.



Reginald in Russia

Reginald in Russia Summary

In "Reginald in Russia," Reginald is visiting with a Princess named Olga. Reginald shares bits of information about other people of note but says that the princess is not particularly impressed with his information. In "The Lost Sanjak," a man who is about to be executed talks to a prison chaplain. The man says that he would not be facing execution if he had been "one of the few men in England familiar with the fauna of the Outer Hebrides" or was able to recite a particular poetry. He then explains how he came to be in the current situation. He says it began when he fell in love with the wife of a doctor and, believing that she shared the emotion, declared his love. She tells him to leave and he does but finds a dead body of a Salvation Army captain on the highway. The man trades clothes with the corpse in order to take on the man's identity and leave the town behind. The next morning the man reads a newspaper account of his own death with the murder being attributed to a Salvation Army captain who had been seen in the area. He begins searching for new clothes, feeling it necessary to be out of the captain's uniform before turning himself in. Many people recognize him as the man sought by police for the murder but no one tries to stop him and he later learns that there are bets being placed on the time and place of his capture. He is caught and believes he can prove his identity by spouting knowledge from his education, bound to be superior to the captain's, but is so nervous that he can't recall anything he's asked. The prisoner is sentenced to death as the courts still believe him to be the captain and the chaplain notes that this kind of misunderstanding "might happen to anyone."

"The Blood-Feud of Toad-Water" is the story of the Cricks and the Saunderses who are neighbors in the town of Toad-Water. One raises hens and the other gardens. When a hen gets into the garden, the gardener chases the hen away. The children report to the woman who raises hens that the neighbor is throwing rocks at her prize hen, prompting a feud. The feud is so intense that the Crick's cat impregnates the Saunders' female cat and the Saunders drown the kittens "but the disgrace remained."

In "Cross Currents," a woman named Vanessa Pennington is married to a poor man but has a rich man named Clyde as an admirer. Vanessa's husband dies and the rich man proposes, although he has by now come to be less enamored with Vanessa. He is more excited about outdoors pursuits and says that he will marry her only on the condition that she travel with him. She readily agrees but soon tires of the constant hardships of safaris and other outdoor activities. She meets Mr. Dobrinton who commiserates on her plight and the two of them run away together. However, they are captured by Kurdish brigands and held for ransom from the government with Vanessa pretending that Mr. Dobrinton is her husband. Clyde reluctantly goes after his wife and is captured by the same group of brigands, who commiserate with Clyde and offer to let him beat Mr. Dobrinton regularly during their captivity. The government says they will ransom Vanessa and her husbands, but must be told how many husbands they can expect to encounter. The brigands are not watching Clyde closely and he slips away. Vanessa



and Mr. Dobrinton are ransomed but he is bitten by a dog and dies of fright. Clyde files for divorce and Vanessa finds a position as kitchen help in an upstanding and civilized neighborhood.

"The Baker's Dozen" is a play in which Major Dumbarton and Mrs. Emily Carewe meet on a sea voyage after many years apart. The two agree that they must marry immediately but compare notes on children and discover that they have thirteen between them. That being an unlucky number, they begin considering ways of getting rid of one. They even approach another passenger about the fact that she has only one daughter and that she cannot possibly expect that the girl will turn into a boy. They try to convince her that she must have another child. She angrily leaves and the couple again begin talking with Major Dumbarton. Suddenly they realize that he counted his son, Albert-Victor, twice, so that they have only twelve. With this realization, they fall into each other's arms.

Reginald in Russia Analysis

In the story of Reginald's meeting with the Russian Princess, Olga says that Reginald must come visit again, adding that he must come to her country home for a visit. Reginald knows that this home is very isolated and says that some places "should be sacred from intrusion." This could be interpreted as Reginald's understanding that the Princess does not want him to come visit but is more likely Reginald's realization that he does not want to go to such a rural area, even to spend time with the Princess. This is evidence of Reginald's self centered attitude.

Vanessa's story is typical of the author's presentations of characters who seem to have obtained everything they want only to have it jerked away in some twisted plot. The tendency for the author to surprise the reader with plot twists is an important aspect of his humor. In Vanessa's case, she so desperately wants respectability that she longs for a residence in a particular neighborhood, believing that this would be an important part of that respectability. She's obviously denied that as the wife of a poor man and Clyde also denies it to her. When Clyde divorces her and Mr. Dobrinton dies, she's left with no option but to go to work to support herself. The final twist of this story is that she finds a job in a kitchen, which would be a low position and utterly lacking in the kind of respectability she obviously craves, except for the fact that she finds the job in this particular neighborhood.



The Chronicles of Clovis

The Chronicles of Clovis Summary

"Esme" begins with Clovis objecting that "all hunting stories are the same" and the Baroness insisting that hers is different. She says that she and a woman named Constance were fox hunting when they become separated from the rest of the group and encounter a hyena obviously escaped from a man who keeps such creatures as pets. The Baroness decides to call the creature Esme and they continue on with the hyena at their heels until they see a young child picking berries along the road. The child screams in fright and Constance and the Baroness discuss the fact that they can still hear the child's screams, then discover that's because the hyena is carrying the body of the child in its mouth. The Baroness tries to make the hyena drop the child by yelling and threatening but the hyena runs off into the bushes and apparently leaves the child's body there. They emerge onto a road and a car hit's the hyena, killing it. The Baroness tells the driver that the hyena was a rare breed of dog named Esme, gives the driver her address but declines payment for the "dog." She says she later receives a lovely diamond brooch with "Esme" engraved on it. Later she sells the brooch although she loses Constance's friendship because she does not share the money.

In "The Matchmaker," Clovis talks about other people, including his mother. He says she is "thinking of getting married." When someone says "again!" Clovis says this is the first time, although he qualifies the statement by saying that his mother has been married three times but that this is the first time she has stopped to think about it.

In "Mrs. Packletide's Tiger," Mrs. Packletide wants to kill a tiger while visiting India because a friend has done so. She can imagine the attention she will get for having done so and plans a tea with the tiger skin prominently displayed. She offers money to anyone who can make it possible for her to kill a tiger. A poor villager leaves out animals for an old tiger who is unable to hunt for himself. At the appointed time, Mrs. Packletide arrives with her companion Mrs. Mebbin, and shoots at the tiger while it is about to devour a goat staked out as bait. Both the tiger and the goat fall down dead, with the goat dying from Mrs. Packletide's gunshot and the tiger from fright. Back home, Mrs. Mebbin threatens to tell the truth of the adventure and Mrs. Packletide buys her silence by purchasing a house for her. Asked if she will hunt anymore, Mrs. Packletide says the "incidental expenses" are too high.

"The Jestings of Arlington Stringham" outlines a new tendency by Arlington, who is a statesman in the House of Commons, to make jests. It is noted that the first of these, made in the House, is "thin." His wife hates this new tendency and notes it as an "abyss" between herself and her husband. In "The Chaplet," Clovis tells the story of "the tragedy at mealtimes" in which a musician so captured his audience's attention that they failed to eat and when the musician returned for an encore, the chef drowned him in a tureen of soup.



