

Collected Short Stories Volume Three Study Guide

**Collected Short Stories Volume Three by W. Somerset
Maugham**

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Miss King

Miss King Summary

As this story opens Ashenden, a writer, has just arrived back in England. At a party Ashenden meets a man who requests to speak to Ashenden further and gives him an address. When Ashenden arrives at the address, he finds the house is for sale, but is led by a non-commissioned officer to meet with R. R. suggests to Ashenden that Ashenden would be a good candidate for work in the secret service. R. tells Ashenden he will get good stories for his writing. He gives Ashenden an example of one of his experiences in the service that he believes is worthy of a story. Although Ashenden is not impressed with the story, he agrees to enter the secret service and arrangements are made.

Ashenden is returning to Geneva on a ferry. He has been to France to help stop a burglary attempt by the German Intelligence Department. These agents are hoping to steal a black cane trunk containing documents belonging to a Bengali. These papers are of interest to the German Intelligence Department. Upon his arrest the Bengali left the trunk in the cloak room of a station in an attempt to keep the papers safe. It is Ashenden's role to alert the French of this planned burglary so that it can be thwarted.

Although it is cold and sleeting, Ashenden stays on the deck of the boat for fear that he might be recognized in the saloon. He looks forward to a hot bath and dinner once he returns to his hotel. Once he arrives at the hotel, however, the porter tells Ashenden two police officers have been waiting for him in his room for one hour. Ashenden chooses to walk up the stairs to his room instead of taking the elevator so that he can have a chance to think about what he will tell the officers. Once he arrives in his room Ashenden notices that his things have been looked through. The officers first ask Ashenden for his passport. Once they begin questioning, they ask only about whether or not Ashenden has been bothered by noisy people leaving the casino. After learning he has not been bothered by the noise, the police further question Ashenden about the new play he is writing, then leave.

Ashenden thinks about a situation from a day ago when he met with a Swiss agent. Bernard tells Ashenden he is no longer willing to put his life in danger for the small amount he is paid. Bernard threatens to go to the police with the names of all spies. Ashenden responds to Bernard's threats by telling him that Bernard might also be arrested. It is at this point that Bernard leaves the meeting.

Ashenden's bath has just cooled to an uncomfortable temperature when he hears a knock on the door. The boy has brought him a letter from the Baronne de Higgins requesting that he play bridge with her after dinner. Since he wonders if the Baronne is the one who reported him to the police, Ashenden agrees to play with her. He goes to dinner, then to the Baronne's sitting room where the game will take place. To his surprise Prince Ali and his secretary are also there to play bridge. As he and the



Baronne talk, Ashenden is aware that the Prince is watching him. When the game is finished, Ashenden goes to his room and goes to bed. He is wakened by the maid knocking. She tells Ashenden that Miss King has had a stroke and is calling for Ashenden. The maid tells Ashenden that the Prince and the princesses are out and unable to be reached. The stroke has left Miss King unable to speak. As Ashenden sits up with Miss King, he wonders what it is she wants to tell him. He also wonders what experience she has had and what she knows about. Before she dies, Miss King is able to speak only one word, "England."

Miss King Analysis

In this story, Maugham describes how Ashenden gets his job in the Intelligence Department. He also describes the details of Ashenden's day to day work by giving his readers a description of Ashenden's day to day activities. As a spy, Ashenden is in constant concern that he will be caught by the police and put in jail. Much like Bernard, Ashenden puts his life on the line for his job. He is aware that if he is ever caught and found guilty of being a spy, the Intelligence Department will give him no support or try to help him.

Ashenden is not aware who his enemies might be. His own fellow workers threaten to turn him in to authorities. He is afraid to ride in the heated saloon of the ferry because someone might recognize him. The police in his room give Ashenden the feeling that he has been turned in to the police as a suspected spy. Ashenden is also suspicious of the porter at the hotel and the lady who invites him to play bridge, as well as Prince Ali.

In addition to being in constant danger as an agent with the Intelligence Department, Ashenden also has no idea as to how the jobs that he helps with end. For instance, Ashenden will never know if the burglary attempt was foiled or if the British Secret Service was able to steal the black cane trunk. Similarly, Ashenden is also often left unsure of his own personal relationships. For instance, Miss King is hateful to Ashenden when he tries to befriend her before her stroke. After her stroke, however, it is Ashenden for whom Miss King calls. Ashenden, however, never learns what it is that Miss King wants to tell him because her stroke has left her unable to talk. Although Ashenden contemplates what secrets the old lady must hold in her experience, the only word she is able to utter to him before she dies is the word "England" the name of both her and Ashenden's native country.



The Hairless Mexican

The Hairless Mexican Summary

R. tells Ashenden over dinner that he has a job for him in Italy. When they return to Ashenden's hotel, the two talk freely about the job. After he has inspected the sitting room that Ashenden has reserved, R. tells Ashenden about the man with whom Ashenden will be working. The man, Manuel Carmona, is known as the Hairless Mexican. R. admits that he does not trust the Hairless Mexican and wants Ashenden to go along on the trip as supervisor. R. gives Ashenden a passport with the name Somerville to use during the trip. R. describes the man as one who would steal, cheat and lie, but would not deny a man something he needed or deserved. The Hairless Mexican once shot a man because he got between himself and the bar where he was drinking.

R. tells Ashenden that the Mexican will be responsible for taking papers from a man by the name of Constantine Andreadi. Although the mission may require the death of Andreadi, the Mexican must keep that man and his information from getting to Rome. Once the Mexican has the information R. wants, Ashenden is to give the Mexican money in exchange for his services. R. indicates that the Hairless Mexican knows exactly what he is supposed to do.

It is at this point that the Hairless Mexican enters the sitting room. He is described as a gruesome character wearing a fur coat and much cologne. His nails are filed to points and painted bright red. As his nickname suggests, the Hairless Mexican has no visible body hair. He wears a wig. R. and the Mexican speak of women briefly, then the conversation turns to the mission. R. tells the Mexican he is to tell Ashenden nothing about the details of the mission. If he gets into trouble, he is to keep Ashenden out of it. R. then tells Ashenden their train will leave at 1:10 that morning. After giving this information R. goes to bed and the Mexican goes for a walk around Lyons. Ashenden, meanwhile, decides to go to the train station to read.

