

The Underground Man Study Guide

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Plot Summary

The Duke of Portland is an aging British aristocrat who lives in seclusion on his Welbeck estate. He is a somewhat eccentric man who has always kept to himself. As he has aged, both his physical and mental conditions have noticeably deteriorated. This causes him to engage in somewhat unusual behavior. Although local folks rarely see the reclusive Duke, news of his increasingly idiosyncratic conduct makes its way into the public arena. The information is quickly exaggerated and distorted and it is often alleged that the Duke is a physically deformed monster who hides himself on his estate in order to conceal his disfigurement.

When the novel opens, it is autumn and construction of an elaborate tunnel system on the Duke's estate has been completed. It is unclear what purpose the tunnel system serves since the parts of the estate that are connected underground can be just as easily accessed above ground. It seems that the Duke built the tunnel for his own amusement.

Over the course of the winter, the Duke makes an attempt to learn more about himself. There are two ways in which he tries to accomplish this. First, he sets about exploring his estate and on his little excursions he collects artifacts that were once owned by his ancestors. Second, he is haunted by a memory and by a conviction that there is phantom boy in his presence and he attempts to discover the significance of recurring experiences.

On one of the Duke's excursions, he finds the Fowler head, the bust of a man on which phrenological information is represented. This inspires the Duke to investigate phrenology and eventually leads him to Edinburgh where he meets with Professor Bannister, an expert in phrenology. On this visit, the Duke learns about trepanning. When a patient undergoes trepanning, a hole is drilled into his skull. According to Professor Bannister, this process was used by primitive tribesmen in Brazil to relieve the patients of evil spirits. Before leaving Edinburgh, the Duke steals Professor Bannister's trepanning kit.

Upon returning to his estate, the Duke is increasingly distressed at his physical and mental condition. His mental deterioration is even worse because the Duke seems at times to be aware that he is becoming mad. The Duke tries to take matters into his own hands and he uses the stolen trepanning kit to perform the primitive surgery on his own skull. This procedure doesn't cure the Duke, but rather, sends him spiraling into madness at an accelerated rate. In order to conceal his self-inflicted wounds, the Duke becomes even more reclusive and begins hiding from his own staff, including his valet Clement. The Duke leaves his room only at night to wander naked on his estate.

In the meantime, the Duke does manage to gain more access to the memory which has been haunting him. The Duke learns that the memory corresponds to a childhood trauma in which his twin brother drowns. The phantom boy whose presence the Duke has sensed all along is presumably his twin.



On one fateful winter night, while the Duke is out wandering on his estate naked, he is mistaken by a local hunter for a wild animal. The hunter shoots him and the Duke is found dead.



From His Grace's Journal to Mr. Bird's Account

From His Grace's Journal to Mr. Bird's Account Summary

The novel opens with five entries from the Duke's journal spanning from September 30 to October 10.

On September 30, the Duke takes a morning walk on his estate. On his walk, he encounters a crow. The Duke is seized by a fear that the crow is evil and has some kind of magical power to keep him in the woods on his estate if the Duke doesn't escape quickly. The Duke hobbles away to the best of his ability.

On October 1, the Duke writes about his grooming regime. In the course of describing how he cares for his head's appearance, he describes the process of going bald. According to the Duke, he began going bald more than 30 years ago. The Duke's discussion of his baldness leads to an account of the deteriorating condition of the rest of his body.

On October 5, the Duke meets one of his gamekeepers while strolling on his estate. With the gamekeeper is a large dog which the gamekeepers' niece and nephew often ride as they would a pony. This encounter reminds the Duke of his fondness for dogs and for one dog in particular which he named "Uncle."

On October 10, Mr. Bird, a garden landscaper who was commissioned by the Duke to build a tunnel system on his estate, visits the Duke. Mr. Bird has completed construction of the underground tunnel system spanning the Duke's estate. On this particular visit, Mr. Bird draws on a map of the Duke's estate a sketch of the tunnel system.

The entries from the Duke's journal are followed by a commentary from Mr. Bird's point of view. Mr. Bird describes the underground tunnel project, addressing some of the rumors concerning the Duke's person.

Mr. Bird relates how a year and a half before the work on the tunnel began, he met with the Duke at the Welback estate. The tunnel took a total of five years to build. Eight tunnels were built covering about twelve miles. Half of the tunnels were large enough for two carriages to pass through easily and the remainder were about half of that size. This is the largest job that Mr. Bird and his company has ever taken.

Although he was in charge of building the tunnels on the Duke's property, Mr. Bird knows very little about why the Duke wanted the tunnels. Since little is known about the Duke's motives, his tunnel system is the subject of a great deal of gossip. According to



Mr. Bird, the Duke has a reputation of being eccentric and the construction of a tunnel system on the Duke's property for mysterious reasons encourages others to spread more rumors about the Duke's idiosyncrasies.

According to some of the rumors, the Duke is horribly deformed, but Mr. Bird denies that they are true. Indeed, Mr. Bird seems inclined to defend the Duke against any public slander. Though Mr. Bird does think the Duke eccentric, he is inclined to think that we all have our eccentricities and that the Duke is no worse for having the means to realize his unusual plans.

From His Grace's Journal to Mr. Bird's Account Analysis

These opening sections introduce us to three important facts concerning the Duke: (1) that he is eccentric or at the very least has a reputation of being eccentric; (2) the Duke's reputation does not accurately reflect his actual qualities; and (3) the Duke's mental and physical health are deteriorating.

The Duke's having commissioned the construction of an underground tunnel system is the clearest evidence of his eccentricity. The tunnel system is supposed to connect his home to various regions of his estate. Since these parts of his estate are accessible above ground,, it is unclear what purpose the underground tunnel system serves.

The Duke's eccentricity encourages others to gossip about him, resulting in the Duke's public reputation. The Duke is considered eccentric because he seems to lead a withdrawn life and he commits himself to seemingly whimsical projects like the tunnel system. However, it is suggested that we all have peculiar ideas, but the real difference between the Duke and the rest of us is that the Duke has the financial means to pursue his peculiar ideas.

As the Duke ages, his behavior is increasingly eccentric. The Duke has noticed his own physical deterioration, but more importantly, he seems to suffer from some mental instability. The Duke's inability to distinguish reality from imagination causes him to behave in a way that may seem bizarre to the outside observer. In particular, the Duke reacts peculiarly to the crow he encountered during his walk on September 30. His mind falsely imagines the crow as a creature with malicious intentions.



From His Grace's Journal to Mr. Bowen's Account

From His Grace's Journal to Mr. Bowen's Account Summary

In these sections, we find four of the Duke's journal entries spanning October 14 to October 17. These entries are supplemented with accounts from Mr. Grimshaw, who is employed by the Duke as a carriage driver and Mr. Bowen, who was hired by the Duke to design and manufacture ornaments for the underground tunnel system.

In one journal entry for October 14, the Duke describes a visit to the laundry room of his estate. Upon waking in the morning, the Duke treks down to the laundry room to find out what has happened to his socks. The laundry room is run by Mrs. Pledger who is assisted by four girls. After having Mrs. Pledger introduce him to the girls, the Duke becomes distracted by the soap bubbles in one of the sinks. He imagines that the bubbles look like the British Isles and as he continues to stare at them, they take on the shapes of various countries, including Italy and Japan. After the soap bubble spectacle has run its course, the Duke presents to Mrs. Pledger his theory concerning the quality of one's sleep and the cleanliness of one's bed sheets. The Duke suspects that a bad night's sleep leaves a distinctive trace on one's bed sheets. Mrs. Pledger has no patience for the Duke's unusual ideas and doesn't seem to take the Duke's theory seriously.

