

Screw-jack Study Guide

Screw-jack by Hunter S. Thompson

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Plot Summary

Screwjack is a collection of three short stories by infamous journalist Hunter S. Thompson. Though unrelated narratively, the three stories titled, "Mescalito," "Death of a Poet," and "Screwjack" could be said to share the common theme of drug abuse and addiction.

The longest story, "Mescalito," involves Thompson's mescaline drug trip during a stay at a Los Angeles hotel in February 1969. Thompson was crushed by writer's block at the time, and pressured by his newspaper to produce material. He was smoking marijuana and taking Dexedrine pills for energy. He ran out of Dexedrine pills, and the only pills he had left with enough "kick" for his drug habit were a mixture of speed and mescaline, so he consumed those pills late one night.

A few hours later, Thompson began to experience the results of the mescaline on his brain and body. He felt weightless, and like he was vibrating. Then his muscles spasmed and went cold. He found it difficult to move around the room, and he felt exceedingly thirsty. At the worst part of Thompson's drug trip, Thompson became convinced that the cleaning ladies were trying to get into his room, and he hallucinated that he could hear the doorknob jingling.

Thompson's acquaintance Oscar arrived, and soon the worst of Thompson's drug trip had passed, to the point he was able to board a plane to Denver. However, lingering effects of the mescaline impacted Thompson's time on the plane - he thought the plane was tilting - as well as his time in the Denver airport.

"Death of a Poet" involved a narrator arriving in Green Bay right after the football Packers had lost a big game. The town was crushed. Thompson visited his friend F.X. Leach in a trailer park, and Leach confessed he had bet for the Packers and was financially ruined. The narrator found a naked woman lying in the kitchen, but Leach showed him it was merely a blow-up doll. Leach was able to save his marriage by beating on his dolls instead of his wife. At that point, police tried to knock the trailer home's door down, and Leach took a gun and fired a few shots through the door, before turning the gun on himself and taking his own life.

The last story, "Screwjack," involves a letter by Raoul Duke which expresses a love/hate relationship Duke had with a tomcat named Mr. Screwjack. Duke and Screwjack appeared to be passionate lovers who vacillated between intense bouts of lust and hatred. Duke kissed Screwjack passionately one night, and then tossed him out of his home. Duke begged God for forgiveness for his transgressions in loving Screwjack, but at the same time defended his relationship.

After this Duke letter, another narrator (who had been reading the letter) discovered to his horror that he had struck up a similar relationship with Screwjack. The narrator stroked Screwjack, and Screwjack bit him. The narrator squeezed Screwjack hard,

trying to kill him, but Screwjack was unharmed, ending the story curled up beside the refrigerator.



Mescalito, Pages 15 through 29

Mescalito, Pages 15 through 29 Summary and Analysis

Mescalito takes the form of a diary/journal entry, and it is dated February 16, 1969. The author, Hunter S. Thompson, found himself in Los Angeles at the Continental Hotel. He was on the balcony, taking in such things as an ambulance passing by and four hippies walking by him on the sidewalk, giving him the "V" peace symbol. Thompson was there to report on the "street freaks" as he called them.

In an entry dated February 18, Thompson lamented his deadlines and pressures from his newspaper. He had writer's block, which included a combination of laziness, a late-night work ethic that was not working, and the fact that he had consumed a large quantity of pills, presumably Dexedrine and smoked marijuana.

The hotel's fire alarm went off, but it was a false alarm. Thompson remarked upon the large amount of natural disasters in California such as fires and mudslides and noted that no one seemed to care.

February 19: Thompson ran out of Dexedrine and was reduced to relying on Ritalin, mescaline, and speed for his drug addiction. Ritalin was too tame so Thompson took the mixture of speed and mescaline. He had never had mescaline before and did not know what to expect. Thompson next witnessed a policeman beating up a teenager outside his hotel and he thought about throwing a bottle at the cop but refrained.

The mescaline took hold later that morning. Thompson's typewriter appeared glittering, and he felt as if he was levitating above his chair. He felt weightless and vibratory. He was amazed he could type. He experienced muscle spasms and a sense of disconnectedness from his own body. He felt his blood racing through his body and overall heightened sensations. His body went cold and he felt paralyzed.