As time for the train to come drew close and the Hairless Mexican had not arrived, Ashenden becomes nervous. At one minute before the train is to leave, the Mexican finally arrives. He does not approve of the seats Ashenden has chosen and demands better seats. The two are put in a private sleeping room. After they are in the room the Mexican tells Ashenden he was not concerned about missing the train because he had asked the stationmaster to hold the train for him. The Mexican told the stationmaster he was the Commander-in-Chief of the Mexican army in town for a meeting with the British Field Commander.

The next day when the train nears the frontier, Ashenden takes the Mexican's gun and knife away for fear that the Mexican might be searched. After they are finished with these formalities, they return to their train compartment and the Mexican suggests they play cards. The Mexican beats Ashenden at cards then tries to cheer Ashenden up by



promising to take him to Mexico. As the Mexican plays with the cards, he tells Ashenden that the cards never lie. He follows this up by a story of a woman who seduced him into telling her his secrets. Although the cards had suggested he needed to stay away from the woman, he pursued her anyway. When the Mexican discovered she was trying to get secrets from him, he slit her throat.

Once Ashenden and the Hairless Mexican arrive in Italy, they go their separate ways so that the Mexican can take care of his business. When the Mexican returns he informs Ashenden that he has found the man. He did not, however, get the documents with which R. said he should return. The Mexican and Ashenden search the Greek's room in hopes of finding the papers but are not able to locate anything.

The Mexican suggests supper and though Ashenden believes he will be unable to eat, he goes along. On their way Ashenden notices a letter in his hotel room's pigeon hole. Since it is written in code, however, he is unable to read it. After dinner, the two leave the hotel for the train station. It is not until they reach the station that Ashenden decodes the message. The message informs the men that Constantine Andreadi never reached Italy because of sickness. It is at this point that Ashenden realizes that the Mexican has killed the wrong person.

The Hairless Mexican Analysis

In this story Ashenden meets a man who is his direct opposite. Although R. insists that he believes he can trust the Hairless Mexican will do the job he has been assigned to do, Ashenden is not sure the Mexican knows what he is doing. Unfortunately, the Mexican does not follow his directions correctly and kills the wrong man. Ashenden does not realize that the Mexican has made this dreadful mistake until they are at the train station, waiting to go home from Italy. Ashenden's true feelings about the Mexican come out as he calls the man a "bloody fool."

In this story Maugham paints a very comprehensive portrait of the Hairless Mexican. Not only is his appearance interesting, so is his personality. The Mexican is described as having no hair, not even eyebrows. He instead wears a wig. Although the description of the man indicates he is not very attractive, he is described as being a ladies' man. This description appears to be correct when one considers his popularity with the ladies at the restaurant where he and Ashenden stop to eat after they believe the Greek spy has been killed. In addition to his odd appearance, the Mexican also wears a good deal of cologne, the smell of which follows him everywhere he goes. Instead of using water to wash himself, the Mexican just applies more cologne. In addition, the Mexican waits until the last minute to board the train to go to Italy. This behavior is very irritating to Ashenden, who believes in being early to catch any train. However, the Mexican uses his people skills and his influence as a leader of the Mexican army to get himself and Ashenden a better place on the train.



Giulia Lazzari

Giulia Lazzari Summary

At the introduction of this story Ashenden is contemplating being bored. He has ridden horses and even carried on a short fling with the Baroness von Higgins. This affair was frowned upon by Ashenden's superiors since they suspected she was an agent with the Austrian Government. One day when Ashenden returns to his hotel from his ride, he finds a letter about his Aunt Maggie from Raymond, a code name for R. It is this letter that lets Ashenden know that he is needed for a new assignment.

Ashenden is called upon by R. to accompany a lady by the name of Giulia Lazzari to France. R. starts by introducing Ashenden to Chandra Lai. Chandra is an Indian conspirator whom the British Intelligence Department hopes to arrest. Although Chandra is married and has children with his wife in India, he has also developed a relationship with Giulia. Although she is only a dancer by occupation, Giulia has been charged with espionage in connection with her relationship with Chandra. In order to free herself of these charges, Giulia has been asked to try to persuade Chandra into French territory so that he can be arrested.

Ashenden accompanies Giulia to Thonon, France. Although Giulia at first seems cooperative with the plan to coax Chandra into France, as soon as they arrive in Thonon she tries to escape to Switzerland. Ashenden assumes this is an attempt to see Chandra without him getting caught and arrested. Ashenden does not mention this failed attempt on Giulia's part to see Chandra, but pushes the now uncooperative lady to keep up her end of the bargain. As Giulia realizes what danger she is putting Chandra into, she becomes uncooperative in her agreement to help Ashenden and his men. When Ashenden reminds Giulia that she is in danger of going to jail if Chandra is not caught, Giulia again decides to work with the spies and tries to convince her lover to travel into France.

Giulia's powers of persuasion over her boyfriend finally work and Chandra travels into France. When he realizes he has been tricked and caught by the English, Chandra takes poison and kills himself. Giulia is pleased to learn that Chandra has killed himself and not let the English men capture him. At the conclusion of the story, however, Giulia makes an unusual request. She asks to have a watch that she bought for Chandra as a present returned to her.

Giulia Lazzari Analysis

This story follows Maugham's theme of spy related stories. In it a lady is asked to turn against her lover in order to win her own freedom. The most interesting part of the story is not the story line, but instead the characters. The Indian Chandra is described as being fat and grotesque. The lady, even though she is a dancer by profession, is



described as being dark, heavy and not particularly attractive. At the end of the story Giulia asks that a watch that she bought for her Indian boyfriend be returned to her. She mentions the cost of the watch, a detail that indicates she is more concerned about getting her money back than having a memento of her lover. Although everyone in the story basically got what they wanted—Ashenden and his men got the Indian conspirator and Giulia got her freedom—the conclusion basically leaves the reader wondering who it was in the novel who was really tricked.