On October 15, the Duke visits Mr. and Mrs. Snow. Mr. Snow, the Duke's former gardener, has suffered a stroke. During his visit, the Duke is horrified at Mr. Snow's condition. Mr. Snow has diminished both physically and mentally. In the Duke's opinion, Mr. Snow has visibly shrunk and when the Duke attempts to engage Mr. Snow in conversation, it becomes apparent that Mr. Snow has lost much of his ability to carry on a coherent dialogue. Moreover, from what few responses the Duke is able to elicit from Mr. Snow, it becomes evident that Mr. Snow has lost many of his memories. Mr. Snow's poor condition depresses the Duke so much that he decides to leave his underground carriage ride for another day.

On October 16, the Duke's entry has two parts. In the first part, the Duke muses about some of the trees on his property. One tree in particular is of interest. This tree is located on the other side of the lake and is peculiar-looking, even stunted. In the past, it has only managed to produce sickly leaves in the spring and it has even looked on occasion quite monstrous. However, this morning, the Duke claims to have seen a silhouette of a wild bucking horse through its thinning leaves. In the second part, we discover that the Duke has been desperately trying to distract himself so that he will not think about Mr. Snow's awful condition. By late afternoon, the Duke cannot help it any longer and he reflects on the relationship between memory and self. The Duke thinks that the loss of one's memories is effectively the loss of one's self.



On October 17, the Duke uses his tunnel system for the first time. It seems he uses it primarily for entertainment and for passing time. With Clement, he rides through the tunnel system repeatedly in a carriage driven by Mr. Grimshaw. He rides so long and so vigorously that he exhausts three sets of horses by the time he is done. The Duke is happy during his carriage ride, but when it is over, his mood quickly darkens. The Duke admits that he often experiences dramatic mood swings. The Duke also confesses that he often has an irrational fear that he is on the verge of collapse.

Mr. Grimshaw's and Mr. Bowen's accounts provide us with more insight into the origins of the Duke's reputation. Mr. Grimshaw expresses his disapproval of the Duke's keeping a graveyard for horses, which Mr. Grimshaw considers "unholy." Mr. Bowen reports that when he visits the pub, the men are inclined to gossip about the Duke and he confesses that he has spun a few tales of his own. Mr. Bowen's account suggests that some of the Duke's reputation is a product of folks' idle conversations.

From His Grace's Journal to Mr. Bowen's Account Analysis

There is more evidence of the Duke's mental instability. The Duke is easily distracted. For example, the mere sight of soap bubbles causes him to disengage from the people and the happenings around him. The Duke's dramatic mood swings suggest that he is perhaps bipolar and his irrational fear of being on the verge of collapse indicates that he is perhaps a hypochondriac.

Similarly, there are hints of the Duke's physical deterioration. The sickly tree whose leaves form the silhouette of a wild horse represent the Duke's own condition.

The Duke is mentally unwell and his aging body causes him discomfort. However, despite his condition, the Duke spends his last few months trying desperately to live a more complete life. In the Duke's case, this amounts to coming to terms with himself and engaging more meaningfully with the world around him.

On the subject of one's self, the Duke seems to think that memories are one necessary component in the concept of self. He believes that knowing who you are depends on remembering your personal history and that forgetting parts of your past is tantamount to losing part of your self. This foreshadows an important milestone as the Duke comes to terms with himself. Later on, the Duke manages to recover a lost memory concerning his family. Rediscovering this memory is a step toward acquiring a more complete concept of himself.

Mr. Grimshaw's reaction to the horse cemetery shows that the Duke is someone whose good intentions can be misinterpreted by people with strong personal convictions about what is and is not acceptable.



From His Grace's Journal to a Local Woman's Account

From His Grace's Journal to a Local Woman's Account Summary

These sections include 16 entries from the Duke's journal 13 of which are mentioned here. These entries span a period from October 22 to November 27. A local woman's account is also included.

On October 22, the Duke receives map as a gift from Mr. Bird. As he studies the map, he is initially impressed by the details, but upon closer examination he finds many flaws in the map. Some of the cities seem poorly proportioned and even ugly. The Duke becomes disturbed by this discovery, but when he turns his attention to locating his own estate, he becomes better.

On October 27, the Duke takes a walk through Tile Kiln and Cow-close Wood. Because it is autumn, the trees are losing their leaves. The Duke finds the leafless condition of the trees "humiliating." He compares his own condition to that of the trees in autumn.

The Duke also reminisces about Fanny Adelaide, a theatre performer to whom he had once proposed marriage. She refused him and married another man with whom she had two children. She later died from eating a bad fish.

On November 2, while he is walking home from the post office, the Duke meets two young boys playing an unruly game. Eventually, the Duke engages the boys in conversation. He is impressed by how energetic they are. This reminds him of a dead sparrow that he encountered the previous year; the sparrow was so obviously depleted of any energy whatsoever. The Duke's memory of the sparrow leads his thoughts to the different trajectories that one's life can take. The Duke conjectures that the way in which one's life unravels is determined by an internal flame whose energy influences how active one is. According to the Duke, the course of one's life is sensitive to the condition of the flame. If the flame is weak, one is in danger of dying, but if the flame becomes too agitated, one will suffer mental illness and instability.

On November 6, Dr. Cox is summoned because the Duke feels some discomfort in his back. Dr. Cox hardly takes the Duke's reports of his own condition seriously. He inquires about some of the Duke's previous "illnesses" which include scrofula, lockjaw and meningitis. It is suggested that the Duke is a hypochondriac.

On November 10, the Duke takes a walk with one of his dogs, a whippet named "Julius." On his walk, the Duke tries to remember a dream he once had as a boy. He struggles to remember all of the dream and in various attempts to recall the whole



dream, the Duke tries different methods of accessing this memory. He tries using smells and the sounds of voices with some degree of success.

On November 11, the Duke recalls waking from a nightmare as a young boy and seeking his parents for comfort. However, he also recalls being unable to ask for their help because, even as a youngster, he suspected that they would not or could not help him.

Presently, the Duke visits his parents' mausoleum which he built for them when he was 22 years old. The Duke, now in his old age, struggles with his fear of death. At his parents' grave he is aware that, once again, he cannot ask his parents for help or consolation. Of course, this time it is physically impossible for his parents to give him the comfort he needs.

On November 12, the Duke receives a tin of beef essence from Miss Whittle at the post office. The beef essence is supposed to be a remedy for stomach ailments. The Duke is reluctant to try the beef essence, but he convinces himself that the best course of action is to try it. His reasoning proceeds thus: If he doesn't try it and doesn't want to hurt Miss Whittle's feelings, either he can still frequent the post office but lie to her when she enquires about the remedy or he can avoid the post office for six months. Since he doesn't want to avoid the post office and since he knows himself to be a bad liar, he realizes that he must try the beef essence.

On November 21, the Duke takes a walk. As he walks past a seemingly lifeless lake, a fish leaps out of the water and quickly disappears into the water again. This leads the Duke to contemplate the brevity of life.

On November 22, the Duke takes a walk through the underground tunnel toward Cresswell. Although he encounters no one, he has the impression that he has the company of a young boy. Upon further reflection, he is convinced that the phantom boy has always been with him.

