

Too Many Magicians Short Guide

Too Many Magicians by Randall Garrett

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

Too Many Magicians Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Characters.....	3
Social Concerns.....	5
Techniques.....	7
Themes.....	8
Literary Precedents.....	9
Related Titles.....	10
Copyright Information.....	11



Characters

Lord Darcy, Chief Investigator for the Duke of Normandy, is the main character of *Too Many Magicians*. Not a magician himself, he dominates the book by his authority and by his relentless powers of observation and deduction as the man responsible for investigating the murder of Sir James Zwinge, chief forensic sorcerer for the city of London and secretly the head of counterespionage for the Admiralty.

Darcy is also an agent in the King's Secret Service. A Sherlock Holmes without the neuroses, Darcy can also be described as a G. K. Chesterton version of James Bond. Ruthlessness in pursuit is tempered by a sense of humor and sensible humility. Darcy, for example, shares none of the ascetic Holmes's habitual scorn of women. His "Dr. Watson," Master Sean O Lochlainn, is a more independent, powerful figure in his own right.

Master Sean is Darcy's technical expert out in the field. A forensic sorcerer of formidable talent and warm temper, he maintains the open-minded attitude necessary to keep up with Darcy and at the forefront of his discipline. Short and tubby, he is physically distinct from the tall, lean, and athletic Darcy.

Assisting them in the investigation is Commander Lord Ashley, who like Zwinge works for the Admiralty. Looking the classic seaman, Ashley is intelligent, brave, quick under fire but also reckless. Recklessness, like other excesses, may lead to compromise; no officer of the King can afford even the appearance of it. But even in his fall from grace, Ashley is limited in what mischief he is willing to do, at least in a short period of time. His fall is relatively recent; he is desperate but not cynical. He so abhors treason that he would rather become a murderer than be thought guilty of it.

Attending the convention in London where Zwinge is murdered is Master Ewen MacAlister, a weaseling little man who is eventually discovered to be more than a minor annoyance. While not guilty of the killing under investigation at the convention, he is, of the two criminals who come to light, the one who is genuinely evil. The fallen are no less individual in their state than the faithful; Ashley falls into bad circumstances and compounds them, but Master Ewen is under no duress to take up the practice of Black Magic and act as an agent for his country's enemies. His sole concern is for his own skin.

Minor characters who embody the novel's themes of responsibility, compassion, and bravery are the Dowager Duchess of Cumberland, Lord John Quetzal, and Tia Einzig. Mary, the Duchess, is a journeyman sorceress, a beautiful young widow, intelligent and vivacious, who is obviously more than the close friend of Darcy's that she appears in public. She lends her skills and influence to the investigation at crucial moments as an intelligent amateur. Lord John Quetzal du Moqtessuma de Mechicoe is a modest young sorcerer for all his noble blood and exceptional talent. He has bravely chosen a life as a hard-working forensic magician with a talent for detecting black sorcery, a capacity which will bring him into frequent contact with the most fallen and dangerous of



criminals. Tia Einzig is an apprentice sorceress, a refugee from the Polish Hegemony. Her young life has been a difficult one; she is separated from family, ignorantly accused of Black Magic, and threatened even within the relative safety of the Angevin Empire by agents of the Polish government. Yet she still seeks to become a Healer, to work with the sick and suffering, when with her beauty and grace she could marry well and never have to work again.

Those minor characters who contrast, sometimes comically, the themes of responsibility, compassion, and bravery are the Marquis de London and Lord Bontrionphe. De London, who is Darcy's cousin, shares his gift for deduction but little else. The Marquis is a physically indolent, penurious bureaucrat who pulls the sublimely ridiculous stunt of jailing Master Sean for Zwinge's murder, to shift the expense of the investigation to the Crown and so embarrass his cousin. His information about the world outside his office is provided by the easy-going Lord Bontrionphe. Bontrionphe is a walking, talking sponge for experience, with a real gift for telling his story effectively. But he lacks any genuine ability to reason from the material he collects. During the course of the investigation he comes up with one impossible theory after another, to the amused exasperation of Darcy and company. For all the individual strengths of their peculiar gifts, as a pair the two Londoners can be as much of an obstacle as a help.



Social Concerns

The motivating force of this novel, typical of the murder-mystery genre, stems from society's desire for the rule of justice to be ascendant over the anarchy of crime. Garrett has taken this concept one step further by introducing the element of fantasy into his detective story, setting it in an "alternate earth" with alternative but quite logical rules, where the human need for justice and order still prevails. Although this fictional world has a kindlier history than the real world, *Too Many Magicians* is set in no Utopia; its men and women have the same frailties, the same ill-luck, that entangle people in crime in the real world.