In "The Quest," Clovis is a guest at the Villa Elsinore when Mrs. Momeby screams that she has lost her son, Erik. Clovis's first question is whether by "lost" she means that he's died or that she "staked it at cards and lost it that way." This upsets her but she tells the story, saying that her husband had come inside to discuss the upcoming meal and what kind of sauce there would be with the asparagus, and that upon returning outside they discover that the child is gone. Clovis interrupts to ask more about the asparagus but Mrs. Momeby ignores him. At one point, Clovis suggests that a wild animal took the child though Mrs. Momeby says there are no such things in Surrey. Another woman says that Mrs. Momeby cannot find the child only because she does not have enough faith to find him. Clovis argues that the wild beast he is certain has eaten the child has faith that it knows the child's whereabouts. Just then someone yells that they've found the boy in the street. They bring him in but he's crying and they put him on "roly poly" for a ride in hopes of calming him, only to discover that Erik has been hiding on the "roly poly." When one woman asks what they are supposed to do with the boy from the street, Clovis says she won't have to keep him forever but can be accepted in the Navy at age thirteen. The extra child turns out to be from across the road, a boy named Percy, and his nursemaid comes to get him. Clovis goes inside to check on the asparagus sauce, having never gotten any suitable answer to his questions about that.

The Chronicles of Clovis Analysis

The story of "Esme" is an example of the macabre humor seen in several of Saki's stories. The child is apparently killed by the hyena but the two women don't stop to see if they can help the child or share the information of the child's death with anyone. The Baroness goes on to say that she doubted the gypsies that were the child's family even realized the child was missing, because the group has so many children they can't possibly know if one is missing.

In "The Jesting of Arlington Stringham," the author tells the story of a statesman and his wife and their relationship, which becomes strained because of the man's new tendency to tell jokes. The humor of his jokes are very dated to the time period of the writing and much of the humor is seen in poor communication between the wife and her mother. Finally, a friend tells the wife that Arlington is spouting the saying of a woman named Lady Isobel. This knowledge prompts the wife's death, probably a suicide. It seems that it's prompted because of a supposed affair between Arlington and Isobel though it could be much more subtle in that the wife realizes she no longer has the hold over Arlington that she'd had in years past.

Clovis is introduced in this section and seems very much like Reginald of the earlier sections though he is not described in nearly so much detail. The reader is given more information about Reginald in his actions and interactions with other people. It is almost as if Clovis was already introduced and the author sees no real reason to give details about Clovis. There are some aspects of his character that are immediately seen, including that Clovis is self-absorbed to a comic degree. For example, in "The Quest," Clovis is more interested in the kind of sauce being prepared for the asparagus than the fact that a child has disappeared. However, this is tempered by the fact that others are

equally unconcerned and that the author's account of this includes the fact that the parents do not realize the first child given to them isn't their own son.



Beasts and Super-Beasts

Beasts and Super-Beasts Summary

"The Brogue" details the presence of a brown gelding, known as "The Brogue" or "The Berserker" because of its tendency to run in a pattern reminiscent of "forked lightning" at the slightest provocation. The things that prompt this are as small as a gate "painted too aggressively white." The horse is owned by the Mulletts who have tried to get rid of it for years. When Mrs. Mullett tells Clovis Sangrail that she has finally succeeded, he offers congratulations but then learns that the purchaser, Mr. Penricarde, is now interested in one of Mrs. Mullett's daughter, Jessie. Mrs. Mullett fears that Mr. Penricarde will be killed riding the horse, making her daughter a widow before they have the chance to marry. Clovis suggests that Jessie ask for the horse back but that ploy fails. He then volunteers to keep Mr. Penricarde occupied but it rains the first morning of this plan. Mr. Penricarde rides and is summarily thrown. He is not seriously injured and Jessie nurses him back to health in time for the wedding. Listed among the gifts in the newspaper account is the horse as a gift to Jessie from her new husband. Jessie's brother Toby says that this means Mr. Penricarde was none the wiser about the horse but Clovis says that it could mean he has a sense of humor.

In "The Hen," Clovis's mother has a house guest that she wants to leave. Clovis tells the guest that the butler has come to believe that she is Queen Anne, and that the Queen is supposed to be dead. To drive home the point, Clovis sends the butler with a sword into the room where she is writing letters, prompting her to decide that she has to leave before the butler does kill her.

In "The Treasure-Ship," the Duchess purchases an apparatus used for exploring the ocean's depths in order to send a young man named Vasco to retrieve the treasure from a sunken galleon. The Duchess sets Vasco up on her property on the coast of Ireland to practice with the apparatus and he soon returns, telling her that he has found a small boat at the bottom of the bay there. He says that there were papers in a lock box on the boat that list scandalous information about a group of people including the Duchess. The Duchess asks what he plans to do next and he says that he will not do anything, hinting at blackmail and putting an end to further exploration.

In "The Forbidden Buzzards," Hugo Peterby asks Clovis if he has ever tried his hands at matchmaking and Clovis says the after-effects of having people angry at you for pushing them into matrimony are something he wants to avoid. Upon learning that Hugo wants to marry a particular woman, Clovis says that the woman never stops talking and suggests that Hugo race her around the hay lot, then propose quickly before she "gets her wind back." Hugo says he believes he can propose if he can only keep another young man away from her for a few hours and asks if Clovis will keep the other man occupied. Clovis says the man already doesn't like him after Clovis had remarked that a story the man told had been around since the time of George II or James II. He does promise to help if he can. The following day Clovis tells his hostess that he believes the



man is visiting because he's an egg collector and the only pair of rough-legged buzzards known to nest in the entire country are nearby. The hostess makes certain from that point that the man is never left alone. Clovis goes on to note that Hugo doesn't marry the young woman and that the buzzards successfully raise two young, both of which are shot by a local hairdresser.

In "Clovis on Parental Responsibilities," Clovis is listening to a mother extol the virtues of her children, saying that they've been carefully brought up. Clovis says that the fact that she was so careful indicates that she doubted how they might turn out. He says his mother never bothered with anything other than to "whack" him now and then and to teach him right from wrong, though he's forgotten what that difference is. As they part, Clovis says he looks forward to meeting the woman's son and she says that she'll be careful that he never does.

In "The Stalled Ox," Theophil Eshley is an artist who is moderately successful though everyone expects that he will paint nothing but cows in an array of settings. One day his neighbor Adela Pingsford, arrives, upset, saying that there's an ox in her garden. Theophil says he won't be of any help, knowing only about cows and having no idea how to move an ox out of the garden but Adela insists and he goes to help. After Theophil throws sticks at the ox, it finally decides to move on but goes directly into Adela's morning room. She is angry, saying that she'd prefer that it had remained in the garden and suggests that he just sit down and paint it. He rushes to get his easel and paints. When the ox finishes eating the cover of a book and a bouquet, Theophil throws it some more leaves in order to entice it to remain. The ox leaves of its own accord and Theophil becomes famous for the painting, launching a new career that goes on to include "Barbary Apes Wrecking a Boudoir." It's noted that he buys Adela another book but she never completely forgives him.