Mescalito, Pages 30 through 39

Mescalito, Pages 30 through 39 Summary and Analysis

Thompson had to catch a plane ride later that day with a man named Oscar, but he felt that was impossible in his current drug-induced state. He also greatly feared trying to pay for his room or pack. Everything was impossible on his drug trip. He tried mightily to keep a grip on reality. The TV news was on, and Thompson couldn't bear to hear more about President Nixon. He tried to turn his radio on to concentrate on that, but he found it very hard to operate. Thompson called Oscar, and Oscar said he would be over soon with beer. Thompson was dreadfully parched. It took him a great amount of effort to fetch ice from a bucket on his balcony. Thompson was unable to type from this point, and a red indicator on the typewriter that marked one's place appeared to Thompson to dance and have a life of its own.

Thompson's consciousness began to be severely affected with whatever was playing on the radio, as well as the television. He was still parched, and he began to aurally hallucinate that the maid was jingling his doorknob, trying to get in. He did not want anyone, and especially the hotel management, to see him during his drug trip. Thompson felt marijuana seeds beneath his feet on the rug, and thought about watering the carpet to raise a crop of marijuana plants.

Oscar arrived with beer, and Thompson's drug high leveled out and he started to come down. He managed to leave with Oscar to the airport, and board a plane. In the air, Thompson still felt high. He was overwhelmed by the dials and knobs near his chair. He put an in-flight phone receiver to his ear and heard all manner of strange conversations. He became convinced the plane was tilting too far to one side, and he felt like alerting the pilot.

In the Denver airport finally, most of the "high" effects of the drug had passed, and Thompson felt extremely weary and sapped of energy. He imagined himself as the co-pilot of an "Aero Commander" plane, and his last words are a stream-of-consciousness mixture of his imaginary plane ride, his observations of the people at the Denver airport, and his own attempts to explain his bizarre state of mind.



Death of a Poet

Death of a Poet Summary and Analysis

"Death of a Poet" begins with a couplet attributed to F.X. Leach that read, "In the coffin of ice, I sleep naked / In the tunnel of fire, I drink." The narrator arrived in Green Bay, Wisconsin. The town was devastated because the football team, the Packers, had just lost to the Kansas City Chiefs. The woman at the rental car counter was especially devastated, and didn't seem able to help the narrator get a rental car. So, the narrator "gave her a taste of the long knuckle" and took a key to a car for himself.

The narrator drove to the trailer home of his friend, F.X. Leach. The narrator is in a celebratory mood, because they both bet against the Packers. However, Leach confessed that at the last minute, during a Packers pep rally, he changed his bet and bet for the Packers. Leach was financially ruined, and he feared people coming to collect the gambling debt.

Going into the kitchen to fetch more Wild Turkey whiskey, the narrator was shocked to discover a naked woman lying on the floor. The sight confirmed the narrator's fears that Leach finally had taken his wife-beating habits into murder. However, Leach showed the narrator that the woman was simply a blow-up doll. Having a few blow-up dolls had actually saved Leach's marriage; instead of beating on his wife, he could beat on the dolls. Leach revealed another Chinese woman doll in the closet. The narrator imagined the horror of Leach's neighbors in seeing Leach through the window drinking whiskey and beating on dolls.

Suddenly, the police banged on the door and demanded to be let in. Leach grabbed a revolver and fired shots through the door. Then, looking directly at the narrator, Leach put the gun into his mouth and blew his brains out. Leach was apparently the Poet of the title.



Screwjack

Screwjack Summary and Analysis

"Screwjack" begins with a note from "The Editors," stating that the following letter was one of the many documents that had survived the Duke Estate fire of 1988. The letter was written by Raoul Duke. The Editors warn that Duke was seized by "madness and fear and lust."

As to the content of the letter itself: Duke described a dinner with "Mr. Screwjack," who is described as a young black tomcat. Screwjack may be symbolic of drug addiction, but the matter is open to interpretation. The two had tuna fish together, and Screwjack nuzzled Duke. Duke's relationship with Screwjack was highly erotic; Duke and Screwjack appeared to care about each other passionately, but like passionate lovers they also had bouts of hate and violence. Duke threw Screwjack out of his home in a rage, but paused to thrust his tongue between Screwjack's fangs in a kiss. Screwjack went away at that point for a time, but the ghost of Screwjack haunted Duke for the rest of his life. Six years later, Screwjack returned, having grown in the meantime to become as large as a panther, and raped Duke.

The last part of the letter has Duke begging forgiveness from the Lord for his sins and transgressions - with Screwjack - but at the same time expressing his love and lust for Screwjack, and the wish that Screwjack and himself just be left alone to continue their odd relationship. Duke said he was guilty, but he was also a lover, and that he was not an embarrassment to God.