On November 24, the Duke finds a piece of paper on which a biblical quote is written. Mrs. Pledger suggests that Ignatius Peak, one of the men working in the Duke's bakery, is responsible. The Duke summons Peak to his study in order to reprimand him. Peak explains that he put the papers in all the loaves that he baked because he was inspired to spread the word of God. After hearing Peak's explanation, the Duke finds himself unable to blame or criticize Peak. Before leaving, Peak recommends that the Duke visit the Oakley sisters since they have a reputation for diagnosing and curing ailments.

On November 25, the Duke visits the Oakleys. The Oakley sisters are twins, but not identical twins. Upon inspecting the Duke, the Oakleys correctly ascertain that he has been eating beef recently. They advise that beef disagrees with him and the Duke declares that he will avoid consuming beef in the future. The Oakleys also claim that the Duke's aura is incomplete, i.e. that something is missing from the Duke's life.

On November 26, the Duke recalls a story that Lord Galway once told him about a pregnant woman who ate coal in order to satisfy her cravings for iron.



The Duke also recalls a more recent occasion during which he met a man with patch of psoriatic skin. The man mentioned that coal tar is a remedy for psoriasis. The Duke misunderstood and asked if the man really drinks coal tar, but the man corrected him by telling him that the coal tar is rubbed onto the skin. The Duke realizes that an encounter like this can encourage rumors that he is mad.

On November 27, the Duke receives from Reverend Mellor a suggestion for a remedy for his stomach ailment. The Duke speculates about how gossip spreads in a community. He tries many ways of mapping out how a piece of information, or misinformation, might travel from person to person.

According to a local woman, the Duke is deformed from syphilis and he had his tunnel built in order to hide from public view.

From His Grace's Journal to a Local Woman's Account Analysis

Some of the important themes addressed in these sections include aging and the relationship between the self and the world.

On the theme of aging, two subtopics are suggested: (1) deterioration of the mind and body; and (2) mortality. First, the lifeless trees the Duke sees during his walk on October 27 remind us of the physical deterioration that accompanies aging, in particular, the Duke's own physical decline. The November 6 visit from Dr. Cox in which the doctor hints at the Duke's hypochondria provides more evidence for the mental deterioration that accompanies aging. Second, the Duke seems acutely aware of his own mortality. In the Duke's discussion in his November 2 entry, he writes of an internal flame which burns for a finite time. The finitude of the flame's existence parallels the finitude of human life. Moreover, the rate at which different flames burn is similar to the variations in the vigor with which different persons live their lives. In addition, the Duke compares life to a brief glimpse of a jumping fish in an otherwise lifeless pond. This comparison, which he makes on November 21, suggests that an individual human life briefly occupies the space and time of the physical universe.

There are three perspectives from which to view the relationship between the self and the world around it: (1) the self viewed entirely from within itself; (2) the self viewed entirely from outside itself; and (3) the self viewed from within a dynamic relationship with others. First, one can examine the self without reference at all to the surrounding world. There is some evidence that the Duke was raised to develop his sense of self in this way. In the November 11 entry, the Duke reveals that as a child he often felt that his parents were either unwilling or unable to provide him with comfort when he needed it. This suggests that the Duke was left to his own devices emotionally, physically and socially at a very young age and that the Duke's mature self is the product of an insulated life with limited social interaction. Since a self that was developed in this way would be entirely detached from anything outside of it, this self is presumably viewed only from within, i.e. without reference to anything or anyone outside of it.



Despite his upbringing, the Duke also exhibits some awareness of the second way in which the self maybe viewed, that is, entirely from outside of himself. In other words, how others view the Duke. Local people gossip about the Duke which forms the unreliable foundation upon which the Duke's public reputation is built. When the Duke contemplates, on November 27, how gossip about him might be introduced and disseminated within society, he shows that he is aware that there is a certain image others associate with him. This public self can depend on a person's condition and conduct, but more often it depends on others' interpretation of these features. A good example of this is the local woman's account that the Duke allegedly suffers from syphilis and is deformed.

Finally, the Duke also exhibits a desire to develop the third perspective. The Duke has engaged in relationships with others, e.g. his relationship with Fanny Adelaide, a London theatre performer who almost became his fiancée. However, the Duke's attempts to forge relationships with others and to develop a self which is not entirely contained within itself are often failures. This is symbolized by the map given to the Duke by Mr. Bird. The Duke contemplates all the exotic countries represented on the map and finds that he is most comfortable and secure when he locates his own estate on the map. Although the Duke expresses some curiosity in new places and new people, he feels most comfortable geographically when he finds his home, just as he feels most comfortable socially when he keeps to himself.

On the subject of finding one's self, the Duke's November 25 visit to the Oakley sisters is revealing. The Oakley sisters suggest that his aura is incomplete. This can be interpreted as an indication that the Duke's sense of self is incomplete and indeed, the Duke seems to be on a quest to find himself in these final months of his life.

One of the ways in which the Duke's sense of self is incomplete is that he can't engage properly with others. The Duke's encounter with Ignatius Peak foreshadows at least one of the ways in which the Duke finds a solution, albeit a limited one, to this problem. Just as Ignatius Peak uses anonymous notes to convey the word of God to others, the Duke will later resort to communicating with the outside world with anonymous notes.

Although the Duke seems to lead a lonely life without the company of and interaction with others, his relationship to the phantom boy will become increasingly important as the novel progresses. At the moment, the identity of the phantom boy is a mystery, but as we will discover later, the phantom boy plays an important role in the Duke's past and in the definition of his self.



From His Grace's Journal to Mr. Hendley's Account

From His Grace's Journal to Mr. Hendley's Account Summary

These sections include eight of the Duke's journal entries and an account by Mr. Hendley, the local postman.

On November 28, the Duke laments his own wasted life. He has not created anything. He has not made any significant contribution to the world. He has not married nor has he reproduced. However, he is not alone in failing to create because he thinks that men in general are not true creators.

The Duke visits his attic where he rifles through his families discarded things. He's not searching for anything in particular. He seems to be making this trip because he feels safer retreating to the past than facing the present or the future. He finds a windup monkey.

On December 2, 5 and 7, the Duke is preoccupied with the presence of the phantom boy who was first mentioned in the November 22 entry. During his December 2 visit to Conner, a blind bonesetter who realigns his spine, the Duke relates his experiences with the phantom boy and Conner reacts non-judgmentally. Indeed, Conner seems to understand exactly what the Duke is talking about and he even encourages the Duke to engage with the phantom boy. On the other two days, the Duke senses the presence of the phantom boy while smoking his father's briar pipe.

On December 10, Mrs. Pledger reports to the Duke that Mr. and Mrs. Snow died days ago and the funeral has already taken place. The staff and Dr. Cox decided that it was best not to inform the Duke of the deaths and the funeral at the time because it would only upset him. However, the delayed news is perhaps even more damaging to the Duke.

On the following day, the Duke awakens early and on a whim walks towards Holbeck Village. Although he had no plans in particular that morning, he decides to pay Reverend Mellor a visit. While they breakfast together, Mellor shows the Duke his collection of fossils and other discoveries that he found in the Duke's caves near Creswell. Reverend Mellor invites the Duke on a trip to these caves. They end up at Pin Hole Cave. Their lamp extinguishes and the small hole at the top of the cave lets in enough light to cause the rock to glisten. The result is a vision that resembles a sky full of twinkling stars. As soon as Reverend Mellor relights the lamp, the heavens turn back to stone.