Beasts and Super-Beasts Analysis

The author's knack to turn understatement into humor is seen repeatedly throughout the stories. One of the prime examples is seen in the short story, "The Brogue," in which Mrs. Mullet explains that she has a total of six daughters and that she's not exactly trying to get them off her hands, but "a husband or two wouldn't be amiss among the lot of them." Clovis responds that he's never taken time to count them but believes that Mrs. Mullet is probably right because mothers tend to "know these things."

The story of the Duchess who wants to recover the treasure of a sunken ship is another example of the author's tendency to have a wealthy person who finds that the tables are turned. The humor of this story is that the Duchess is convinced that she's using her money to buy the diving apparatus in order to increase her fortune. When Vasco arrives with the information he's found aboard the small ship that sank off the Irish coast, the Duchess is initially hopeful that he might have been showing this to her in order to explain the success of his efforts but seems to realize this optimism is unfounded. When she asks Vasco what he plans to do now, he says that he does not think he will do anything, and that that he'll do that for the rest of his life. This obviously indicates that he



believes he's going to have some outside source of income, and all indications are that his blackmail idea works.

The story of Theophil and Adela is interesting in that it is one of the few times the woman gets the upper hand in delivering one-liners. When Theophil asks if she can't get the ox out of the garden, she says that if she could have, she wouldn't have bothered to call on him. She goes on to say that she thought he might be of some use but that she'd obviously been mistaken. When Theophil says "shoo" to the ox without any reaction, Adela says that if she ever has a chicken in her garden she'll call on him because he "shoos" so well. The tide eventually turns with Adela losing what little control she has and raging at Theophil before leaving the house to call the police for assistance.



The Toys of Peace

The Toys of Peace Summary

In "The Toys of Peace," a young man named Harvey, at his sister's request, brings toys that have nothing to do with battles and fighting as gifts to his nephews in an effort to foster interests in things other than war. They prefer to study battles to playing with the toys and Harvey tells his sister that they've started this much too late to have any effect on the boys. In "Louise," a young woman recounts her experiences of the day, realizes that she's left her niece Louise somewhere and has to call around to the various places she had visited in order to find her. In "Tea," a young man named James Cushat-Prinkly comes to realize that he wants to be married some day and that he's going to have to propose to someone in order to make that happen. When he comes into an inheritance, he decides on the woman and prepares to go propose. However, he stops in to visit another young lady on the way and finds her most agreeable over tea. She says that she believes he's come to visit her to order hats as gifts for his sisters but he proposes instead. His family, having expected that he'd marry the other woman, are surprised but supportive.

In "The Disappearance of Crispina Umberleigh," two men meet up on a train, one the wealthy nephew of Crispina Umberleigh who had disappeared years earlier and the other a journalist. The nephew says that her disappearance had not been a great blow to the family and that his uncle had received a letter requiring a lump sum payment followed by an annual payment, and that without these payments Crispian would be returned to her family. The nephew says that his uncle had justified his payments, saying that he feared not making them would prompt the kidnappers to harm Crispina though he and the family enjoyed being out from under her rule. Eight years later, she simply returns, having been struck by amnesia that had miraculously abated.

In "The Wolves of Cernogratz," a group of visitors to the castle Cernogratz is talking about legends associated with the castle. The governess contradicts the telling, saying that she is a blood member of the family, having been forced into work when the family fell on hard times. No one believes her until the night she falls ill and dies, prompting the legend as she tells it to come true with hundreds of wolves gathering at the edge of the property to howl.

In "Louis," a husband and wife are arguing over plans for the Easter holiday with the wife saying that she cannot go to Vienna because to do so would mean she would have to leave her beloved Pomeranian, Louis, behind. The husband, aided by his sister, decides that he has to do away with the dog. The wife never lets anyone near the animal, saying that he's prone to snapping and that he'll bite anyone who tries to touch him. The husband and sister know that the wife uses the dog to escape any situation she doesn't want to participate in. The husband, finding several hours in which the wife is to be away, plots with his sister to poison the dog by gas in order to kill it. When they complete their efforts they discover that the dog isn't real. When the wife returns, the



husband tells her that the dog attacked the butcher boy, bit the husband and had to be put down. He says that he's going to have to pay off the boy, meaning she can't have the gift she'd wanted for Easter, and that he's going to have to go to Vienna in order to be treated for the bite.

In "The Phantom Luncheon," Lady Drakmanton is urged by her husband to take three sisters to lunch in an effort to repay their family's political efforts on his part. She refuses but gives in. On the appointed day, she dresses down for a meeting at the New Didactic club, and invites the sisters to the Carlton for lunch. The meal is extravagant and as the sisters turn the talk to politics, Lady Drakmanton tells them that she isn't Lady Drakmanton, that she has had a sudden memory loss and recalls nothing other than the sisters inviting her to lunch. Just then, Lady Drakmanton's sister walks in Lady Drakmanton points her out as being Lady Drakmanton. The sisters believe her and then the real Lady Drakmanton says that she's suddenly remembered that she was at the club because she's been hired to polish the brass, says that she has to rush away to her job and leaves the sisters with the bill.

In "Quail Seed," a grocer tells a friend that his business is suffering because so many people are traveling into London for their shopping. The next afternoon two ladies stop in the store to kill time until the train to London arrives. As they are waiting, a young boy comes in and asks for pomegranates and quail seed. The grocer complies and the boy leaves. A short time later a man enters and asks if the boy has been in. The grocer says he has not seen the boy and the two women abandon their trip to London, deciding instead to visit friends and share their story. The next day there are several women in the store when the boy arrives followed soon after by the man. The theories run rampant among the shoppers.

The following day the store is so busy that the owner has to hire additional help. The shoppers are easily swayed into additional purchases. The boy arrives as usual and is told by the shopkeeper that there are no more quail seeds. The man arrives before the boy can leave and a mysterious veiled woman tells the man of the boy's whereabouts. There's a brief encounter before the man and boy also leave the store. The shoppers continue to arrive over the coming days but the man, the boy and the mysterious woman never appear again. Later, the shopkeeper thanks an artist friend for setting up the scenes.

In "The Hedgehog," a woman who is known to have seen spirits arrives at a home and sees a ghostly hedgehog though she's assured that it was just a prank. In "Fate," a young man named Rex Dillot is not well off but constantly finds himself in the right place to make a little money or to be invited to a particularly good weekend event, usually just when his dinner jacket is fresh from the laundry. He is terrible at games but good at making profitable bets on who will win at games. One weekend he bets a great deal more than he has on a billiard game and finds that he's going to lose. Unable to pay, he finds an excuse to leave the room and ponders the situation. He finds his hostess in another room with a reading lamp nearby. He says that if Fate were really on his side, his hostess's gown would catch on fire, putting an end to the billiard game. Since Fate is not available at that particular moment, Rex takes matters into his own hands. Minutes



later, a young man rushes in with the hostess in his arms, her gown smoldering, and drops her on the billiard table where she's doused to extinguish the blaze, effectively putting an end to the game.