After this letter, a new narrator - perhaps Thompson, perhaps one of "The Editors" in the preface commented that he had discovered and read Duke's letter about Screwjack. This narrator was then horrified to discover he had struck up his own relationship with Screwjack, whom he was petting and fondling at that moment. As the narrator was stroking Screwjack, Screwjack became violent and sunk his fangs into the narrator's hand. The narrator was furious that he had trusted Screwjack, and he was determined to end Screwjack's existence, but at that moment, Screwjack relented, removed his fangs, and started to nuzzle the narrator.

Apparently not fooled by Screwjack's sudden affection, the narrator took Screwjack in both hands and "squeezed him like a grape." Screwjack was so flattened he could not even hiss; but after only a few moments, Screwjack apparently returned to form, unable to be killed or eliminated. The story ends with Screwjack laying down near the refrigerator, tamed for the moment but never gone, perhaps much like a drug addict's urges get reduced but never disappear entirely.



Characters

Hunter S. Thompson

Hunter S. Thompson is the narrator of "Mescalito," and is more than likely the unnamed narrator of "Death of a Poet" and "Screwjack." Thompson was a journalist famed for his extreme lifestyle and his exploration of previously taboo subjects, like sexual topics and drug abuse. In "Mescalito," Thompson was in Los Angeles at the Continental Hotel to cover, in his words, "street freaks" such as hippies. Thompson was a lifelong substance abuser, and as he struggled to come up with an article for his demanding newspaper, he was taking Dexedrine pills as well as smoking marijuana and drinking beer. Not quite high enough, he resorted to taking mescaline and speed pills, thus beginning the drug trip that forms the heart of the piece.

Thompson had tripped out on acid before, but the mescaline experience was new to him and very intense, resulting in such emotional states as paranoia and aural hallucinations and such physical states as paralysis, numbness, and muscle spasms. In "Screwjack," Thompson likely uses the titular tomcat as a symbol for his relationship to substances. Like the character Raoul Duke, Thompson was both drawn to and repulsed by drugs and try as he might to expel Screwjack, Thompson could not fully eliminate this aspect of his life because of his addiction.

Screwjack

First named Mr. Screwjack, Screwjack is the title character of the last short story. He is described as a young black tomcat who displays equal amounts of passionate lust and fierce violence. Though the matter is open to interpretation, Screwjack is likely a symbol of drugs and drug abuse. His manifestation as an animal and a domesticated animal that is nonetheless wild and feral shows that drug addiction similarly turns men into animals with primal urges.

Screwjack engaged in a torrid love affair with first Raoul Duke and then the unnamed narrator. In both relationships, the men lusted for Screwjack mightily, and Screwjack often returned their affection with his own. However and just as often, the relationship was likely to turn ugly and hateful, with Screwjack biting or even imagined to be raping his lover.

Additionally, Screwjack resisted any attempts to be tamed, expelled, or killed. Raoul Duke tossed Screwjack out from his house, but Screwjack persisted as a ghost that haunts the memory of Duke, and six years later, Screwjack returned as a panther to rape Duke. Similarly, the unnamed narrator attempted to squeeze the life from Screwjack, but Screwjack returned to form like a cartoon character, unharmed. This seeming immortality relates to the notion that drug addiction cannot be easily



conquered, and even the "sober" or "clean" former drug user likely obsesses about drug use and must struggle mightily to resist its call.

Oscar

Oscar was an acquaintance of Thompson that visited Thompson in his hotel room to bring him beer and help him to the airport.

Raoul Duke

This man, in a letter, described his love-hate relationship with the cat Screwjack. He found his relationship with the cat repulsive, but at the same time he was unable to resist his lust for the beast.

Street Freaks

While observing the city from his balcony, Thompson flashed the "V" peace sign to a group of hippies. He was in Los Angeles to cover these types of people for his newspaper.

F. X. Leach

The Poet of "Death of a Poet," Leach lived in a trailer park, and had a propensity to beat his wife and get drunk on Wild Turkey. When police banged on his door, presumably to collect on his bad sports gambling debt, Leach fired at them with a gun and then took his own life.

Jennifer

Jennifer was a blow-up sex doll that the unnamed narrator mistook for Leach's dead wife in "Death of a Poet." Having Jennifer around to beat up saved Leach's marriage as he no longer had to take his frustrations out on his actual wife.