On December 13, while wandering in his home, the Duke stumbles upon a stairway that leads to a storeroom. He finds an old microscope with a slide of a honeybee. He adds the slides and the microscope to his shrine which includes: Sanderson's map, Peak's note, The Ancient Chinese Healing Man, Gray's Anatomy, a windup monkey (found in the attic) and his father's pipe.

Mr. Hendley, the postman, meets the Duke at the entrance of one of his tunnels. The Duke tries to persuade Mr. Hendley to let him ride the bike in the tunnels. When Mr. Hendley declines, the Duke manages to convince Mr. Hendley to let him ride the bike above ground. After the Duke has a go on the bike, he mentions to Mr. Hendley that he would have liked to have been a mailman himself.

From His Grace's Journal to Mr. Hendley's Account Analysis

In these sections, we witness the Duke trying to come to grips with his sense of self.

The Duke thinks of himself as an incomplete or failed man on at least two levels: on a grand or public scale and on an ordinary private scale. More specifically, the Duke is disappointed that he hasn't succeeded in creating anything. He hasn't made any grand contributions to the human race by inventing a new piece of technology or by engaging in artistic creation. The Duke hasn't even succeeded in creating his own family by reproducing. Mr. Hendley's account reveals that the Duke had some desire to pursue an ordinary career for himself such as that of a postman, but the Duke never managed to do this either.

The Duke is searching for clues about his self outside of himself. On the trips to the attic and a storeroom, the Duke rifles through some of his family's old possessions and he collects a few items in his shrine. The Duke seems to think that the items that are included in his shrine will help him to understand more about himself.

One item in particular, his father's pipe, seems to bring him closer to understanding his self because it seems to draw the Duke's attention to the phantom boy. Although the identity of the phantom boy still remains a mystery, it will become apparent later that the phantom boy is an important component in the Duke's own identity. His father's pipe seems to be a conduit through which the Duke can access the phantom boy, so it does play some small role in bringing the Duke closer to himself.

In addition to collecting some of his family members' possessions in a shrine, the Duke's visit to the Pin Hole Cave with Reverend Mellor is an important milestone on the Duke's journey to find his self. The Cave represents the Duke's self. When the Cave is lit from within, the Duke sees only the uninteresting rock walls of the cave. However, when the torches are extinguished and the sunlight passes through the hole in the top of the cave, the light manages to reflect off of crystals on the rock and the Duke has the impression that he is seeing stars in heaven. Similarly, there is a considerable difference between how the Duke's self appears to him when viewed from within and from without.

The lesson is that it is important to be receptive to varying perspectives because one can learn a great deal about one's self by taking all of these perspectives into account. Indeed, some perspectives can display one's own hidden beauty.



From His Grace's Journal to Mrs. Pledger's Account

From His Grace's Journal to Mrs. Pledger's Account Summary

On December 19, some local folks ask the Duke's permission to skate on his lake. He grants his permission and by the evening the lake is quite busy. While the local folks are skating and having fun together, the Duke stands alone in his study watching them. Eventually, Clement joins the Duke in the study and shows the Duke a pair of ancient skates. Despite the Duke's protests, Clement bundles the Duke up and sends him to skate among the common folk. Although the Duke is anonymous in his many layered winter costume and although he hardly engages anyone in intimate conversation, he finds that just skating in the presence of strangers has yielded a sense of fellowship. He no longer feels lonely.

On December 21, the Duke decides to approach his search for clues to himself in another way. He decides that instead of searching within his house or looking from his house to the outside world, he will circle his house and examine it from without. He comes upon some old stables that are being used for storage. In one of the stables, he re-discovers an old bust which maps out phrenologically important lines along the skull. This is Fowler's head and the Duke recognizes it from his childhood. It used to sit in his father's study, but the young Duke was forbidden from touching it. Now, in the absence of his father's prohibitions the Duke takes the skull and adds it to his shrine.

The following day, the Duke pays Reverend Mellor a visit to obtain information on phrenology and Reverend Mellor recommends that the Duke visit an expert in Edinburgh.

From His Grace's Journal to Mrs. Pledger's Account Analysis

The Duke makes more progress in his quest for his sense of self. He learns to see himself and to interact with people differently. He discovers that his house can look differently from other perspectives. This insight is equally applicable to how one may view one's self. The Duke also experiences fellowship with others in a new way. He learns that just being in the presence of others can do much to relieve his loneliness and to remind him that he inhabits a world with other people.

The Duke's discovery of Fowler's head is an important one. It is the first step in his investigation of phrenology. As the Duke gains more knowledge about phrenology, his madness manifests itself in a way that leads to his death.



From His Grace's Journal to a Housemaid's Account

From His Grace's Journal to a Housemaid's Account Summary

Between January 6 and 11, the Duke travels to Edinburgh to visit the expert on phrenology recommended by Reverend Mellor. The Duke had wants to travel alone to prove his own independence, but Mrs. Pledger, fearing that the Duke could not manage on his own, insists that Clement accompany him. The Duke agrees to let Clement come along but insists that Clement travel in a separate carriage and keep his distance so that the Duke can at least appear to be independent.

After boarding the train, Clement posts a sign that reads "Specially Reserved" on the door of the Duke's carriage in order to discourage outsiders from disturbing the Duke. However, after a few stops, the Duke becomes so bored that he removes the sign. He is soon joined by a young mother with her children and a grumpy middle-aged man. Instead of lively conversation, there is little social interaction amongst the travelers in the Duke's carriage. The Duke realizes that even when you are surrounded by people, you can still feel lonely.

While in Edinburgh, the Duke visits the Camera Obscura on Mellor's recommendation. In the Camera Obscura, a small hole in the roof permits the entry of light from outside the room and an image of bustling Edinburgh is cast on a dish below. Before the lights are dimmed and the images appear on the dish, the Duke feels a great deal of apprehension reminiscent of how he felt in the Pin Hole Cave with Reverend Mellor. However, the anxiety passes as the lights are dimmed and the Duke is able to look in awe at the dynamic images of the bustling activity of Edinburgh.

The Duke visits Professor Bannister at the University. In the course of his discussion with the Professor, the Duke learns about the process of trepanning. It is an outmoded practice in which a small hole is drilled into a patient's skull in order to release evil spirits. Although it is no longer used for that purpose, it is still sometimes practiced to stop brain hemorrhaging. The Duke expresses an interest in acquiring a trepanning kit, but the professor explains that such equipment is not available to untrained people. Before returning from Edinburgh, the Duke steals the trepanning kit from Professor Bannister.

On January 28, the Duke is able to remember more of the recurring dream that he first mentions in his November 10 entry. In this dream, the young Duke is traveling with his mother and father; it seems that the trio is lost on a misty trail. Mother is upset to tears. Father is talking, perhaps asking for directions. The young Duke is helpless.



An anonymous housemaid recounts three anecdotes involving the Duke. First, the Duke once asked the housemaid's assistance in locating a cart used to transport plates and other kitchen wares between the kitchen and the dining area. Once the carts were located, the Duke asked the housemaid to push him back and forth on the carts as though they were an amusement ride. Second, the Duke once asked the housemaid's friend Molly to push him around in a dumb waiter used to transport coal. Third, the housemaid once found the Duke hanging from a tree by his trousers. He claimed to be checking the tree's buds.