The Toys of Peace Analysis

The series of articles published in "Toys of Peace" have a slightly different tone without the overt humor so prevalent in the previous stories. In fact, these stories were originally published as newspaper articles in several publications, which probably accounts for the tone. An interesting aspect of these stories is that many of them tend to have an epitome as the story comes to a close. For example, the story of "Tea" relates the worry of a young man over the setting of his proposal. When he chooses the young lady and the date, he sets out to make the proposal but finds that he is going to arrive just at tea time. He realizes that tea with this young lady is awkward, that she forgets how he likes his tea, and that the conversation has to revolve around the food being served. Instead, he drops in on another young woman. This woman is calm and confident, turning the attention from the food and making the tea time pass in interesting conversation. The importance here is that the man realizes this woman will make him happy, not just at tea time but in all life.

The reaction of the wife in the story about "Louis" is interesting in that the wife is obviously appalled that the husband is taking up the game, pretending that Louis was real. The husband turns the situation around so that the wife is now paying the price for those years of lies. She will not get the gift she had expected as the husband says he has to pay off the boy who has been attacked. She then tries to laugh but notes that her efforts are an "unmistakable failure."

Clovis makes several appearances in stories of this section although he continues to be a means of conveying information than an important character in the story lines themselves. In the story of "Shock Tactics," Clovis becomes slightly more involved. In this story, Clovis helps a friend put an end to the snooping of his mother. Clovis, disguising himself as "Clotilde," writes letters to the friend Bertie, insinuating details of a murder and robbery that are purely fictitious. Bertie's mother raises quite a ruckus about the letters and Bertie, upon revealing the hoax, tells his mother that he is going to call for the doctor because she is so upset. In her desire to keep her emotional state private, she agrees to never again read his letters.



The Square Egg

The Square Egg Summary

"The Square Egg" begins with a "badger's view" of the military front. There is a description of the wasteland that military conflicts create. The author says that the soldier who has been in the wilderness is relieved to find shelter in a bombed-out building that provides even rudimentary shelter. One day the author encounters a man who tells him the story of a business enterprise. The man had found a hen who laid eggs that were not quite round. He began to travel in search of similar hens and selectively bred chickens until he had a strain that laid eggs that are almost perfectly square. Some people purchased them as an oddity but soon realize that the eggs are preferable to round eggs which roll around. He says that he has a thriving business but that his aunt is claiming all the proceeds for her own. The man asks Saki to lend him some money to take his aunt to court. Saki responds that he will go to the man's hometown and check out his business. The man, realizing that Saki is not going to lend him any money, asks what he will do if he finds the claims of the square-egg business to be factual. Saki responds that he will marry the man's aunt.

In "Birds on the Western Front," the author outlines the birds he has seen in the area. He notes that there is an abundance of mice and that birds of prey, including owls, are plentiful. There are few other birds in the area. The author says that it might be assumed that they are scared away by the artillery but believes that isn't necessarily the case. He says that he had seen a hen-chaffinch circling desperately above a wood where many died and that he believes the bird had a nest nearby. He says that she was too scared to feed her young but too loyal to abandon them.

In "The Infernal Parliament," a man named Bidderdale is believed to be dead although there is some debate as to whether he's actually deceased. He is waiting in Hell but the powers there say they will wait until the earthly matter of his death is decided before grabbing him. Bidderdale is given a bit of a tour and learns that there's a Parliament in Hell, though there is only a single party system, there is no reward system and all motions are defeated. Bidderdale then learns that there's a new point coming before Parliament in the form of "special Hells." He realizes that this must be a reference to the saying that there's a "special Hell" prepared for specific crimes. He's given a tour and finds that there's a special Hell for playwrights in which they will be given news clippings of reviews of their plays. Bidderdale says he does not believe this would be such a bad way to spend time for a playwright but then is shown that all the S's are missing from the clippings. Bidderdale then realizes that he truly is in Hell.

In "The Comments of Moungh Ka," the author recounts the words of a politician and philosopher named Moungh Ka from his home, a cane house near the Irrawaddy river. The man cites the recent news of a splitting of Britain and says that the people don't need to be consulted because they are "what is called a Democracy." He says that it is not to be confused with a Democratic society.



The Square Egg Analysis

This final section of short stories is slightly different in tone and subject matter than any of the other sections. This is probably due to the fact that the author himself becomes embroiled in the war. It is noted that this section is first compiled in 1924, several years after his death. He is in the military and involved in a military campaign at the time of his death. These final short stories seem to indicate the discomforts of the war although there is still some level of humor seen occasionally.

The story of the Parliament in Hell is likely symbolic of Saki's current situation. The reader should remember that he is on the military front and is living in horrible conditions. He is killed shortly after this time and is probably fully aware that he is facing the likelihood of death. The idea of war being equated with Hell is not a new concept and Saki's changed tone during this section indicates that he is living a life of hardship. The fact of a playwright in Hell may be an indication of Saki's own struggles with eternity. He has made no particular references to his own religious beliefs and it is left to the reader to decide if there is a significance.



The Unbearable Bassingtons

The Unbearable Bassingtons Summary

Francesca Bassington is in her drawing room remembering her youth. She lives in a house left to her by a friend. The friend's will stipulates that Francesca will only be allowed use of the house until the friend's niece, Emmeline Chetrof, marries. Her only son Comus is away at school.

Her brother Henry comes for a visit and suggests that it would be good for Francesca if Comus were to marry Emmeline. Francesca has considered this possibility already. She writes Comus a letter, telling him that Emmeline's younger brother is attending the school where Comus is currently attending. She urges Comus to be kind to the brother, knowing this will endear him to Emmeline. Henry says that Comus does not take direction well and Francesca agrees that her letter might do more harm than good, but hates to waste the stamp that's already on the envelope and so sends the letter anyway. In Chapter two, Emmeline's brother, Lancelot, is waiting to receive his punishment for having missed a football practice. Comus convinces another student in charge of the punishment to allow Comus to administer the caning instead. Lancelot writes to his sister of his dislike for Comus. In Chapter three, Comus has completed school and is unwilling to get a job. Francesca tries to endear herself to a political figure that she knows will be in need of a secretary. One morning she picks up the paper and discovers a scathing editorial printed against this political figure. The article is attributed to Comus although he has gotten someone else to write it.

In Chapter four, Francesca learns that there is a new young lady on the social scene called Elaine de Frey, and that she is very wealthy. It is obvious that Elaine and Camus already know each other and are fond of each other. Francesca is encouraged by this fact. She also learns that there are some people who believe her to be the perfect wife for a rising young politician and one of Comus's best friends fits that description. His name is Courtenay Youghal and Francesca does not approve of him, believing that he leads Comus astray. In Chapter five, Courtenay meets with an old friend named Molly and confides that he might be falling in love, although he does not reveal that the object of his affection is Elaine. In Chapter Six, both Courtenay and Comus are paying attention to Elaine, as both young men know that the other is courting her. One day, Comus and Courtenay are both at Elaine's residence having tea and Comus insists that Elaine give him a basket. His insistence angers Elaine and it is obvious that she is upset, but Comus continues to insist and she gives in.