The Traitor

The Traitor Summary

In the story "The Traitor" Ashenden begins his tale by introducing Gustav. Gustav is the best report writer employed by the British Intelligence Department. His reports are often used as examples of the proper way to write an acceptable report. After Gustav has been employed by the intelligence department for about a year, R. begins to be suspicious of his prize writer. R. sends Ashenden to Basle to confront Gustav about R.'s suspicions. Once in Basle, Ashenden is surprised to find that Gustav is home since his wife had received a letter from Gustav addressed from Mannheim the day before. Ashenden questions Gustav about this letter and receives an answer which he believes is unsatisfactory. Ashenden asks to see Gustav's passport, a request that Gustav refuses to honor. As Ashenden continues to talk to the man, Gustav finally admits that he has not been going into Germany, but merely listening to talk around the town, then reporting this as news from Germany. Gustav insists, however, that he has sold no information to the Germans. Ashenden tells Gustav that he will no longer receive a monthly salary for his services. Only if Gustav is able to give a substantial tip to the authorities will he be paid. In response, Gustav asks what Ashenden wants to know. Ashenden replies that he needs to find out about the business of Grantley Caypor, a German spy now staying in Lucerne.

It is while eating dinner in his hotel that Ashenden first spots the Englishman Caypor and his German wife. With the help of Caypor's dog, Fritz, Ashenden gets to know the Caypors. Soon Mrs. Caypor is giving Ashenden German conversation lessons. Ashenden is interested in Caypor because it is believed Caypor, before he moved from England to Switzerland, was employed by the German Intelligence Department. Caypor got on R.'s bad side when he reported to the German Intelligence Department the identity of a new and promising spy with the British Intelligence Department. As a result this spy was caught by the Germans and killed. Ashenden is to attempt to determine if Caypor could be convinced with enough money to work for the British. If not, Ashenden is to report Caypor's movements to R. It is already known that the head of the German Intelligence Department is not pleased with Caypor's current inactivity. Ashenden hopes Caypor will be convinced to cross the border into England where Caypor will be punished for his crimes against England.

During their first conversation together, Caypor tells Ashenden that he is in Switzerland mainly because of his German wife. As they talk, Ashenden remembers that Caypor is a traitor of his home country of England. He wonders if Caypor ever feels any sadness for the death of the Spanish agent that he caused to be put to death. Ashenden is also intrigued by Caypor's wife. He finds her to be very intelligent and very in love with her husband. He also feels, however, that it was she who encouraged her husband to betray his country. During one of their conversations Caypor asks Ashenden about his work in the Censorship Department. It was this line of questioning that Ashenden and R. had hoped Caypor would adopt.



One day during their conversation lesson Caypor's wife mentions to Ashenden that Caypor has gone to Geneva for a few days. Ashenden suspects that Caypor is going to a meeting with Major von P. When Caypor returns, Ashenden notices that he is unusually down-spirited. Ashenden has learned that Caypor has indeed had a meeting with Major von P. He suspects the head of the German secret service is pressuring Caypor to go back to England. The next time Caypor speaks with Ashenden, he asks Ashenden to write him a recommendation to work in the Censorship Department. Ashenden gives him the letter as Caypor requests, knowing that the letter is a trick that will send Caypor to his death. For days after Caypor leaves, his wife seeks a letter from her husband. Although she does not receive a letter, Ashenden does receive a letter indicating that Caypor took the bait, and has been punished for his crimes. Mrs. Caypor continues to seek letters from her husband until one day Fritz, the dog, throws his head back in a howl. It is at this point that Mrs. Caypor seems to truly understand that her husband has been arrested and killed for his crimes of espionage against England.

The Traitor Analysis

In this story Ashenden deals with an apparently heartless, ruthless man who is a spy for the German Intelligence Department. The problem is that this man is actually an Englishman by birth. Betrayal of one's country was considered a very serious offense during this time period. However, it was not this action that caused R. to be upset with Caypor, but instead Caypor actions of giving information to the Germans that caused one of England's agents to be caught and killed. It is Ashenden's responsibility to get Caypor to either agree to work for the English Intelligence Department or cross into English territory where he can be arrested and killed.

More than anything else, this story is a study of opposites. It begins with the story of one man too cowardly to actually do the spy work that he claims that he does. This man gives up the location of Caypor, a man who has been, in his own way, cowardly. Since a man discovered Caypor was working for the German Intelligence Department, Caypor set this man up to be killed. Ashenden sees in Caypor no remorse or sadness about this murder. The opposite of Caypor is his wife. Mrs. Caypor is of German birth. Ashenden believes it is through Caypor's wife that Caypor was hired by the German Intelligence Department. Ashenden also believes that Caypor's wife encouraged him to be involved as a spy against his own country, an engagement that eventually led to his death.

With the number of traitors in this story one might wonder why it was not titled "The Traitors." Gustav is a traitor because he gives Ashenden information about where Caypor can be located. Caypor is a traitor to his own country. Mrs. Caypor is a traitor to her own husband as she knowingly allows him to be involved in a job that might result in his death, then apparently encourages him to travel to the very country where he will be killed. Even Ashenden is, in a way, a traitor as he leads Caypor to believe he is a friend but is instead leading him into a trap.

Maugham closes his story with the haunting picture of a dog throwing his head back and howling. It appears through his actions that the dog realizes even before his

mistress that his master is not coming home. However, it is this howl that brings Mrs. Caypor to her senses and causes her to realize that her husband has indeed fallen into a trap.



His Excellency

His Excellency Summary

Ashenden has been sent to X to verify information that an American ambassador, Mr. William Schäfer, has been accidentally giving private information to his Swedish lover. Upon his arrival in X, Ashenden visits Sir Herbert Witherspoon, whose personality is described as polite but cold. Going about his business, Ashenden is lucky to be able to place a lady spy in the Swedish lady's home when one of the Swedish lady's maids becomes ill. Some of the most interesting information learned by this spy tends not to be any secrets shared by Schäfer, but instead the fact that Schäfer dislikes Witherspoon. Schäfer apparently dislikes Witherspoon for his proper English ways and his unwillingness to work things out in the manly fashion that Schäfer feels would be more appropriate.