From His Grace's Journal to a Housemaid's Account Analysis

In these sections, we find evidence of the staff's protectiveness of the Duke. The staff seems to think that the Duke is incapable of taking care of himself. Earlier, in the December 10 entry, the Duke learns of Mr. and Mrs. Snow's deaths well after the fact because the staff thought it necessary to protect him from the truth. The Duke is allowed to travel to Edinburgh only with Clement as his escort. The staff is not entirely wrong in believing that the Duke needs to be supervised, because on the one occasion the Duke wanders off on his own he manages to get himself lost.

The Duke's visit to the Camera Obscura is reminiscent of his visit to the Pin Hole Cave. It reinforces the idea that one's self can be viewed from different perspectives. Before the lights are dimmed, the Camera Obscura is just another cramped room, but after they are dimmed, it can receive images from the outside world.

The Duke's visit to Professor Bannister is important because it is here that the Duke learns about trepanning and obtains, albeit illegally, a trepanning kit.



From His Grace's Journal to Mr. Walker's Account

From His Grace's Journal to Mr. Walker's Account Summary

These sections correspond to the final month of the Duke's life. The Duke shows signs of increasing madness culminating in his death.

On February 3, the Duke contemplates the phrenology chart Reverend Mellor gave him. According to the chart, the mind is compartmentalized into rooms occupied by little homunculi who are responsible for various personality traits such as Secretiveness, Combativeness and Benevolence. The Duke imagines that the homunculi become animated and start tearing down the walls dividing the mind into the compartments in which each homunculus lives. The homunculi begin to attack each other and anarchy results.

Three weeks later, the Duke shaves his head and his beard. He likens himself to the Fowler head. He remarks that he is "an amalgamation of all the maps of man." (241)

On February 25, the Duke locks himself in his bedroom. He uses the trepanning kit he stole from Professor Bannister to drill a hole in his own skull. Once he succeeds, he believes he has removed a significant barrier between himself and the outside world.

In the aftermath of the Duke's trepanning attempt, he becomes increasingly reclusive. He locks himself in his room during the days and he ventures out into the woods only at night. Since the Duke has withdrawn himself, he communicates with the world through written notes. Mimicking Ignatius Peak, the Duke takes to leaving written messages anonymously under the doors of his servants.

In his March 4 entry, the Duke reveals his opinion that clothing is constrictive. He regularly takes the monks' tunnel out to the wilderness and walks around naked.

Just as the Duke seems to be losing his grip on the world and himself, he makes a significant discovery concerning his past. On March 5, the Duke stumbles upon a gravestone. He recalls the memory he first took to be a dream in his November 10 entry. Father, Mother, the Duke and a young boy who looks just like him are running from a tide that is out of control. The young boy drowns. Later, the Duke discovers two birth certificates, one belonging to him and the other to his twin who died at the age of four. We can thus infer that the Duke's twin is, in fact, the young phantom boy whose presence is often felt by the Duke.



It is revealed in Mr. Walker's account that the Duke perishes on one of his midnight ventures. Mr. Walker mistakes the Duke's shadowy figure in the woods for that of a wild animal. Mr. Walker shoots and accidentally kills the Duke.

From His Grace's Journal to Mr. Walker's Account Analysis

In these last sections, we see the Duke's fall into madness. The Duke's imaginings concerning the phrenology map parallel the madness that seems to be plaguing the Duke's own mind. The map, which initially depicts the mind as an orderly entity, becomes the representation of mental chaos in the Duke's imagination. Likewise, the Duke seems to have less and less control over his thoughts and actions.

In a perfect example of poor judgment, the Duke decides that it would be in his best interest to attempt trepanning on himself. This procedure is meaningful to the Duke on at least two levels. First, recalling that trepanning was originally used by tribesmen to relieve a patient of evil spirits, the Duke's own trepanning procedure can be viewed as an attempt to alleviate his own madness, of which he has been aware for some time. Second, the Duke has been trying desperately to open communication channels between himself and the outside world. Just as the Pin Hole Cave and the Camera Obscura had holes in their roofs through which light could pass and information could be received from the outside world, the Duke drills a hole in his own skull in a desperate and misguided attempt to allow the world access to the man who has been withdrawn from the world for so much of his life.

Ironically, the Duke's use, or rather misuse, of the trepanning procedure actually leads him to withdraw further from the world. To conceal his self-mutilation, the Duke locks himself in his room and refuses to receive any visitors, including members of his own staff. He resorts to communicating rather impersonally through written notes. Tragically, the Duke's final attempt to reach out to the world backfires. It leaves him in greater isolation than ever and ultimately, it leads to his death.



Characters

The Duke

The Duke is the principal character of the novel. He is an aging aristocrat who leads a reclusive life on his Welbeck estate. In his advanced age, his body and his mind are deteriorating and he is aware of it. In the final months of his life, the Duke embarks on a personal quest to discover as much as possible about himself. He wanders his estate contemplating his condition and collecting items that were formerly owned by his ancestors. One of the collected objects is the Fowler head which leads the Duke to seek information concerning phrenology. While consulting an expert on phrenology in Edinburgh, the Duke learns about trepanning, a surgical procedure in which a hole is drilled into the skull of a patient in order to relieve the patient of evil spirits. The Duke attempts to cure himself of his own madness by performing the trepanning procedure on himself. Rather than improvement, the trepanning procedure leads the Duke still further into madness causing him to wander naked on his own estate in the middle of the night. The Duke's unusual nighttime activities lead eventually to a hunting accident in which the Duke is killed.

Clement

Clement is the Duke's loyal valet. Clement's many duties include keeping a watchful eye over the Duke. The Duke's staff believes that he is unwell and unfit to care for himself and Clement often accompanies the Duke to ensure the latter's safety and well being. For example, Clement travels with the Duke on his trip to Edinburgh despite the Duke's declared desire to be left alone.

Mrs. Pledger

Mrs. Pledger is the head housekeeper in the Duke's residence. She ensures that the daily chores are performed satisfactorily in the laundry room and the kitchen. She also attends to the Duke when he feels unwell. She is the one who consults with Dr. Cox when he pays a visit to the Duke. She is responsible for ensuring the Duke's diet conforms to the guidelines suggested by Dr. Cox. Mrs. Pledger is also the one who insisted that Clement accompany the Duke on his trip to Edinburgh.

Fanny Adelaide

Fanny Adelaide is a London theatre performer. The Duke apparently asked her hand in marriage, but she refused. It is unclear how intimate their relationship was, but it is clear that the Duke had strong feelings for her. Fanny later married her agent Peter Nicolson with whom she had two children. At age 30, she ate a bad fish and died suddenly.



Dr. Cox

Dr. Cox is the Duke's attending physician. He is accustomed to being summoned to Welbeck estate to attend to the Duke's many imaginary disorders. The Duke is apparently in the habit of misdiagnosing himself with various diseases and demanding that Dr. Cox cure him of them. On one occasion, the Duke complains of abdominal pain, convinced he has some serious disease. When Dr. Cox fails to offer him any diagnosis, let alone any medications for his condition, the Duke is upset that the Doctor doesn't take him seriously enough. The Doctor simply recommends that the Duke begin a diet rich in fruits. Sure enough, it is later revealed that the Duke suffered from intestinal gas.