In Chapter seven, Francesca is at an afternoon gathering when she encounters George St. Michael who always has the latest information about social news, including engagements. He says that he believes there will soon be an announcement of the engagement of Courtenay and Elaine, a fact that makes Francesca anxious. In Chapter eight, Elaine encounters an old family friend and she realizes that he is not happy. In Chapter nine, Elaine realizes that she really likes Comus but that he is inconsiderate



and that she likes the attention paid to her by Courtenay. She says that she is willing to overlook a great deal with Comus and his lack of consideration for her feelings, but that she does have a limit to her understanding. At one point, Comus insists that she lend him some money to pay off a debt. When she questions him, he sulks and she agrees to send him the money by messenger the following day. That afternoon, she is out with Courtenay. When a waiter asks if they are engaged, Elaine tells Courtenay to tell him that they are.

In Chapter ten, Comus is looking at a picture of his mother and remembers that their relationship was different when he was younger. He sees a crowd of people and gets closer to figure out what is causing the uproar, and hears the news of the engagement. In Chapter eleven, Elaine is relieved to have made the decision between the two men. She goes to visit another woman who has recently become engaged and shares her news. Comus sends a message to Elaine with the money he had asked to borrow. He tells her that he does not want the money and that he is "too broke" to buy her a wedding gift, so is sending her the dish he had insisted she give him during their tea time together. In Chapter twelve, Francesca asks Comus what happened with Elaine and he tells her about borrowing money. This disclosure makes her angry. She then tells him that Henry has arranged for him to have a job in West Africa and that he will have to go there. He asks if they do not have something to sell so that he does not have to leave the country and she refuses. As they part with Comus headed upstairs, he tells her that she will have her way and that he'll go "to that West African hole."

In Chapter thirteen, Comus attends a theatrical event and realizes that he hates the thought of leaving his life. He encounters a young author who says that she will be attending the going-away party Francesca has planned for Comus. She says that she is not going to tell him that he is better off for having been shipped off to West Africa and goes on to say that this seems to be the one advantage to going to hell, that is people will not say that it is better than being somewhere else. Francesca learns that Emmeline has announced her engagement but that it will be a long time before they marry. She hopes that something might happen over the intervening years, such as Emmeline losing interest and never marrying anyone else, making Francesca hopeful that she will retain her home forever.

In Chapter fourteen, the young author tells Comus that she has seen a small black dog. Comus says that he has seen it only once before, when he was six. The woman knows that Comus was six when his father dies and agrees to his request that she not mention to Francesca that she has seen the dog. During the dinner, Francesca watches Comus and knows that he has headed to a better life than his current life of temptation and idleness, but also believes that she will miss him, at least for awhile.

In Chapter fifteen, Elaine is married and traveling with Courtenay. He insists that they attend a masquerade although Elaine says she does not understand the point of wearing a mask when no one knows them anyway. A relative says that Courtenay has saved Elaine from the biggest mistake in her life by persuading her not to marry Comus. Another woman says that in doing so Courtenay has caused Elaine to make the second biggest mistake of her life by marrying Courtenay. In Chapter sixteen, Comus is settled



into his job but is obviously unhappy. He says that he will remain "in exile forever" if he is waiting for love to prompt his return to his home. He also says that his "epitaph" will be "Comus Bassington, the boy who never came back." As the chapter comes to a close, he cries.

In Chapter seventeen, Francesca is out for the afternoon when she suddenly realizes that she has to return home immediately. She arrives to find a cablegram waiting for her and decides that she will not open it immediately. She cites recent news that Comus is not well and knows that the news from the cablegram will be alerting her to his death. She believes that by not opening it for a few minutes she will be able to hold onto the image of her son, alive and well. She finally does open it and the news is exactly as she has expected. Just then Henry arrives and says that he has horrible news for her. He then tells her that a painting she has set great stock in is actually not an original but is a fake. Francesca begins to cry and Henry tries to console her, believing the painting is the reason for her tears.

The Unbearable Bassingtons Analysis

Francesca is very interested in worldly things. Her main fear in being kicked out of the house where she lives until Emmeline's death is that she will not have anywhere to put her possessions. Among these is a particular painting that Francesca believes to have been painted by a famous artist but that turns out to be a fake. It is soon obvious that Francesca claims to care about Comus but hates it when he's living with her. It is noted that she would be worried about him if he were living somewhere else and she knew that there were outbreaks of diseases of native uprisings in the area, but that it's difficult to be loving and kind when he's living under her roof and "taking up an unreasonable amount" of room.

Comus's insistence that Elaine give him the basket with her family crest on it is completely unreasonable. He realizes that his insistence makes her angry but does not seem to care. He also borrows money on a regular basis from her. While she is wealthy, it seems evident that Comus is only looking for what he can get from her and that he really does not care about her. This seems typical of his personality. He is self-absorbed and does not care whether his actions help or hurt someone else, as long as it is good for him. Elaine obviously sees him for what he is and it is enough to make her choose Courtenay but she still longs for Comus, indicating that she must have really cared for him.

The hint of the supernatural is interesting because it seems so completely out of place with regard to the rest of the book. The story revolves around the lives of Francesca and Comus, apparently going through life without giving a great deal of thought to anyone or anything except their own comforts and desires. This basic storyline is almost disrupted by the appearance of an unexplained black dog, apparently a spirit of some sort, that was seen only once before at the time of the death of Comus's father. This is apparently a premonition of his death, and it works well in this sense although it clashes somewhat with the rest of the story line.

The section of "novels" also contains a series of stories about "Alice," which are obviously a parody of Alice in Wonderland and titled by the name "The Westminster Alice."



The Death Trap

The Death Trap Summary

The Death Trap is the story of a prince named Dimitri, who is the reigning prince of Kedaria. As the scene opens, Dimitri arrives in the outer room of his chamber where several guards are talking. The guards are obviously planning a coup and Dimitri's death at their hands is imminent. When one asks if it's necessary to kill Dimitri who is still just a boy, another says that Dimitri will eventually marry and create more heirs to the throne, meaning they'll have to kill an entire family in order to put another in his place as ruler. Dimitri dismisses the men, having apparently overheard nothing of their conversation. They leave the room and Dr. Stronetz arrives. Dimitri tells Stronetz that all his weapons have been taken away and that he has nothing with which to defend himself, not even a hunting knife. Stronetz asks if this means Dimitri is being held prisoner and he says that it is, adding that he knows the guards plan to kill him that very evening. Stronetz says there has to be some way of escape and Dimitri says they'll never let him leave the room, let alone the building.