When he learns of Schäfer's dislike for Witherspoon, Ashenden approaches Witherspoon with what he has learned. Although Ashenden is afraid the ambassador will think him rude to approach him with the information about Schäfer's feelings, Witherspoon tells Ashenden he did the right thing by alerting him to the problem. Witherspoon makes plans to meet with Schäfer quickly and to try to make up for his shortcomings. As they part, Witherspoon invites Ashenden to dinner, an invitation Ashenden takes as a command rather than an invite.

Once at Witherspoon's residence Ashenden realizes the dinner party will only include himself and the ambassador. Ashenden is impressed by the properness with which Witherspoon behaves himself and with the ceremonious serving of dinner to the two. Ashenden, like Schäfer, finds himself wishing the conversation could become more comfortable and personable.

After dinner is finished, Ashenden draws Witherspoon's attention to the fact that he is familiar with Byring, an associate of Witherspoon's while he was an ambassador in Paris. The two discuss Byring's future with diplomatic service; a future they both agree is bleak. Byring has apparently fallen in love with and plans to marry a prostitute. Ashenden tries to describe to Witherspoon the lady named Rose Auburn, who is Byring's lover. Ashenden admits to Witherspoon, however, that he does not believe the marriage between the two will last. Ashenden tells Witherspoon that he believes that in time Rose Auburn will become tired of Byring and Byring will become resentful of Rose Auburn when he thinks the great man he might have been if he had not married her.

After Ashenden finishes Witherspoon goes on to tell a story of a man that he knew who chose for himself the proper way of life. As the story progresses Ashenden begins to realize the story is actually about Witherspoon. Witherspoon describes the young man as being intelligent with the ability for greatness in his future. He was also ambitious and wanted to be great. In addition to his ambition, this young man enjoyed art and literature and often took trips to Paris. On one of these trips, he was introduced to a crass,



unattractive acrobat named Alix. Although the young man finds nothing attractive about Alix except her voice, he soon finds himself madly in love with her.

Alix, however, does not return the attentions of the man, whom Witherspoon calls Brown. Finally, Brown proposes to a proper young lady with excellent manners and background. The fall before the two are married, the young lady travels with her father to South America for the entire summer. During this time, Brown has an unexpected break from his work. He has also received a letter from Alix indicating her company is returning to Paris and she would like to see him. Brown goes to Paris and begs Alix to leave the tour and spend the rest of the three months before his marriage with him. She refuses but suggests he travel along on the tour. During the months that he is with Alix on the tour, Brown is exposed to things he deeply dislikes. He views Alix's show as gaudy and unprofessional. He is irritated by the way the stagehands treat him as an equal. He dislikes the cheap, smelly hotels that he stays in with Alix. Brown is jealous of the various lovers that Alix visits during their time together. Even though all this unpleasantness, Brown realizes that he is happy.

As planned, at the end of the three month period, Brown leaves Alix and is married to his fiancée. Although he becomes the success he had hoped for, Brown discovers he is bored with his life. He realizes that he has never even made his wife happy. At one point he even told his wife about his affair with Alix. Instead of improving his situation, his wife holds the affair over his head with her jealousy. Witherspoon concludes that even if Byring's marriage only lasts five years, he will have done the right thing.

At the point Witherspoon's wife enters the room. For an instant Ashenden sees a glimmer of hate in Witherspoon's eyes. The lady chides Witherspoon for not taking Ashenden into his study, then asks what the two have been talking about. Ashenden responds that they have been talking about the things from which art and literature are created.

His Excellency Analysis

"His Excellency" is a story of theme rather than action. In it an English aristocrat attempts to teach Ashenden through a story of his past that good social standing and pleasant surroundings are not always what makes one the happiest. The story addresses the age old question of what makes men most happy. Should they follow their heart and marry a person seen as below them or should they marry someone they do not love but will be an asset to their future? Witherspoon admits that he found the circumstances of his affair with Alix miserable but that it was during this time period that he was the happiest he had ever been.

This story strongly addresses the recurring theme in Maugham's stories of love affairs between two unequal or unmatched people. Although Witherspoon has chosen to marry a person seen as his equal, he is unhappy. He was happier with the crass, ugly woman who would have kept him from being the success that he desired to be. Similarly, Witherspoon believes Byring will be happy in his unmatched relationship with the former

prostitute. Although this relationship may not last long, Witherspoon believes, based on his experience, that Byring is making the correct choice for his life.



Mr Harrington's Washing

Mr Harrington's Washing Summary

In the story "Mr. Harrington's Washing" Ashenden has been dispatched on what he considers to be the most important job of his career. He is traveling to Petrograd with no one to give him orders and with unlimited funds. Although he feels honored by his position, Ashenden is not aware that the job is not humanly possible. To reach his job Ashenden must travel by train through war torn Russia. He has been warned he may never reach his destination.

When his boat docks in Vladivostok, Ashenden is met by Benedict from the British Consulate. Benedict has gotten Ashenden a seat on the train to Petrograd as well as a traveling companion. Ashenden learns that he will be traveling with an American by the name of Harrison. The first time Ashenden sees Harrison, Harrison is upset because another family has been trying to take the train seats for which he and Ashenden have paid. After Ashenden is introduced to Harrison, the family returns to the train car accompanied by the station master. Although Harrison and the station master do not speak the same language, Harrison lets the man know through his angry gestures and loud voice that he does not intend to give up his seat. After the confrontation is finished Harrison apologizes to Ashenden for not being willing to give up his seat to a lady. He indicates he understands the need to respect women but that the job that he is traveling to is more important than this respect.

Ashenden learns through his 11 day trip with Harrison that Harrison talks constantly. Although this personality trait irritates Ashenden, he also finds his traveling companion extremely compassionate. For instance, Ashenden recalls in his story the way in which Harrison took care of him while he was sick during the train trip. Harrison is also obsessed with cleanliness. While the other passengers, Ashenden included, become grubby on the train, Harrison bathes daily. His clothes are also neat and clean. Despite his endearing qualities, however, Ashenden notes that by the end of the trip, he would have gladly killed Harrison just to keep him from talking.