Conner

Since the Duke complains persistently of back pain, Clement arranges for him to see a blind bone setter named Conner. Conner manipulates the Duke's joints and spine and the Duke feels much better. Over the course of his treatment, the Duke discloses to Conner that he often feels the presence of a boy's ghost. Conner does not judge the Duke, but rather, encourages the Duke to find out more about the ghost and possibly engage in conversation with it.

Professor Bannister

On the recommendation of Reverend Mellor, the Duke travels to Edinburgh to meet with Professor Bannister, an expert on phrenology. On his visit to Bannister's office, the Duke is treated to lengthy lectures on subjects that are of little interest to him. Bannister does, however, manage to engage the Duke's interest in the process of trepanning. According to the professor, trepanning is a primitive surgical procedure that was used by tribesmen in Brazil to relieve a patient of evil spirits by drilling a whole in the patient's skull. The professor shows the Duke his own trepanning kit and informs him that such kits cannot be obtained by untrained persons. Before leaving Edinburgh, the Duke steals the professor's trepanning kit.

Mr. Bird

Mr. Bird is a garden landscaper whom the Duke commissions to build the underground tunnel system. After the tunnels have been completed, Mr. Bird sends the Duke a map by cartographer Sanderson as a gift. The Sanderson map is the first item in the Duke's shrine.

Mr. Grimshaw

Mr. Grimshaw is the carriage driver employed by the Duke. Whenever the Duke requires carriage transportation, Mr. Grimshaw is called. On the occasion of the Duke's



first use of his tunnel system, Mr. Grimshaw operates the carriage that the Duke rides round and round in.

Ignatius Peak

Ignatius Peak is one of the bakers employed by the Duke. On one occasion, the Duke discovers a paper in his bread, on which is written a biblical quote. The Duke summons Peak to his study in order to reprimand him, but after Peak explains that the notes in the bread were meant to spread the word of God, the Duke cannot bring himself to scold Peak.

Oakley Sisters

Upon hearing of that the Duke feels unwell, Ignatius Peak recommends that the Duke visit the Oakley sisters who have a reputation as healers. The Oakley sisters are spiritual advisors. When the Duke visits the sisters, they purportedly examine his aura and tell him that his aura is incomplete.

Reverend Mellor

Reverend Mellor is a local clergyman who is very learned. After the Duke discovers the Fowler head, he visits Mellor and requests information on phrenology. The Reverend suggests that the Duke visit an expert in Edinburgh and it is through the Reverend that the Duke comes to meet with Professor Bannister.

Mr. Bowen

Mr. Bowen is a general carpenter employed by the Duke. After the tunnel system has been constructed, the Duke asks Mr. Bowen to build ornaments for the tunnel, such as gateposts and engravings in plaster ceilings.

Mr. Hendley

Mr. Hendley is a local postman who once lent the Duke the use of his bicycle.

Mr. Walker

Mr. Walker is the local man who accidentally shot the Duke to death when the Duke was out wandering on his estate in the middle of the night.



Objects/Places

Welbeck Estate

The Welbeck estate is a large private property where the Duke resides. The Duke's home is surrounded by stables, woods and lakes. The Duke often wanders on his estate while he contemplates his deteriorating physical and mental conditions.

The Duke spends most of his time in isolation on his estate. The Duke rarely ventures off of his estate and when he does, he is usually accompanied by his valet Clement. The Duke's most significant trip away from the estate is his trip to Edinburgh.

Underground Tunnel System

The Duke commissions Mr. Bird, a landscaper, to build a system of underground tunnels on his Welbeck estate. The tunnels connect various regions of the Duke's spacious property. It is not clear what purpose the underground tunnel serves since the regions connected by tunnel are accessible above ground. The Duke does, on a few occasions, use the tunnel system for his own amusement. On the occasion of the tunnel's first use, the Duke spends a whole morning riding his carriage through the tunnel system repeatedly. He has no particular destination, but rather, he amuses himself by riding in circles.

Mysterious phantom boy

The Duke confesses that throughout his life he has felt the presence of the ghost of a young boy. Through much of the novel, the identity of the phantom boy is a mystery. The Duke is haunted by the presence of the boy. When the Duke finally recovers his traumatic childhood memory in which a young boy who is purportedly his twin drowns to death, we infer that the phantom boy is the Duke's twin.

Fowler Head

The Fowler head is a bust the Duke discovers on one of his excursions on his estate. Phrenological information is sketched on the Fowler head, which inspires the Duke to seek more information concerning phrenology. This leads to the Duke's trip to Edinburgh where he learns about trepanning, a primitive surgical procedure. In a desperate attempt to relieve himself of his own madness, the Duke attempts a trepanning procedure on himself, but this leads him deeper into madness and eventually to his own death.



Edinburgh

Upon discovering the Fowler head, the Duke meets with Reverend Mellor who recommends that the Duke visit an expert in Edinburgh to learn more about phrenology. The Duke travels to Edinburgh in early January. While in Edinburgh, he meets Professor Bannister who tells the Duke about trepanning, amongst other things. The Duke becomes fascinated with trepanning. The Duke steals the Professor's trepanning kit before leaving Edinburgh.

The Sanderson Map

Upon completion of the tunnel system, Mr. Bird, the landscaper responsible for its construction, sends an antique map to the Duke as a gift. The map was created by a famous cartographer named Sanderson. The Duke is impressed with the map and it becomes the first item in the Duke's shrine.

The Shrine

In an effort to learn more about himself, the Duke collects various items that he discovers while wandering on his own estate. The collected items are kept in the Duke's shrine. The shrine contains, among other things, a copy of *Gray's Anatomy*, the Sanderson map and the Fowler head.



Themes

Aging and Mortality

The Duke is an elderly man. The novel is set in the last winter of his life. He has been aging for quite some time and he is aware of the changes to his body and mind.

The Duke is distressed by the physical consequences of aging. He has no confidence that his muscular and skeletal systems are structurally sound. Moreover, he takes physical deterioration in the trees on his estate to be a humiliating condition and since he seems obsessed with his own physical decline, it is likely that he is mortified by his own physical condition.

The Duke is also suffering from mental deterioration. There is evidence that the Duke is aware, albeit vaguely, that he is going mad. When he stares at a phrenological map, he imagines that the orderly mental compartments dissolve and violent anarchy ensues. This is a metaphor for what seems to be happening in his own mind. Thoughts and experiences that would normally present themselves in a controlled and orderly way are now uncontrollable. The Duke is easily distracted and he is unable to make reliable judgments about which of his ideas are nonsense.

Memory

The Duke thinks that memory has an important role in determining one's identity. He writes, "Deprived of our memories we are deprived of our very selves. Without our histories we are vacated. We may walk and talk and eat and sleep but, in truth, we are nobody." (pg. 32)

Throughout the novel, the Duke is haunted by a memory concerning his family. This memory, which he initially takes to be the memory of a dream, is first mentioned in his November 10 journal entry. He is lost in the woods with his mother and father. The situation seems to be distressing, but it is unclear why. By the end of the novel, the Duke is able to recover the whole memory and he realizes that it is not merely the memory of a dream, but rather, of actual events from his childhood. The Duke remembers that a boy who looks just like him drowns and his upset parents are reacting to the drowning. It is suggested that this boy is the Duke's twin.

The Duke's struggle to recall a traumatic childhood memory is a testimony to his commitment to his search for himself. Full recovery of such a memory is surely painful and the Duke could have lived the final months of his life without the upsetting discovery of this tragic event from his childhood. Yet the Duke persistently pursues the recovery of this memory in order to learn more about himself and his personal history. He wants to know who he really was no matter how painful the discovery would be.