Avis Counter Girl

In "Death of a Poet," a girl at the rental car counter was unable to help the narrator get a rental car as she was devastated by the recent loss of the Green Bay Packers. The narrator punched her and got his own key.

President Nixon

During Thompson's drug trip in "Mescalito," Thompson was infuriated by any mention of Nixon on the television news. In his vulnerable state, Thompson seemed unable to bear any political news or news about the Vietnam War.

Abusive Policeman

In "Mescalito," Thompson witnessed an abusive policeman beat and harass a young teenager, even though the teenager begged him to stop. Thompson considered throwing a whiskey bottle at the policeman, but thought better of it.



Objects/Places

Los Angeles, California

This was the setting for "Mescalito." Thompson had been sent to the city by his newspaper to cover the people there.

Green Bay, Wisconsin

This was the setting for "Death of a Poet." The setting was important because the town was devastated by a recent loss by its football team, the Packers. The narrator's friend, F. X. Leach, bet on the Packers and was financially ruined.

Mescaline

This was the psychoactive substance that Thompson ingests - along with speed - that resulted in the drug trip Thompson describes in "Mescalito." The drug caused a variety of psychological as well as physical effects.

Typewriter

Before the age of computers, Thompson used a typewriter to produce copy for his newspaper. During his drug trip in "Mescalito," he found he was eventually unable to type, overwhelmed as he was by the drug.

Dexedrine

Thompson was abusing Dexedrine pills for energy. He ran out of these pills and resorted to taking mescaline pills for the first time.

The Radio

To try to distract himself from the effects of his drug trip, Thompson turned on the hotel room's radio. However, the radio became a cacophony of bizarre sounds to Thompson in his drug-induced state and it dominated his focus for much of his trip.

Wild Turkey

This was the alcohol of choice for F. X. Leach as he became drunk in his trailer home.



The Denver Airport

Coming down from his drug trip, Thompson still had lingering effects from mescaline ingestion as he sat in the Denver Airport waiting for a flight in "Mescalito."

Beer

In "Mescalito," Thompson only had a small amount of beer at the start of the drug trip, and his condition made it impossible for him to retrieve more. He became insanely parched.

Marijuana

On top of all the other substances, Thompson had also recently smoked marijuana in "Mescalito." There were marijuana seeds stuck in between the carpet threads of the floor, and Thompson imagined watering the carpet to grow a crop of marijuana plants.



Themes

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse is perhaps the central theme that unites and shapes each of these three short stories. In "Mescalito," Thompson details his first experience of using mescaline, a psychoactive drug. Beyond mescaline, Thompson had engaged in abuse of multiple drugs, including alcohol, Dexedrine, and marijuana. Thompson's drug abuse leads to an intense episode of paranoia, physical changes, heightened sensations, and other consequences.

Substance abuse is more subtly introduced in "Death of a Poet" with the exception of drinking copious amounts of Wild Turkey - but the short story's surreal elements and imagery, not to mention the bizarre behavior of both the narrator and the character F. X. Leach, lend credibility to the notion that the story is the product of a drug trip, or that in the least there are drugs involved that have warped the reality of the story, so to speak.

In "Screwjack," Thompson uses the cat Mr. Screwjack to symbolize drug abuse. Raoul Duke, and later the narrator, express their simultaneous love and hate for the enigmatic Screwjack. Screwjack brings these characters to extreme highs and desperate lows, and they cannot escape from Screwjack's grasp. The fact that Screwjack is a cat communicates the idea that drug abuse brings out the animal in a human being, and that drug abuse cannot be easily "tamed," although at the same time drug abuse is as common and pervasive as the ordinary housecat.

Surrealism as Relating to Substance Abuse

Thompson communicates the reality of a drug trip by incorporating surreal elements into his stories. This surrealism can take on different forms. One form is the extreme emotional states of the characters, often the narrator. In "Mescalito," the narrator communicates such things as extreme paranoia, fear, desperation, and similar emotions. In "Screwjack," Raoul Duke as well as the narrator have intense, transgressive feelings of lust for the tomcat Screwjack.

Surrealism can also take the form of bizarre, out-of-place images, characters, or events. Screwjack, as a cat who initiates sexual relationships with his masters, is one such surreal character. The blow-up sex doll whom the narrator mistakes for a dead wife in "Death of a Poet" is another. "Mescalito" is full of bizarre images, but images which are ironically quite real in the mind of the narrator, such as the red indicator on the typewriter which begins to take on a life of its own.