Once in Petrograd, Ashenden meets with three Czechs who will help him with his project. The four make plans for finishing their mission as quickly as possible. Ashenden then asks the men if they know a woman by the name of Anastasia Alexandrovna Leonidov. The men do know her and Ashenden asks them to send for her. Anastasia was already married when Ashenden met her. She had, however, decided that her husband was not worthy of her. Ashenden would like to marry Anastasia but is afraid that she will not want to divorce her husband. When he asks Anastasia about the proposition, however, he is surprised that she is agreeable. She tells Ashenden that her husband will kill himself when he is faced with the divorce. In order to keep this from happening for no reason, Ashenden and Anastasia decide to spend a week together and see if this time goes in a manner that is agreeable to both of them.



The week goes well with the exception that Anastasia insists that Ashenden eat scrambled eggs each morning. Anastasia, in fact, throws a fit when Ashenden suggests he would like eggs cooked differently from hers. It is at this point that Ashenden decides that he does not want to marry Anastasia. After their week together, Anastasia is happy with Ashenden but the feeling is not mutual. Ashenden escapes to America by himself.

Several years have passed since his experience with Anastasia. He hopes now that she will see him since he believes she may be of some help to him. Anastasia does agree to meet with Ashenden and Harrington for dinner. During the meal she shows no sign that she has any remaining affection for Ashenden. Harrington, however, is impressed with Anastasia. The two strike up a close relationship during Harrington's stay in Petrograd.

Finally, one day, real war breaks out in Petrograd and the current government is overthrown. Although both Anastasia and Ashenden encourage Harrington to leave Petrograd, Harrington is determined to get his laundry before he leaves the city. Anastasia walks Harrington to the laundry, but the two are separated on the way back to the hotel. Anastasia arrives at Ashenden's hotel room in a frantic state because Harrington is nowhere to be found. Anastasia explains she had gone to see an argument on the street while Harrington wanted to go to the hotel by the back way. As Anastasia nears the group of people, soldiers drive by shooting their guns into the crowd. Anastasia escapes safely, but now cannot locate Harrington. Ashenden goes back with Anastasia to help her find Harrington. They finally locate him lying in the street. His usually clean clothes are smeared with blood and mud. Even in his death, however, he has not let go of his laundry.

Mr Harrington's Washing Analysis

The story "Mr. Harrington's Washing" tells the tragic story of a man undone by his own obsessions. Like many of Maugham's other characters, Mr. Harrington is very colorful and very eccentric. Mr. Harrington is very precise in his manner of dressing and cleanliness. For this reason, he refuses to leave behind the parcel of laundry he sent off from his hotel even though going after these clothes may cost him his life. Unfortunately, Harrington is shot and killed by a stray bullet on his way back to his hotel. When Ashenden and Anastasia find Harrington lying in the street, Ashenden is struck by Harrington's appearance. It is the first time he has seen Harrington unclean.

Although Ashenden and Harrington are described as being very different personalities, Harrington and Anastasia get along well together. These relationships are interesting because the reasons that Ashenden dislikes and does not understand Harrington and Anastasia are the same personality traits that draw Harrington and Anastasia together. Just as Ashenden did not understand why Anastasia insisted he eat only scrambled eggs, he also does not understand why it was so important for Harrison to get his laundry before leaving Petrograd. Anastasia, however, does understand Harrison's quirks because she has the same types of quirks herself. Although his death was tragic and unnecessary, Anastasia understands Harrison's reasons for his actions.



Sanatorium

Sanatorium Summary

In this story Ashenden deviates from his usual stories about the spy business and writes instead about the people that he meets during his time in a tuberculosis sanatorium. Once Ashenden is well enough to get out of bed, he is taken to the veranda of the hospital where he begins to meet a few of his fellow inmates. Ashenden is introduced by his nurse to Mr. McLeod, one of the two men who have been at the sanatorium the longest, and the pretty Ivy Bishop. McLeod explains he has actually begun to like being in the sanatorium. Since being there for seventeen years, he no longer feels comfortable in the outside world. Although Ivy has been told she will be well in a few months, McLeod tells her that she too should stay where she is.

Ivy smiles when she sees Major George Templeton walking toward them on the veranda. McLeod wonders aloud to Ashenden if there is a love affair between the two. He comments that Ivy, who is about to be well, would be a fool if she got involved with Templeton, whom McLeod believes is just a few years from death. At this point Ashenden is taken by the nurse back to his room. During his daily check up Dr. Lennox talks with Ashenden about the feud that has been going on between McLeod and Campbell. As Dr. Lennox describes their relationship, the two seem to enjoy irritating each other.

At meals Ashenden sits at the table with Ivy, Templeton and a man named Henry Chester. Chester is a business man who never dreamed he would become sick with tuberculosis. Although his wife visits him monthly and Chester looks forward to these visits, he is generally unhappy once the visits have passed. Ashenden likes Chester's wife and one day they have an opportunity to walk and talk together. Mrs. Chester cries as she tells Ashenden that her husband is beginning to hate her because she is well and he is sick. Ashenden writes briefly of an incident where a young man dies of tuberculosis in barely two months time. Those in the hospital are saddened only briefly, then life goes on as usual.

Meanwhile, Ashenden becomes friends with Templeton. After resigning from the Grenadier Guards, Templeton led a life of leisure. Ashenden describes Templeton as being the most morally unworthy patient in the sanatorium. He is however, Ashenden writes, also the one least concerned with his condition. In addition, Templeton has a way with the ladies and is currently working on Ivy Bishop. Ashenden soon begins to realize that Templeton is falling in love with Ivy. In addition, Ashenden learns that Chester has told Lennox to tell his wife that she is not allowed to visit any more. Chester tells Ashenden he does not want his wife coming anymore because he realized he was resentful of his wife when she came to visit.

The balance in the sanatorium is disturbed when McLeod dies during a bridge game. Although it has always been assumed that Campbell would be pleased once his



antagonist was gone, things are instead just the opposite. Campbell mourns the loss of his friend. He refuses to play his violin any longer. It appears that McLeod's death has taken Campbell's reason for living away. Ashenden assumes that Campbell will die soon. After McLeod's death, however, Templeton decides to ask Ivy to marry him. Although Lennox discourages the wedding, and indicates the two will have drastically shorter lives, Ivy and Templeton go ahead with their plans. The two ask that Chester's wife be present at the wedding. Chester invites her and she comes as requested. After the wedding Chester and his wife walk alone. As they walk, they realize how much they really do love each other.