Just as the soldiers enter the room and demand that Stronetz leave, saying they have business with Dimitri. Stronetz, rips open Dimitri's tunic as the guards are walking in and tells them that he has just conducted an examination of Dimitri. He announces that Dimitri has a disease that will end his life within a six-day time period. The soldiers hurriedly consult each other and leave, without bringing harm to Dimitri as they had planned originally. After they are gone, Stronetz tells Dimitri that the examination he had hurriedly conducted was real and that Dimitri will actually die within six days. Dimitri is crushed and asks Stronetz to give him a vial of poison in order to end his life without waiting for the inevitable. Stronetz agrees and leaves the room.

Dimitri pours the poison into a bottle of wine and calls the three guards in. There he pours four goblets of wine and the soldiers drink. Dimitri then tells them that he'd known of their plot, that he's poisoned them, and then drinks the wine himself.

The Death Trap Analysis

The twist in the play is typical of some of Saki's earlier writings but there is darkness in this work that is not present in most of his short stories. In fact, by the time he is writing these longer works, Saki has most likely been moved to the military front and is seeing a great deal of war and death. His tendency to focus on death, doom, and despair in many of these longer works is probably the result of this new physical location. It may also be a clue that Saki is actually fearful for his own life and perhaps that he is fighting the depression common of the soldiers of this era.

The play is very brief, meaning there is little time for character development. In fact, there is little known about Dimitri, even in his role as the main character. It is known that

he has been on the throne for several years and was fourteen when he took control. He also says that he is guarded against the possibility of a coup, but obviously is not ready for it when it occurs.



Characters

Reginald appears in Reginald, Reginald on Christmas Presents, etc.

One of the main characters for several of the stories. The first two sections of the book are titled for Reginald as are most of the stories within those sections. Reginald has a dry humor that is sometimes very subtle. Most of the time Reginald's humor comes at another person's expense. He is apparently very young as evidenced by a conversation with a man in which Reginald says that anyone who reaches the age of thirty has "failed in life."

Reginald is a vain person and talks several times about clothing. He seems incredibly rude on several occasions and seems not to care that others see him as rude. Despite this, he seems to be very much in demand though this is never explained. Reginald is clear on the fact that many others have shortcomings, as is evidenced by the story in which he says that no one understands how to buy presents, though he is apparently an expert on the subject. Reginald also seems disdainful of others' talents, as is seen in his attitude toward poets. He says that the only qualification is that one be born and that he fits that requirement. Reginald could be the alter-ego of the author, H.H. Munro who writes as "Saki." He talks about his education in terms that seem reminiscent of his own educational experiences and his disdain for poets could be a reflection of his chosen field as a writer. However he spends a short time working as a police officer and dies as a soldier.

Francesca Bassington appears in The Unbearable Bassington

This is a woman who is living the life of a wealthy widow although she is in fact barely making ends meet. She lives on the charity of a deceased friend who has agreed to allow her the use of a house until the friend's niece marries. Francesca lives in constant fear that the niece's engagement will be announced. It is noted that Francesca doesn't want to live a life of stress and worry and that she desires that her life would be smooth, but that she has a great many things to worry about. One of her biggest concerns is her son Comus. Francesca's attitude toward her son, who is her only child, is not very motherly. She realizes that she misses him when he is away at school but dreads his visits. In fact, she feels sad when the time comes for Comus to leave the country but is also relieved. The most interesting aspect of the relationship between Comus and Francesca is seen when Francesca arrives home to find a telegram waiting. She knows without looking at it that it is a notice of her son's death. This is a fact that indicates a stronger relationship between the two than is seen in any of their interactions. Francesca truly wishes for a good life for Comus and tries on several occasions to direct



him on a path that would provide that. However she does not seem especially surprised when Comus does not follow any of her instructions.

Mrs. McKillops appears in Reginald

This is the woman who throws a garden party. The author invites Reginald hoping to make a favorable impression on Mrs. McKillops who has Persian kittens that the author wants for his own. Reginald knows that this is the reason for his invitation but agrees to go anyway. Reginald creates a disturbance and the party breaks up early, prompting Reginald to say that the author probably is not going to get one of the kittens.

Major Dumbarton appears in The Baker's Dozen

This is one of the main characters from "The Baker's Dozen" who asks Mrs. Emily Carewe to marry him. He has to try to figure out a way to get past the unlucky fact that they will have thirteen children between them. He realizes that he is counted one of his children twice, meaning they have only twelve and that they can marry.

The Baroness appears in Esme

Seen in the story "Esme," the Baroness is obviously of the upper crust of society and has little compassion. She says that she and her husband have remained together because they could not afford to live apart, though it seems likely that her idea of poverty is skewed by her need for the finer things in life. She says that she tries to come to the aid of the child killed by the hyena though her idea of helping is to yell at the hyena. Her greed is seen when she is willing to lose the friendship of the woman named Constance by not giving her a part of the money she had received from selling a broach.

Mrs. Packletide appears in Mrs. Packletide's Tiger

Found in "Mrs. Packletide's Tiger," she is an elderly woman with plenty of money. She wants to kill a tiger because she had a friend who did so and this friend gained a great deal of attention from the feat. Mrs. Packletide's tiger actually dies of fright at the sound of the gun and Mrs. Packletide has to buy the silence of her paid companion. This prompts her decision to never hunt again because of the heavy price of the "incidental expenses."

Clovis Sangrail appears in The Chronicles of Clovis, Esme, etc.

Introduced in the third section of the book with a group of short stories titled "The Chronicles of Clovis," he seems very much like Reginald. Clovis's attitude is self-



absorbed, as seen in the story of "The Quest," in which he is very interested in finding out what kind of sauce is going to be served on the asparagus rather than being concerned about the child. Clovis snatches onto the idea that the child might have been taken by wild animals. He points this out to the mother, despite the fact that the mother is already very upset because her son is missing. Clovis is also seen in the section of stories titled Beasts and Super-Beasts and it is here that his last name is revealed. In this story, Clovis hears a piece of news that is incredibly fortunate for a neighbor and he congratulates her. It is noted that he might have kissed her except that he is not typically that demonstrative.

Mrs. Mullet appears in The Brogue

This is the woman who sells a particularly unruly horse to a man that later proposes to Mrs. Mullet's daughter, Jessie. Mrs. Mullet calls on Clovis for help, saying that she has to get the horse back before the young man is killed. Mrs. Mullet cites the fact that she has six daughters. She says that she is not exactly trying to get rid of them, but that "a husband or two" among the group of women would be a positive thing.

Comus Bassington appears in The Unbearable Bassington

The son of Francesca, he is the epitome of a self-centered and selfish character. Comus is given instructions by his mother of a course that might endear him to a young woman who could provide him an ample living. However he seems to go out of his way to make certain that he doesn't comply. Comus is so incapable of either getting a job or of holding a relationship together. Eventually Comus has to leave the country in order to go to work and dies there.

Elaine appears in The Unbearable Bassington

The young woman who is described as incredibly wealthy, Elaine is being courted by both Comus and another young man at the same time. Elaine eventually comes to realize that she loves Comus although she has married his friend.



Objects/Places

The Kurdish Brigands appears in Cross Currents

This is the group that captures Vanessa, Clyde and Vanessa's lover, Mr. Dobrinton.