"Death of a Poet" is a particular example of surrealism as it relates to narrative logic. The fact that the Avis rental car counter girl is too distraught to aid the narrator with a rental car, and the fact that the narrator cruelly punches her for her incompetence to take a key, stretches any sense of credible reality and sends the story on a journey



where little will make logical sense. The narrator's mistaking a blow-up doll for Leach's wife, and then Leach's sudden gun violence and suicide, further challenge conventional story logic, and force the reader to wonder whether the reality at play is a drug-induced one.

Many Sides to Addiction

"Screwjack" and its personification of drug abuse as a cat character drives home the point that addiction is a complicated issue that has more than one side. Thompson himself was conflicted on the subject of his own addiction. In "Screwjack," Raoul Duke writes of his intense feelings for Screwjack. In a physical act that crystallizes Duke's relationship with Screwjack, Duke violently expels the cat from his home and out into the wilderness, but not before passionately kissing the beast. Later in the story, the unnamed narrator is similarly entranced by the beast, petting and fondling it, but he is bitten by Screwjack and his lust turns to hatred. Translating this dynamic to an addict's relationship to drugs, Thompson seems to say that drug use results in positive as well as negative things, and that drug abuse resembles a torrid love affair.

Similarly, in "Mescalito," Thompson speaks of the amazing glittering nature of his room and he speaks positively about the pleasant weightlessness and general euphoria he feels. However, as the drug trip continues, the physical effects start to become negative, with weightlessness giving way to paralysis and muscle spasms, and euphoria giving way to paranoia and desperation. Thompson is seduced by the "high" of drug abuse, but that seduction exacts a heavy toll, in the form of the "come-down." In "Mescalito," Thompson experiences a down moment in the Denver airport, feeling heavy and sapped of energy. For the addict, it is an endless cycle of craving, the euphoric high of abuse, the low as the drug wears off, and the withdrawal that leads to further craving.

Style

Perspective

Hunter S. Thompson was famous for his willingness to tackle taboo subjects like sex and drug abuse and in that light, "Screwjack" is typical of Thompson's go-for-broke style and uncommon intimacy with the reader. Nothing appears to be out of bounds or forbidden for Thompson to explore in detail. In this case, the subject of exploration is his own struggles with substance addiction, including marijuana, alcohol, and pills.

Throughout "Mescalito," Thompson shows a willingness to live life to its fullest, even when doing so is psychologically damaging and physically dangerous. Thompson has an affection for the seamy underbelly of society such as the kooks, freaks, and weirdos. He would probably count himself among that group and part of Thompson's agenda is to unearth this underbelly.

As revealed in the story "Screwjack," Thompson has a love/hate relationship with his substance addiction. He experiences both awesome highs and terrible lows, much like a lover in a tempestuous relationship might. A part of him wants to cast off his addictions and emerge free from drug abuse, but an equal part yearns for the thrill of the "high" and the sensations of the abuse. By symbolizing drug abuse in the character of Screwjack, Thompson shows that drug abuse is a pervasive and insidious influence that impacts many people.

Tone

Thompson is known for his often brilliant prose style and "Screwjack" does not disappoint. Pervading most of Thompson's writing, and particularly "Mescalito," is a concern for accuracy and observation. Thompson does not wish to varnish the truth or hide from it; he maintains a journalist's dedication to objective reporting, such as his frank appraisal of his mental, emotional, and physical changes during his mescaline drug trip. Certain details such as the fact that Leach prefers Wild Turkey whiskey, or Thompson's description of minute details about shops on the Sunset Strip - also speak to the fact that Thompson is, above all, a reporter observing the world around him.

However, on top of that journalist's objectivity is Thompson's signature style, sometimes lyrical and sometimes shocking. He searches for unusual ways to express himself or describe people or situations. Thompson can shock with particularly lurid descriptions, such as the highly-charged erotic moments in "Screwjack." Thompson wishes to unsettle the reader, to knock the reader from his or her comfort zone, to force the reader to be exposed to something he or she was previously ignorant of. Thompson's tone could thus also be said to be confrontational, though Thompson's charm tempers this aspect somewhat.



Additionally, Thompson uses his stream-of-consciousness style in "Mescalito," along with tone, to portray the sense of confusion, disconnectedness, and fear that comes with his intense drug trip.

Structure

Screwjack is a collection of three short stories by journalist Hunter S. Thompson. The stories are narratively unrelated, but are all centered around the theme of substance abuse. The first story, "Mescalito," is clearly autobiographical, and is a record of Thompson's mescaline drug trip while in a hotel room in Los Angeles in February 1969. The other two stories are much more fanciful and imaginary, but likely autobiographical in some way, and probably the result of one drug trip or another.