Individual responsibility for maintaining justice and order, an old-fashioned and unwritten code of conduct which might be labeled "honor," is strongly evident in the world of Lord Darcy. Christian chivalry did not die out, to be replaced, of necessity, by secular constitutional government, but continued to evolve in a world which never knew the fragmentation of Christendom. It is a world, while still divided into east and west along somewhat familiar lines, which never knew the Reformation or the Inquisition, Thomas Jefferson or Karl Marx, the Magna Carta or the American Revolution. It is a world in which the term "scientific revolution" applies not to material science, but to the laws of magic, which have brought quite different wonders and terrors to the modern world. It is a world where superior leadership has made a real difference in the quality of civilization.

That leadership has maintained sovereignty by respect for the people it rules, and a tradition of respect for the law. The historical point at which Garrett chose to have this civilization diverge from that of reality is quite important in this regard. Darcy's world is one where a superb warrior survived to become a good king at a crucial moment, preserving both a strong bloodline and a major achievement in the history of government. The warrior-king was Richard the LionHearted, son of Henry II of England, and the greatest of the knights errant.

Henry II is credited with the invention of an administrative apparatus to effectively carry on the King's Justice even after his death, something which no previous English king, however strong, had ever managed. In the real world Richard died young, and England was left to his younger brother John, who was so disreputable that his barons were forced to limit his power and that of future kings of England with the Magna Carta, starting a trend towards curtailing executive power and initiative that has continued to the present day. In Darcy's world Richard was brushed, but not taken, by death in a minor battle. The resulting long convalescence had a sobering effect on Richard, who instead of running off irresponsibly to the next available war and leaving the fate of his country in his brother's foolish hands, stayed home and preserved his nephew Arthur's claim to the throne. Arthur became a great king, preserving the Angevin Empire which would in time rule benevolently the territories of the British Isles, France, and New England and New France (North and South America). In Darcy's time (the 1960s) the Angevin Empire is eight hundred years old and still healthy.



Within the borders of a just and secure realm, new progress was possible. The discovery in the late thirteenth century of the analog equations by which the mind of man influences the universe — magic — by Saint Hilary of Walsingham, enabled the psychic healing and forensic arts to advance rapidly. The physical sciences remained mired in infancy, the province of amateurs and eccentrics only. Because of a lucky break in history, the forces in human society which heal and preserve, such as able leadership, good government, honest spirituality, and effective medicine, have a solid lead on those which tear and destroy, such as stupid or venal leadership, bellicosity, greed among the clergy, and neglect of learning. Therefore, Darcy's world is a frankly more wholesome place than the readers' for a variety of reasons that bear inspection, even study; though it is plain that the stories were written to amuse more than instruct, they do both uncommonly well.

Techniques

Too Many Magicians is a "locked room" mystery, given a fresh twist by the introduction of the fantasy element.

The impossible crime is committed, and because it occurs at a sorcerers' convention it would seem that a sorcerer must be the culprit. Because there are so many high-caliber suspects about, determining motive, method, and opportunity makes for a particularly Byzantine and absorbing puzzle.

Contrast is used playfully to draw the reader into the alternate world of the novel. Darcy's world is just similar enough to the reader's world for it to be comprehensible with an occasional paragraph explaining its history or technology. It is a world where the reader can feel at home, yet still be intrigued and amused by its unexpected parallels or differences.

Contrast between characters, or sets of characters, is used to emphasize the true nature of each. Darcy and Master Sean appear all the more dedicated and cogent for their comparison to the devious Marquis and his less-than-able assistant Bontrionphe. Lord Ashley's downfall is all the more sad for his likeness to Lord Darcy; but for a single flaw in his character, the Angevin Empire could have had a man of exceptional resourcefulness and daring in a key position to guard against its enemies, instead of accidentally doing their work for them. Master Ewen, for all his posturing as a Master of his guild, looks small compared to the two journeymen and one apprentice who risk their lives defying him and bringing him to justice.



Themes

Too Many Magicians explores two major themes common to the genre of detective fiction: the superiority of reason over impulse, and the variety of human responses to temptation. Reason is represented by the detective team of the novel: Lord Darcy, an investigator for the King's Justice, and his associate, forensic sorcerer Master Sean O Lochlainn. While Darcy has the superior gifts of deduction, and knowledge of self-defense, interrogation, and tactics, he must rely on Master Sean's scientific expertise and psychic gifts to gather the necessary evidence upon which to base his deductions. Neither can afford to let his imagination lead him far away from the paths of probability. For contrast, another investigator, Lord Bontrionphe, for all his remarkable memory for detail, and genuine narrative ability, makes himself look ridiculous doing just that. More importantly, neither Darcy nor Master Sean can afford to give way to impulse, for their exceptional abilities and power as King's officers would make them far more dangerous to society than the average man, should they ever decide to do wrong, or become lax in their duties.

Impulse is represented in the novel by the two criminals, Commander Lord Ashley and Master Ewen MacAlister.

Ashley murders on impulse, desperate for the money he needs to pay off a gambling debt before it is exposed and he is discovered to be too reckless for promotion because of it. Master Ewen becomes involved in treason and attempted murder less out of desire for money than a desire to feel important, and he is no more reasonable in this impulse than Ashley is about money.