Toad-Water appears in The Blood Feud of Toad-Water

This is where the Cricks and the Saunderses live and engage in a feud.

Esme appears in Esme

This is the name given the hyena by the Baroness.

India appears in Mrs. Packletide's Tiger

This is where Mrs. Packletide goes hunting for a tiger.

House of Commons appears in The Jestings of Arthur Stringham

This is where Arlington Stringham tells his first joke.

The Villa Elsinore appears in The Quest

This is where Clovis is staying in when the Momebys lose their son.

The Brogue appears in The Brogue

This is also known as the "Berserker," it's a brown gelding.

The Carlton appears in The Phantom Luncheon

This is where Lady Drakmanton takes the three sisters to lunch and leaves them with the bill.



Irrawaddy River appears in The Comments of Moungh Ka

This is the body of water that flows past the cane house of the philosopher Moungh Ka.

Blue Street West appears in The Unbearable Bassington

This is where Francesca Bassington lives.



Themes

Self-Absorption

Saki's works are filled with characters who are completely self-absorbed, caring little for the comfort and well-being of others. In many cases, this is done for the sake of creating humorous situations. For example, Clovis is at a villa where a child goes missing. Clovis asks for the situation that led to the child's disappearance and is told that the child's father had gone inside to check on the sauce to be used for the asparagus in an upcoming meal just before the child is found to be missing. Clovis grabs onto the idea of what kind of sauce is going to be used and notes that the mother simply does not pay any attention to the fact that he asks about the sauce, returning the conversation to the child. This lack of concern about the child is typical of Clovis's self-absorption. This is also typical of Reginald. In the *Unbearable Bassington*, both the mother and son who are the main characters remain completely self-absorbed to the point that they work almost constantly at cross purposes. When the mother tells the son to be nice to a particular young man who is attending the same school, the son goes out of his way to be the one to punish the young man. The mother wants her son to marry and her first recommendation is a young woman who owns the house the mother wants to live in. Yet another example is seen in the story, "Louis." In this story a woman uses a fake dog to get her way.

Social Superiority

There are several stories that include the characters' efforts at social superiority. This theme is evident in "Mrs. Packletide's Tiger." Mrs. Packletide has seen the attention given to another woman who'd killed a tiger. Mrs. Packletide has only one goal in mind when she sets out to kill the tiger, which is to attain that same level of social superiority. In an effort to get back at another woman, she has a tiger claw made into a pendant. Again, the only purpose of these actions is to attain the social superiority she believes the tiger will bring her. There are other stories that also exhibit this theme. "The Unbearable Bassington" focuses on the relationship between a mother and son. This relationship is colored by the mother's desire to know that she is going to be able to continue living in a particular house. Toward that goal, she tries to endear her son to the true owner without really caring whether this will make her son happy. In the story of "Clovis on Parental Responsibilities," there is a woman who is anxious to raise her children to be perfect. She does not allow them to take part in any number of activities so that they meet up with her expectations.

Dysfunctional Relationships

Dysfunctional relationships are common in many of the stories. In "Reginald at the Carlton," a woman tells Reginald about a young woman who nurses her wealthy uncle



as he dies. The relationship between the woman and her uncle is obviously not one of love and caring because she is angry when he does not leave her anything. This is a relatively minor example of this theme. In "Clovis on Parental Responsibilities," Clovis says that his parents had not spent a great deal of time working at trying to raise him in any particular way, but that she had given him a "whack" now and then. Perhaps the most prevalent example of this theme is seen in the "Unbearable Bassington." In this story, the mother and son are somewhat fond of each other but each are out to use the other. In "The Disappearance of Crispina Umberleigh," a woman is kidnapped and her husband is contacted with an orthodox ransom demand. He is told that if he does not pay an annual sum, the woman will be returned to him. He continues to pay for several years but she actually is lost, suffering from amnesia. In several of the stories, the characters are good friends who later damage their friendships through their actions, which are additional signs of dysfunctional relationships. This is seen in the case of Mrs. Packetide who pays off a friend in order to keep her from telling their friends the secret of how she killed the tiger.

Style

Point of View

The book is written as a series of stories and these are presented in various perspectives. For example, the book opens with a series of stories, mainly about the exploits of a man named Reginald. The very first story of the book is titled simply "Reginald" and is written in first person, apparently from the author's point of view. However this story has a limited perspective as seen in the case of Reginald talking to someone. It is only through overhearing a conversation that the author learns that Reginald has offended another guest at the party.

In another early story titled "Reginald on Christmas Presents," the tale opens with the words "I wish," although it is quickly revealed that the speaker is Reginald. There are no quotation marks around Reginald's words in this story. This gives rise to the belief that Reginald is addressing someone and that someone could reasonably be assumed to be the author. That means this story is also written from the limited perspective of the author presented in a different way.

The story called "Reginald on House Parties" makes no attempt to make the reader aware that the story is being presented from Reginald's point of view. It is also written in first person. Initially, it seems that that the story could be from the author's perspective except for the title.

There are stories presented later from the perspective of other characters. The notable exception is seen in the final section of short stories, "The Square Egg." Several of these are written from the perspective of the author in first person.

Though some of the stories are less limited than the first stories, there seems to be a general trend by this author to present the stories from the perspectives of some particular person rather than from an omniscient perspective. This constant changing can become confusing when the reader is presented with the various stories in a single body of work. However it seems that the perspective is easier to follow when the stories are considered individually.

Setting

The stories are set in an array of places though most seem to be around the same time period. Saki, which is the pseudonym used by H.H. Munro, wrote the stories in a period around 1900. It seems reasonable that these stories was set in that time frame.

The general physical settings seem to be real though the specific settings are likely a figment of the author's imagination. For example, in Mrs. Packletide's Tiger, the main character is seeking the opportunity to kill a tiger because she is envious of a friend who has killed a tiger. She is in India, which is obviously a real place. However, she ends up



in a particular little village which is likely a figment of the author's imagination. She returns to her home in Dorking, which is a historic town near London. The use of these real places makes the fictitious stories more believable.

While there are some very specific settings included in the story such as India and London, there are also some settings that refer to a specific setting without offering any geographic details. For example, the opening introduction of Reginald occurs as Reginald and the author are going to a garden party at the home of Mrs. McKillops. The physical location of this setting is never revealed although it seems likely that the story is set in the vicinity of London simply because many of the stories share that setting. In the case of this garden party, there are few details describing the setting. It is known that there is food, an array of people, and some games, but there are no descriptions at all of the kind of yard, the decorations, or any other details that might help the reader create an image of the setting. This lack of detail with regard to setting is typical of the stories and is seen through out the book.

Language and Meaning

The story is written with a subtle humor that is sometimes very cutting and sometimes macabre. For example, the author writes from Reginald's perspective about the difficulty in training aunts to give suitable presents. "Reginald" says that the biggest problem is that a person does not have a chance to begin this essential training while the aunts are very young and could take to it. He then says that by the time a person can get an aunt properly trained, they die, have a falling out with the family, or do something equally annoying. This is typical of the humor, sometimes caustic in nature.