Sanatorium Analysis

In this story Ashenden addresses the different ways in which people react to death. The young navy man, for instance, dies in an uncomplaining manner. Although he was very sick, Ashenden notes that the young man did not know what was happening to him. Major Templeton laughs at his coming death. He shows by his determination to marry Ivy, despite the fact this marriage will shorten his life, that he has not resigned himself to death. Templeton plans to live until he dies. Similarly Ivy knows that her marriage to Templeton will probably be short but that does not keep her from taking a chance on love. It is this show of belief in love demonstrated by Ivy and Templeton's wedding that causes Chester and his wife to reunite at the end of the story. They realize that although one of them will live and the other will die there is no need for resentment or hate.

An interesting relationship that Ashenden writes of in this story is the relationship between McLeod and Campbell. McLeod and Campbell have lived at the sanatorium for seventeen years each. They no longer have any reason to be in the sanatorium besides the fact that they like life there and do not feel comfortable in the outside world. McLeod and Campbell take their roles as patriarchs very seriously. Although they do not get along with each other, they refuse to leave the other alone. Campbell plays his violin just to frustrate McLeod. McLeod demands the playing be stopped. After McLeod dies, Dr. Lennox hopes there will be peace in his sanatorium. Campbell, however, mourns the loss of his long time enemy so deeply that he is almost more trouble without McLeod than with him. It seems this relationship was almost like that of a husband and wife who do not seem to care for each other, but cannot stand to be apart. Although Campbell and McLeod seemed on the outside to dislike one another, it was apparently this antagonism that kept the two alive.



Characters

Ashenden appears in Various Stories

Ashenden is an English writer who is approached by R. at a party in London, England. When Ashenden meets with R. he is given the opportunity to work for the British government as a spy for the British Intelligence Department. Since he is a writer, Ashenden will be able to pass back and forth into enemy territory without raising suspicions. In a way Ashenden is an alter personality of author Maugham. In fact, in the preface of his book Maugham indicates the character of Ashenden is loosely based on himself and his own experiences as a spy in World War I.

Ashenden is both the writer and narrator of these stories. All of the stories are written from Ashenden's point of view. Ashenden describes himself as one who observes human nature and does not become tied up in relationships and expectations. Ashenden demonstrates this power of observance in his cool relationship with Caypor. Although he dislikes Caypor because Caypor caused the death of one of Ashenden's fellow spies, Ashenden must befriend the man in order to bring justice.

Ashenden's personality and keen ability to observe the actions of others also help to keep him safe in the spy business. For instance, in the story "Miss King", Ashenden suspects that someone may have turned his name into the police. Instead of running scared, Ashenden observes closely those around him to see which of his acquaintances might be holding something against him. He avoids people who might question his motives or think his actions odd.

R. appears in Various Stories

R. is the colonel in the Intelligence Department who first approaches Ashenden about a job as a spy. R.'s real identity is never revealed in the course of the short stories. He is known simply as R., with the exception of one letter to Ashenden where he refers to himself with the pen name of Raymond. R. has a habit of telling Ashenden that one should do what he can to "mitigate the hardships of war" (p. 86). Although R. is respected by Ashenden, it is indicated by the story "The Hairless Mexican" that he does not always choose his employees wisely. Although R. believes that the Mexican will be able to do his job as instructed, the Mexican instead kills the wrong person.

R. appears in almost every story with the exception of "Sanatorium" and "Mr. Harrington's Washing." He generally appears at the beginning of each story where he introduces Ashenden to his new job or assignment. In these meetings R. usually gives Ashenden some important information about his upcoming job, then disappears for the rest of the story. It is shown in R.'s letter to Ashenden about the fictional "Aunt Maggie" that R. does have a sense of humor. However, R. does not seem to exercise this sense of humor very often.



Manuel Carmona appears in The Hairless Mexican

Manuel Carmona is the comical character known as the Hairless Mexican. He claims to have been a General in Huerta's army. This Mexican's outstanding characteristic is that he has no visible body hair. No eyebrows, no arm hair, no hair on his head. He wears wigs, which Ashenden considers comical. R. admits to Ashenden that he does not completely trust the Mexican but that he believes that the Mexican will do the job he had been hired to do. R.'s belief is unfounded because the Mexican winds up killing the wrong man. Ashenden suspects from the beginning of the story that the Mexican is not capable of doing his job. In the end of the story Ashenden refers to the Mexican as what he really is, a bloody fool.

Giulia Lazzari appears in Giulia Lazzari

Giulia Lazzari is a dancer who goes by the stage name of La Malagueña. She is described as being a terrible dancer. Her crime is that she has fallen in love with a dangerous Indian conspirator, Chandra Lal. The agents with the British Intelligence Department hope they can use Giulia to convince Chandra to cross into French territory where he can be captured by the British government. Unknown to the British authorities, Chandra has sworn that he will never be taken alive by the British. Although he does cross into French territory, Chandra has with him a dose of prussic acid which he takes and dies before he is taken into custody. Giulia is pleased that Chandra has managed to kill himself. Giulia, however, makes an unusual request at the end of the story. She requests that she be given back the watch that she gave Chandra as a gift.

Grantley Caypor appears in The Traitor

Grantley Caypor is the main traitor in the short story "The Traitor." Caypor is an English man who is married to a German woman. By some twist, he is suspected of working for the German Intelligence Department. Caypor attracted the interest and dislike of R. when he reported to the Germans the identity and location of an English spy. This information given by Caypor caused the young spy to be caught and killed.

In his story Ashenden's purpose is to try to persuade Caypor to go back to England where he can be taken care of by the British Intelligence Department. It is already known that Caypor has not been working as he should for the German Intelligence Department. These agents are not happy with his work. Caypor begins talking with Ashenden because he believes Ashenden works with the Censorship Department. Caypor indicates that he wants to start earning a living working in the Censorship Department also. Instead Caypor falls into a trap when he goes to England with a letter of introduction from Ashenden.