Throughout the novel Master Ewen exposes himself as a vainglorious fool by thoughtless words or actions. Both men, like Darcy and Master Sean, hold positions of responsibility: Ashley, as an investigator for the Admiralty, and Master Ewen as a master sorcerer. Both men cause exceptional damage because their training enables them to plot mischief and conceal it from the ordinary eye.

Both heroes and villains in this novel are exposed to temptation, but the heroes help each other resist it, while the villains succumb to progressively worse temptations. Darcy can become imperious in his desire to run the perfect investigation, and at one point is reminded that he cannot order master Sean to do things against the master sorcerer's better judgment without breaking up the partnership. Darcy accepts this reminder with good grace, and Master Sean keeps the independent judgment which makes him of such value to Darcy. Ashley, a lone investigator, has more freedom than he can handle, with no partner of similar strength to spot warning signs of trouble. Master Ewen could not make a real friend to save his life, so there is little hope that he would learn temperance in time.



Literary Precedents

Lord Darcy is a most fortunate imitation, flaunting his origins while transcending them. The parallels between Sherlock Holmes of Victorian London and Darcy of Angevin London are played up by Garrett, slipped in as an additional touch for devotees of Conan Doyle's character to enjoy. Darcy has, for example, his own "Watson" in the person of Master Sean O Lochlainn. He has the familiar skills of the nineteenth-century sleuth: the power of first-rate deductive reasoning, moments of insight, the understanding of human psychology that includes the abnormal side of the spectrum so often involved in bizarre crime, a handiness with sword, gun, or fist, the ability to locate cabs and street urchins for message-carrying, and even an intimate knowledge of tobacco ash. But the familiar accouterments may also have the alternate-world twist; Darcy's Meerschaum pipe has a long straight stem, and his "Mycroft" is a cousin who is the Marquis of London, facts which defy the reader's expectations that Meerschaums are curved, and that London is governed by a mayor.

If it were Garrett's intention to set a Victorian-style detective loose in the streets of modern London without the obvious anachronisms bothering his readers, he has certainly found an audacious but internally consistent solution. He has had to set the familiar universe on its ear so that modern knight errant could be born into a world where his gentlemanly style is not a fading relic of a cherished past, but part of a living reality, a better world but still much in need of Darcy's gifts.

The sense of *deja vu* is heightened by the homages to British detective fiction scattered through the Darcy series. There are suspicious similarities to G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown, Dorothy Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey, Ian Fleming's James Bond, and Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot. Like Chesterton's, Garrett's work shows religion at its best: fully integrated into everyday life, a reliable source of comfort and guidance to the weak and the strong alike, organized by reasonable men chosen for their compassion and insight. Garrett uses devices made famous by Christie in her Poirot adventures, such as the least-likely-suspect or the red herring; indeed, the title *Too Many Magicians* could easily be translated to *Too Many Red Herrings*. Although Lord Darcy, as a King's Officer, is spared the indignity of having to maintain a fatuous front to conceal his intelligence and drive, as must Sayers's Lord Peter among his vapid fellow aristocrats in London of the 1920s, the two do share the common bond of knight errantry that goes back to Richard the Lion-Hearted himself. Too, the sleuths share a more modern view of women than earlier detectives, both as partners in work and in love. Finally, Garrett bows to the popularity of Fleming's secret agent 007, whose heyday was the 1960s, when most of the Darcy material was written. Like Bond, Darcy is handsome, clever, deadly when necessary, and thoroughly at home with counterintelligence techniques, although he fortunately lacks Bond's cruelty and licentiousness.

Related Titles

The premier story of the Darcy series is contained in *Murder and Magic* (1979), and establishes Darcy as the instrument of imperial justice to the high-born as well as the more humble.

Darcy begins as the criminal investigator for Richard, the youthful Duke of Normandy, in "The Eyes Have It," which establishes Darcy's intuitive understanding of psychology and his willingness to consult scientific authorities to supplement it. By "The Muddle of the Woad" Darcy's reputation brings him to the attention of King John IV, the Duke's older brother, who gives Darcy occasional work involving international intrigue. The second collection of Darcy stories, *Lord Darcy Investigates* (1981), contains mostly international intrigue, as Darcy's gifts come into play more often to protect the Empire from more foreign threats than domestic ones.

Titles featuring Lord Darcy include: *Murder and Magic*, 1979, four short stories ("The Eyes Have It," 1964; "A Case of Identity," 1964; "The Muddle of the Woad," 1965; "A Stretch of the Imagination," 1973); *Lord Darcy Investigates*, 1981, four short stories ("A Matter of Gravity," 1974; "The Ipswich Phial," 1976; "The Sixteen Keys," 1976; "The Napoli Express," 1979).

Copyright Information

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Copyright ©, 1994, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing, Inc., 2100 "S" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994