Of the stories, "Mescalito" especially follows a stream of consciousness style, with the notion being that Thompson was recording his various drug-induced sensations as he experienced them. This style seems particularly appropriate, as it may best reflect Thompson's scattered thoughts, drug-addled focus, and heightened, exaggerated senses and feelings. More broadly, "Mescalito" takes the form of a few journal entries.

"Death of a Poet" takes the more conventional form of a short story, though frequent instances of bizarre and surreal elements compel the reader to wonder whether the story events are the result of another drug-induced flight of fancy. The final story, "Screwjack," begins with a fictional Editors' Preface, providing context for the fictional letter to come. The rest of the story is then divided between the contents of that letter and a narrator reflecting upon the letter.



Quotes

"I was struck by the distance between me and those street freaks; to them, I was just another fat cat, hanging off a balcony over the strip" ("Mescalito," pg. 18.)

"[W]e live in a jungle of pending disasters, walking constantly across a minefield...will my plane crash tomorrow? What if I miss it? Will the next one crash? Will my house burn down?" ("Mescalito," pg. 22.)

"[T]he pill has taken hold for real. The metal on the typewriter has turned from dull green to a sort of high-gloss blue, the keys sparkle, glitter with highlights...I sort of levitated in the chair, hovering in front of the typewriter, not sitting" ("Mescalito," pg. 25.)

"Any slippage now could be a landslide, losing the grip, falling or flipping around, Christ, can't blow my nose, can't find it but I can see it and my hand too, but they can't get together, ice in my nose, trembling with the radio on now, some kind of flute music, cold and fantastic vibration [...]" ("Mescalito," page 28)

"[S]ounds like a tractor in the hall, the charwomen are going to cave my door in with a fucking webbed vehicle, a crane in the hall, snapping doors off their hinges like so many cobwebs" ("Mescalito," pg. 34.)

"Now, sitting in the copilot's seat of an Aero Commander - weirdness feeds on itself - with a wheel in my lap and pedals on the floor at my feet - forty-one round dials in front of me, blinking lights, jabbering radio noise - smoking, waiting for the oxygen - sick, feeling deranged - two Ritalins don't help much - sliding - no hope of pulling out [...]" ("Mescalito," pg. 39.)

"'Give me some goddamn keys.' She was slow to respond so I gave her a taste of the long knuckle and she fell to her knees. 'There's more where that came from,' I told her" ("Death of a Poet," pg. 43.)

"Then the thing hit me and bounced softly down to the floor. It was a rubber blow-up doll: one of those things with five orifices that young stockbrokers buy in adult bookstores after the singles bars close" ("Death of a Poet," pg. 46.)

"He fired two more shots, laughing calmly. Then he turned to face me and put the barrel



of the gun in his mouth. He hesitated for a moment, staring directly into my eyes. Then he pulled the trigger and blew off the back of his head" ("Death of a Poet," pg.48-49.)

"I lifted him up to my face and kissed him deeply on the lips. I forced my tongue between his fangs and rolled it around the ridges on the top of his mouth. I gripped him around his strong young shoulders and pulled him closer to me. His purring was so loud and strong that it made us both tremble" ("Screwjack," pg. 54.)

"I am guilty, Lord, but I am also a lover - and I am one of your best people, as you know; and yea tho I have walked in many strange shadows and acted crazy from time to time and even drooled on many High Priests, I have not been an embarrassment to you [...]" ("Screwjack," pg. 55-56.)

"That's how it felt. It was a very interesting sensation, because I believed it was really happening. This monster was actually going to puncture me, draw blood, and change our lives forever." ("Screwjack," pg. 57.)

Topics for Discussion

What is the cat Screwjack a symbol for?

Explain the presence of the blow-up dolls in "Death of a Poet." What does F. X. Leach claim about possessing the dolls?

Describe some of the psychological as well as physical effects Thompson describes that resulted from his mescaline trip in "Mescalito."

What kind of relationship does Raoul Duke have with Screwjack? Describe his conflicting feelings.

What trouble is F. X. Leach in, in "Death of a Poet"? How is this trouble resolved?

What is Thompson's relationship with the hotel management and staff in "Mescalito?"

What does the narrator of "Death of a Poet" fear about the neighbor's reaction to F.X. Leach?