Ashenden describes Caypor as a very complex person. Ashenden wonders in one part of the story if Caypor was a "good man who loved evil or a bad man who loved good" (p. 147). He describes Caypor as a pleasant, upbeat person who appears to care about



his wife and his dog. Even as he talks to and gets to know this amiable man, Ashenden has to keep reminding himself that it was this man who caused the death of a fellow English spy.

Sir Herbert Witherspoon appears in His Excellency

Sir Herbert Witherspoon is a British diplomat whom Ashenden initially dislikes because of his coolness. Ashenden later finds it necessary to inform Witherspoon that an American ambassador resents Witherspoon because of his inability to be anything but polite, polished and cool. Witherspoon tells Ashenden he was right to tell him about the American ambassador's feelings, then invites Ashenden to dinner. During this dinner Witherspoon tells Ashenden about the time he had an affair with an acrobat by the name of Alix. Although Ashenden tells Witherspoon that he feels that position is more important than love, Witherspoon uses his story to try to help Ashenden understand that happiness is more important than status. Witherspoon describes his relationship with Alix as being trashy. They stayed in trashy hotels, dealt with low class people and fought constantly, but Witherspoon was happy. He recalls to Ashenden that although he has power and a great position with his current wife, he had never been able to make her happy. Even with the power and prestige that he had always wanted to have, Witherspoon himself is also not happy in his position.

Mr. John Quincy Harrington appears in Mr. Harrington's Washing

Mr. John Quincy Harrington is the American businessman with whom Ashenden travels to Petrograd, Russia. During the 11 day train trip Ashenden learns all that he believes there is to know about Harrington. Harrington considers himself a top rate speaker and story teller. Ashenden, however, does not enjoy Harrington's slow monotone and is frustrated by his traveling companion's inability to be quiet. Harrington even prefers to read aloud, a habit that Ashenden finds very distasteful. During the span of the trip, Harrington tells Ashenden about his wife, his children, his business, and his education. Ashenden feels there is nothing left for him to learn about Harrington. Despite his incessant talking, Harrington does have the endearing quality of taking good care of Ashenden while he is sick during the train trip.

In addition to his frustrating habit of talking, Harrington is also very particular about cleanliness and his clothing. While others on the train become grubby, Harrington cleans himself and puts on clean clothes daily. It is this habit, however that leads to Harrington's death. Instead of leaving Petrograd when he first learns a revolt has broken out, Harrington insists that he walk to the laundry to pick up some clothes he had sent off for washing. On the way back from this trip, he is shot and killed.



Ivy Bishop appears in Sanatorium

Ivy Bishop is the pretty, young English girl whom Ashenden is introduced to after he meets McLeod. Since she has been in and out of sanatoriums for nearly 10 years, Ivy looks much younger than she actually is. Ashenden is told by McLeod the day they first meet that he believes there is a relationship between Ivy and Templeton. As Ashenden watches the two together and notices the soft look on Ivy's face as she smiles at Templeton, he agrees with McLeod's observation. Although she knows that her new husband will not live very long, Ivy still agrees to marry Templeton when he asks her. Ivy agrees that when Templeton dies, she will return to the sanatorium.

Major George Templeton appears in Sanatorium

Major Templeton is described as being a man of extreme leisure and a ladies' man. He appears to be as unconcerned about his coming death as he is about the amount of money he has lost playing cards. Although he begins to flirt with Ivy only because she is the youngest and most attractive lady in the hospital, he soon finds he is falling in love with her. Templeton and Ivy decide to go ahead with their wedding plans despite the fact that the wedding will drastically shorten his life.

Henry Chester appears in Sanatorium

Henry Chester is the middle-aged business man who contracts tuberculosis. Although it is clear to the other patients that Chester loves his wife, it becomes more and more obvious that he is unhappy when she comes to visit him in the hospital. Soon Chester requests that the doctor tell Mrs. Chester that she is not to come back to the hospital any longer. Chester admits to Ashenden that he asked the doctor to do this because he was beginning to feel hate toward his wife. Chester is angry because he is sick and will probably die while she is well. At the end of the story after Ivy and Templeton's wedding, Chester and his wife manage to put this difference between them and realize that they do still love each other despite the fact that Chester is sick.

Alix appears in His Excellency

Alix is the acrobat with whom Witherspoon falls in love in the story "His Excellency." Although she is described as not being pretty, Witherspoon is mesmerized by Alix's voice. Alix is very devoted to her job although Witherspoon believes the performance is tacky. When Witherspoon suggests the two spend the time before his wedding together, Alix refuses to give up her job to do so. Instead she suggests that Witherspoon go along with her.



Chandra Lalappears in Giulia Lazzari

Chandra Lal is described as a fat Indian who is a dangerous conspirator against the Allied forces. Although he has a wife and children in India, he has fallen in love with the dancer Giulia Lazzari. Ashenden and other employees of the Intelligence Department attempt to convince Giulia to lure Chandra across the French border where he can be arrested. Although Chandra does allow himself to be lured to France, he has brought a dose of poison with him. When he realizes he has been trapped by British forces, Chandra takes the poison and kills himself.

Mr. Wilbur Schäferappears in His Excellency

Mr. Wilbur Schäfer is the American ambassador in the story "His Excellency" who finds Witherspoon and his proper manners tiresome. Schäfer is currently spending a great deal of time with a Swedish lady. Secrets have been being leaked to the Central Powers and it is suspected the leak might be found in this relationship.

Bernardappears in Miss King

Bernard is the Swiss agent who demands extra money of Ashenden. He claims that the meager wages that he is paid is not worth the extent to which he risks his life. Bernard threatens to turn Ashenden into the police as a spy. If this happens, Ashenden would be arrested and put in jail. It is Ashenden's experience with this spy that puts Ashenden on edge for the remainder of the story.