Self and Soul-searching

During the final months of his life, the Duke embarks on a journey to discover who he is. He employs two strategies in particular: (1) he takes little excursions on his estate and collects items that were formerly possessed by his ancestors; and (2) he attempts to recover as much as possible a memory that haunts him. The latter is discussed above under the theme Memory. Thus the remainder of this section will be devoted to discussion of the former.

The Duke tries to learn more about himself by collecting artifacts that he discovers on his estate and he keeps these findings in a shrine. Among the items that are included in the shrine are a copy of *Gray's Anatomy* and Fowler's head. The Duke's copy of *Gray's Anatomy* contributes to his obsession with his body and its deteriorating condition. Fowler's head, on the other hand, heightens the Duke's awareness of his own declining mental health. Fowler's head inspires the Duke to seek information on phrenology, according to which the topography of the skull reveals information about a person's character and mental condition.

The Duke's interest in phrenology leads him to Edinburgh where he learns about trepanning from Professor Bannister, an expert in phrenology. In an effort to relieve himself of his own madness, the Duke attempts to perform a trepanning procedure on himself, but this leads him further into madness and eventually to the Duke's death. Thus, ironically, the Duke's journey to discover information about himself leads ultimately to the destruction of his self.

Loneliness and Seclusion

The Duke lives alone on his estate, with the exception of his staff. It is unclear whether the Duke's solitude is self-imposed or the consequence of others limiting his exposure to the outside world.

There is evidence that the Duke's isolation is the result of external manipulation. When he travels to Edinburgh, Mrs. Pledger sends his valet Clement to accompany him despite the Duke's protests. On their journey to Edinburgh, Clement takes measures to ensure that the Duke will have his travel car to himself by placing a sign indicating that the car is specially reserved. Although Clement is attempting to protect the Duke from the aggravation of noisy or disruptive strangers, Clement's actions also prevent the Duke from having any chance of interacting socially with others and hence, of overcoming his feelings of loneliness.

However, the Duke takes matters in his own hands and removes the sign posted by Clement. Soon afterwards, the Duke finds himself sharing his car with another gentleman and with a woman and her children. Despite now being surrounded by people, the Duke is unable to strike up any meaningful conversation and ends up feeling no less lonely than before. Thus, the Duke's loneliness seems also to be the result of the Duke's own shyness in certain social situations.



Matters are complicated further by the events of December 19. On this occasion, the Duke is content to watch from his study several local folks skating on his lake. Clement encourages the Duke to mingle amongst his neighbors. Although the Duke's interactions with the other skaters are limited, the Duke does find that being in the presence of the other skaters fills him with a sense of fellowship. Thus, the Duke's loneliness is sometimes the result of others' placing him in isolation and sometimes the result of his own lack of social initiative. When the Duke does plunge into social situations, the results seem to be mixed.



Style

Point of View

The Duke's story is told from the perspective of many different characters. Most of the Duke's story is told in his own words in the form of excerpts from his personal journal. However, these excerpts are frequently interrupted by brief accounts written from the point of view of various peripheral characters.

The Duke's journal entries give the reader the impression that we have access to the Duke's true mental condition. He writes intimately about his dreams, memories and other mental episodes. Although the Duke's journal entries give the impression that we have direct access to his experiences, the reader should bear in mind that the journal entries are written reports. As such, they are pieces of behavioral evidence and the Duke's mental condition is truly revealed to us only indirectly through his actions, i.e. the act of writing.

The accounts given by some of the peripheral characters give the reader a third-person view of the Duke and his life. Here, information about the Duke's condition is even more indirect because it involves others' interpretation of the Duke's actions. These third-person accounts provide a contrast between how the Duke sees himself and his place in the world and how others see him and his situation.

Setting

According to the Preface, *The Underground Man* is set during the last winter of the fifth Duke of Portland's life. Since the Duke actually lived between 1800 and 1879, the novel roughly spans the winter months between September 30, 1878 and March 5, 1879. The author researched this novel by interviewing contemporary folks who live near the Duke's estate, but these interviews yielded only unsubstantiated tales. Indeed, very little is known about the Duke's actual life. Thus, *The Underground Man* is an invented account of an actual man's life.

Most of the events described in the novel occur on or near the Duke's Nottinghamshire estate. The Duke's confinement to his own estate suggests that he lives an insulated life. The Duke is almost a prisoner on his own property. Though he does wander freely on his estate, he rarely leaves the estate unescorted. Although the Duke takes small trips locally to visit the post office or to visit Reverend Mellor, he only travels significant distances in the company of at least one member of his staff, usually Clement. During the course of the novel, the Duke only takes one particularly long trip off of his estate. He goes to Edinburgh to visit an expert on phrenology. On this trip, he is accompanied by Clement and we are given the impression that Clement is sent in order to keep a close eye on the Duke. It is suggested that Clement's presence is necessary because of the Duke's physical and mental instability.



The Duke's geographical confinement parallels his social confinement. The Duke is portrayed as a man who keeps mostly to himself and doesn't seem to have many friends. Just as the Duke longs to interact socially with others in more meaningful ways, he exhibits a desire to travel beyond his estate and its surrounding areas. The Duke collects maps. He is particularly fond of the map that Mr. Bird sent to him as a gift. Quite revealingly, as the Duke admires the map's representations of exotic new countries far away from his English home, he begins to feel increasingly uncomfortable and when he locates his own familiar estate on the map, he feels safe and content. Similarly, the Duke desperately wants to connect socially with his fellow men. However, his interactions with others are often stilted and misunderstood and he seems most comfortable when he is left alone with his own thoughts.

Language and Meaning

Since the novel is set in the 19th century, the language is meant to mimic that of Victorian novels. When the author researched the novel, he spent some time reading Victorian gothic novels and he has crafted his book on the model of these novels.

While the whole novel is meant to conform to the Victorian-style gothic novel, there are slight variations in the styles of the journal entries and the third-person accounts. The Duke's writing style reflects his aristocratic background and the accounts written by common folk and servants are written in a slightly cruder style.

Structure

The Underground Man is presented as a series of excerpts from the Duke's personal journal. At various times, the Duke's journal entries are interrupted by accounts from peripheral characters. This style of presenting the events of the Duke's final winter underscores and illustrates the importance of distinguishing between how the Duke sees himself and his own life and how the rest of the world sees the Duke and his life. The structure of the novel facilitates the shifting perspectives from which the Duke's story is narrated.



Quotes

"As a young man I imagined growing old would be something like feeling one has at the close of a long satisfying day: not unpleasant lassitude, always remedied by a good night's sleep. But now I know it to be the gradual revelation of one's body as nothing more than a bag of unshakeable aches. Old age is but the reduced capacity of a failing machine." pg. 3

"Where my neck and torso come together is usually a regular network of root and vein. Of late, however, I have become uncertain whether all these wires are properly attached. Some appear to have grown quite slack; one or two have come away from their housing altogether. On a bad day I worry that somewhere inside me an essential spring might have snapped, to dangle and rattle about in me for the rest of my days." pg. 7

"When a man starts acting eccentrically and hiding himself away, people feel at liberty to give their imaginations some slack. By the time they'd finished, they'd made him into a right monster, but it was all in their own minds." pg. 18

"Our life experience is kept safe, is it not, in the strongroom of our Memory. It is here that we store our pasts. We keep no other record, save the odd souvenir, of life's small successes, its staggering failures, of those whom we have loved and (if we are fortunate) the ones who have loved us in return. The only assurance that we have that our lives have been well spent - or, for that matter spent at all - is the proof delicately held in our Memory, in those great ledgers of the mind..."