The overall tone varies from one story to the next. There does seem to be a common thread of people who believe they are ahead to find that they are actually the underdog. A prime example of this is seen in the story of Mrs. Packletide's Tiger. The woman, Mrs. Packletide, pays an enormous amount of money in order to get the opportunity to shoot a tiger, but misses the shot. Despite this, the tiger dies, obviously the result of being very old and just dying of a heart attack. Nonetheless, the character has her tiger and returns home, proud of the opportunity to show off her accomplishment. But when her paid companion threatens to tell the truth of the tiger's death, Mrs. Packletide pays her off and then declines to ever hunt again, saying the extra costs are simply too high. Here the underdog is the paid companion. This tendency for the underdog to come out ahead is seen in several other stories. There are also a great many of the stories in which the hero or heroine is simply above caring what others think but remain in great demand anyway. Reginald is typical of this. As a rule, the tone is upbeat and humorous although some of the stories would be considered politically incorrect.

The stories tend to be slightly formal. However, a reader who stays with the stories will soon come to appreciate the author's subtlety and eloquent speech.

Structure

The book is presented as a series of short stories, plays and novellas, though the latter are referred to as "the novels." The book is formally divided in to three sections, "Short Stories," "The Novels" and "The Plays." The first is further divided into six sections. These are titled "Reginald," "Reginald in Russia," "The Chronicles of Clovis," "Beasts and Super-Beasts," "The Toys of Peace," and "Square Egg." The first of these series contains fourteen short stories. The second series contains fifteen, while the third series contains twenty-eight. The fourth series contains thirty-six while the fifth series contains thirty-three and the sixth series contains eight. The second part, "The Novels," has three parts. These "novels" are titled "The Unbearable Bassington," "When William Came," and "The Westminster Alice." The final part contains three plays. These are titled "The Death-Trap," "Karl-Ludwig's Window," and "The Watched Pot." The book has a total of nine hundred and forty-four pages, with just more than half being dedicated to the short stories, less than three hundred devoted to the novellas and about a hundred given over to the plays. The short stories vary little in length with most being some two to six pages. The first two novellas are just more than one hundred pages each and the final novella is only about twenty-eight pages. The first two plays are short, only about eight to twelve pages each. The final is by far the longest, at more than eighty pages.

Quotes

"Why are women so fond of raking up the past? They're as bad as tailors, who invariably remember what you owe them for a suit long after you've ceased to wear it." Reginald from *The Short Stories*, Page 6

"It was one thing to go to the end of the world; it was quite another thing to make oneself at home there. Even respectability seemed to lose some of its virtue when one practiced it in a tent." Cross Currents from *The Short Stories*, Page 87

"Once a female, always a female. Nature is not always infallible but she always abides by her mistakes." The Bakers Dozen from *The Short Stories*, Page 93

"We've lost Baby, she screamed. 'Do you mean that it's dead, or stampeded, or that you staked it at cards and lost it that way?' asked Clovis lazily." The Quest from *The Short Stories*, Page 148

"Motors and cycles he treated with tolerant disregard, but pigs, wheelbarrows, piles of stones by the roadside, perambulators in a village street, gates painted too aggressively white, and sometimes, but not always, the newer kind of beehives, turned him aside from his tracks in vivid imitation of the zigzag course of forked lightning. It a pheasant rose noisily from the other side of a hedgerow the Brogue would spring into the air at the same moment, but this may have been due to a desire to be companionable." The Brogue from *The Short Stories*, Page 250

"In all the time I've known her I don't remember her to have stopped talking for three consecutive minutes. You'll have to race her six times around the grass paddock for a bet, and then blurt your proposal out before she's got her wind back." The Forbidden Buzzards from *The Short Stories*, Page 330

"She just saw to it that I got whacked at decent intervals and was taught the difference between right and wrong; there is some difference, you know, but I've forgotten what it is." Clovis on Parental Responsibilities from *The Short Stories*, Page 338

"You talk as if I'd lost her in a churchyard sense, instead of having temporarily mislaid her. I'm sure to remember presently where I left her." Louise from *The Short Stories*, Page 400



"Perhaps there is nothing in the foregoing description to suggest that a village wine-shop, frequently a shell-nibbled building in a shell-gnawed street, is a paradise to dream about, but when one has lived in a dripping wilderness of unrelieved mud and sodden sandbags for any length of time one's mind dwells on the plain-furnished parlour with its hot coffee and vin ordinaire as something warm and snug and comforting in a wet and slushy world." *The Square Egg* from *The Short Stories*, Page 540

"Francesca loved the smooth ways and pleasant places of life; she liked not merely to look on the bright side of things, but to live there and stay there." *The Unbearable Bassington*, Chapter 1, Page 570

"Francesca was, in her own way, fonder of Comus than of any one else in the world, and if he had been browning his skin somewhere east of Suez she would probably have kissed his photograph with genuine fervor every night before going to bed; the appearance of a cholera scare or rumor of native rising in the columns of her daily news-sheet would have caused her a flutter of anxiety, and she would have mentally likened herself to a Spartan mother sacrificing her best-beloved on the altar of State necessities. But with the best-beloved installed under her roof, occupying an unreasonable amount of cubic space, and demanding daily sacrifices instead of providing the raw material for one, her feelings were tinged with irritation rather than feeling." *The Unbearable Bassington*, Chapter 4, Page 589

"Perhaps in the shadowy half-light her boy would come and sit with her again for awhile and let her look her last upon his loved face; she could never touch him again or hear his laughing petulant voice, but surely she might look on her dead." *The Unbearable Bassington*, Page 686

"But I won't drug myself. I've never seen anyone killed before and I shan't get another opportunity." *Dimitri*, *The Death Trap* from *The Plays*, Page 848



Topics for Discussion

Describe Reginald. What is known about his tastes? Describe his actions in at least three situations. What are the indications that he is self-absorbed?

What is "the square egg?" How does the author come to be aware of this phenomenon? What does he say he plans to do about it? Describe at least two other stories in this section.

What is "the brogue?" What is the situation that arises over the selling of this creature? Compare this to what happens when the Baroness sells a hyena in the story "Esme." Which of the two stories is more realistic? Why?

Who is Francesca Bassington? Who is Comus Bassington? The title of the story refers to the "unbearable" Bassington. To which is the title referring? Support your answer.

Who is Prince Dimitri? He is faced with three threats of death in a single evening. List the three and their sources. Describe his demise.

What is "Louis" in the story by that title? How is Louis used by his mistress? What is the eventual fate of Louis? Compare this story to the story of "Mrs. Packletide's Tiger." How are the characters similar? How do they differ?

Choose any three stories included in this guide. Compare the main characters and the plots of the three. What journalistic aspects do each have in common?

Give three examples of Saki's humor as seen in these stories. In what ways do these humorous scenes capture the attention of the reader? Would some readers be offended by some instances of his humor? Why or why not?