Deprived of our memories we are deprived of our very selves. Without our histories we are vacated. We may walk and talk and eat and sleep but, in truth, we are nobody." pg. 31-32

"This behaviour, this constant vacillation of mood, is becoming something of a habit with me. One minute I am triumphing over a depressive fit and feeling positively tip-top. The next, for no good reason, I feel myself start to sink again and spend the rest of the day mooning all about the place." pg. 37

"Since I was a boy I have periodically suffered from the irrational fear that I am on the verge of fatal collapse. I think I am right in saying it is my mind that is chiefly to blame. Left to its own devices my body appears to function reasonably well, requiring feeding and watering and a good deal of rest but being for the most part a quite contented and smooth-running apparatus. Yet the moment I begin considering some particular pump or piston - the lungs being a prime example - an alarm goes off inside me and suddenly all hell is let loose." pg. 39

"I reckon that I am very much like the leafless tress. Autumn scares the life right out of me. Every year I worry I will not survive it, that this may be my last." pg. 50



"Like my father before me I have suffered from occasional 'absences' - seconds, even minutes when my mind seems to switch itself off completely. In my youth, without the slightest warning, I would become entirely detached from everything going on around me." pg. 39

"So, perhaps every creature carries inside it a living flame - a modest candlepower. If, for some reason, the flame falters, the creature's existence is put at risk. But if our inner flame flares up and engulfs us, madness is the result..."

Time's back is bent over the candle flame. For each one of us, the sun arcs through the sky at a different speed. For some creatures life must be but a series of shooting suns. Others must have but one sun which takes a lifetime to rise and fall." pg. 61

"It was with a certain glumness that I concluded that all pain sufferers are doomed to be shut away in quiet, shadowy places and that each one of us must suffer our pain alone." pg. 68

"After I had said a prayer for my mother and father, I said a prayer for myself. I find I am troubled by that half-remembered memory, that fragment of some distant dream. Something very far back demands my attention.

I asked my parents, 'What is it I cannot remember?' but I received no reply.

They are not telling. Their lips are firmly closed. In the end, of course, they did indeed slip away from me." pg. 81

"When considered against the backdrop of eternity the period between our birth and death is the shortest of trajectories. From the moment we first feel the smack of life to the moment when we re-enter the deep, black pool is but one breath. We are no sooner aloft when we begin to feel gravity's inevitable pull. We hand[land?] there but for a second in all our twisting glory. We feel the air on our bodies, our cold eye snatches at the light. We turn a little, as if on a spit. Then, we start to fall." pg. 89

"I have never composed a work of art. I have invented nothing, discovered nothing. The land and wealth which were left me, though hardly squandered, were not employed as fruitfully as they might. And while I may have built the odd row of almshouses and a cottage hospital out near Belph, there will be no statues unveiled in homage to my benefaction, no great weeping when I go. I did not even manage to marry the woman I loved - a feat most men manage to carry off. No, all I've done with my life is take countless melancholy constitutionals and grow apples by the ton. Even the credit for the apple growing belongs elsewhere. As things stand, I will be remembered as the Duke who built the tunnels and kept himself to himself. Otherwise, I am eminently forgettable - but half a man." pg. 116

"If I wished, I could waste my worthless time in one of a thousand different ways. But every happy moment has the brake put on it, for I know it will be recalled alone." pg. 117



"There are men who in years to come will explore the world's farthest corners, who will think up great philosophies. But when it comes to real creation, men are of little use. We are not gifted in that way, have not the machinery. All we can do is stand by and wonder - and perhaps offer to lend a hand. For, in reality, there is but one set of true makers and the men are not among them. At best, the men are the midwives of this world." pg. 117

"In other words, by regarding ourselves through the eyes of another we are momentarily relieved of the burden of inhabiting ourselves." pg. 143

"I wept for my old and much loved gardener and his faithful wife who had followed him to the grave. I wept for my absence at their funeral; their being seen off without my being there. I wept from the shame of my own staff thinking me weak and mad and not to be trusted with the truth. And I wept because of that damned pain which climbed the ladder of my ribcage and might have strangled me had it not been for kind Conner. And somewhere in my tears I believe I wept for Mrs. Pledger - for having picked the shortest straw and having to wend her way up to me, to own up to my own staff's deceit." pg. 146

"How perverse that at such moments I am still fascinated by my every twitch and tremble, by my tear's slow journey down my cheek. That even as I smoulder in a pit of misery, some part of me still coolly observes my every move." pg. 147

"I cannot honestly say I know what I am after on these little excursions of mine, but have convinced myself that in some forgotten corner of the house there sits an item which will make sense of my recent spiritual hurly-burly." pg. 164

"And, indeed, what could be a worthier pursuit than harmony with one's fellow man? But out on the ice tonight I felt as if I had found my own version of it. It rather crept up on me. I was a stranger, skating among other strangers. Nobody said a word. Yet between us we seemed to stir up enough fellowship for the whole wide world." pg. 181

"How instructive to look *at* my house instead of *from* it. I did not immediately recognise the balcony where I have recently taken to stargazing and smoking my pipe, nor the bay window of my bathroom, come to that. It demands, I now see, a special sort of thinking to match up the picture one has of the inside of a room with how it might look from *without*. The same might be said about journeys to and from a place...that when one travels in each direction one might sometimes just as well be covering different ground." pg. 183

"I was struck by how a church's windows might be admired from outside as well as in." pg. 222

"We are not, as I had feared, simply a camera obscura - just a spectator of the light of the world. No. We are both the camera obscura and the lighthouse. We receive light and we send it out." pg. 222

"All I want is to let a little light in. To let a little of me out into the world." pg. 239



Topics for Discussion

Throughout the novel, the Duke yearns to overcome his feelings of loneliness and to engage with the world. What obstacles did the Duke face in his quest to emerge from his insulated life? Did the Duke succeed or fail on his quest?

The Duke thinks that personhood and identity are intimately linked to memory. He thinks that a man who loses his memories can no longer claim to have a self or to be a self. He also thinks that a man who is not remembered after he dies is not a complete man. What is the difference between these two claims? Is the Duke correct in endorsing one or both of these claims?

How does the Duke see himself? How do others see the Duke? How accurate are others' perception of the Duke? Given that others have only the Duke's behaviour as evidence for his mental condition, how justified is their opinion of him?

At one point, the Duke claims that "at best, men are the midwives of this world." (pg. 117) What do you think that the Duke means by this?

Was the Duke mad? What evidence have we that he is mad? Is there any evidence to the contrary?

As the Duke ages, members of his staff, including Clement and Mrs. Pledger, attempt to protect him. They withhold potentially distressing news from him and they try to keep him under watchful eyes as much as possible. Do you think that his staff acted appropriately? Is the Duke's loneliness and declining mental health what caused him to be the object of protection, or did over protectiveness contribute to the Duke's condition?

Over the course of the novel, the Duke suffered many physical and mental ailments for which he sought both conventional and unconventional remedies. Effectively, the Duke was waging a war against his aging body and mind. What is your assessment of the Duke's reaction to the aging process? Was his struggle heroic? Or would he have been a better man if he gracefully accepted the ravages of old age?