McLeodappears in Sanatorium

McLeod is one of the first sanatorium patients that Ashenden meets. McLeod tells Ashenden that he has lived at the sanatorium 17 years. He inhabits the best room there. Although he is well and could go home, McLeod has been in the hospital so long that he no longer feels comfortable in the outside world. McLeod dies immediately after victoriously winning a tense bridge game.

Campbellappears in Sanatorium

Campbell is one of the patients at the Sanatorium who has lived there the longest. His competitor is McLeod, who currently believes it is he who inhabits the best room at the hospital. Campbell claims to be waiting for McLeod to die or move out so that he can inherit McLeod's room. As a way to frustrate McLeod, Campbell plays the same tune on his violin repetitively.



Lady Anne Witherspoon appears in His Excellency

Lady Anne Witherspoon is the woman whom Witherspoon chose to marry in the story "His Excellency." He chooses Anne because her upbringing would make her an appropriate diplomat's wife. Before their wedding Anne travels to Africa with her father. It is during this time that Witherspoon has an affair with Alix, the acrobat whom he spends his life wishing that he had married instead of Anne. When Anne learns of this affair, she holds the knowledge of it over her husband's head.

Baroness de Higgins appears in Miss King, Giulia Lazzari

The Baroness de Higgins invites Ashenden to play bridge with her and a group of her friends after dinner. The Baroness is an Austrian whom Ashenden believes might have given his name to the police as a spy. Later in the story "Giulia Lazzari" Ashenden indicates that he has had a brief fling with the Baroness. This fling is brought to an end when Ashenden learns that the Baroness de Higgins is indeed an Austrian spy.

Prince Ali appears in Miss King

Prince Ali is one of the people that the Baroness invites to play bridge with her after dinner one evening. The prince does not speak much during the game but Ashenden feels the man's eye on him while he is talking with the others. When the governess employed by the prince is on her deathbed, it is not the prince that Miss King calls for, but Ashenden instead.

Miss King appears in Miss King

Miss King is the Englishwoman who served as the governess of Prince Ali's daughters. She is treated badly by the girls. Although Ashenden tries to befriend Miss King, she is hateful to him and discourages a friendship. One evening Miss King has a stroke that keeps her from being able to speak. She indicates she wants Ashenden with her. Although Ashenden believes Miss King has something important she wants to tell him, she speaks only one word to him, the name of their mother country England, before she dies.

Gustav appears in The Traitor

Gustav is a spy employed by the British Secret Service. Although he writes excellent reports, it is soon suspected that he is not actually traveling into Germany to get the information. Ashenden is sent to Gustav's home to determine if this star spy is really doing his own work or not. Ashenden convinces Gustav to tell him that he is not really going into Germany, only getting information by word of mouth. As a bargaining chip,



however, Gustav gives information about Grantley Caypor, a man believed to be an English traitor.

Byring appears in His Excellency

Byring is a promising diplomat who is friends with both Witherspoon and Ashenden. Byring plans to marry Rose Auburn, a dancer and show girl who will not be an asset to a rising diplomat.

Rose Auburn appears in His Excellency

Rose Auburn is the dancer whom Byring falls in love with and plans to marry. Byring is a promising diplomat but his marriage with Rose Auburn would severely damage his chances to be great in his field. Although Ashenden believes this union is a mistake, Witherspoon believes Byring should embrace the experience even if it makes him happy for just a few years.

Brown appears in His Excellency

When Witherspoon tells Ashenden his story of his affair with the acrobat, he tells it as if it happened to a friend of his. Witherspoon decides to give this friend the name of Brown. Despite this intent to fool Ashenden, Ashenden realizes that Witherspoon is actually talking about himself.

Fritzi appears in The Traitor

Fritzi is the dog in the story "The Traitor." He is a purebred who belongs to Mr. and Mrs. Caypor. At the end of this short story Fritzi howls a long mournful howl as if he realizes his master is dead.



Objects/Places

Black Cane Trunk appears in Miss King

This trunk contains documents wanted by the British Government.

Macaroni appears in The Hairless Mexican

R. asks Ashenden if he likes this kind of pasta as a way to introduce the spy's mission in Italy.

Italy appears in The Hairless Mexican

Italy is the country to which Ashenden and the Mexican travel.

Greasy Pack of Cards appears in The Hairless Mexican

The Mexican and Ashenden play a game with the pack of cards, then the Mexican plays with the cards as he tells Ashenden the story of how he was betrayed by a woman.

Church of Santa Chiara appears in The Hairless Mexican

It is at this church that Ashenden finds himself returning to over and over as he waits for the Mexican to finish the job in Italy.

Letter in a Pigeon Hole appears in The Hairless Mexican

It is this letter that Ashenden finds in his box, but does not read until he and the Mexican are leaving Italy. The letter informs Ashenden that the Greek man for whom the Mexican is looking is sick and was not able to travel to Italy.

Romeo and Juliet appears in Giulia Lazzari

Romeo and Juliet is the play that Ashenden and the Baroness see together.



Lausanne appears in Giulia Lazzari

Lausanne is the place where Chandra and Giulia Lazzari have planned to meet.

Prussic Acid appears in Giulia Lazzari

Prussic acid is the poison with which Chandra kills himself.

Allies appears in Various Stories

The Allies were one of the two main forces in First World War. The Allies were comprised of several countries including the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France and China. It is for this party that Ashenden worked as a spy.

Central Powers appears in Various Stories

The Central Powers were a force in the First World War that was opposed to the Allies. Germany was one of the main countries included in the Central Powers.

Lucerne appears in The Traitor

Lucerne is a city in Switzerland where Ashenden meets Grantley Caypor.

X appears in His Excellency

X is the country in which the story "His Excellency" is set.

Moulin Rouge appears in His Excellency

The Moulin Rouge is a cabaret in Paris in which Alix's group is performing.

Petrograd appears in Mr. Harrington's Washing

Petrograd is the city in Russia to which Ashenden and Harrington travel together.

Mr. Harrington's Washing appears in Mr. Harrington's Washing

It is by going to retrieve this laundry before he leaves that Mr. Harrington meets his death.



Sanatorium in the North Part of Scotland appears in Sanatorium

It is in this tuberculosis hospital that the final short story in this collection is set.

Fiddle appears in Sanatorium

Campbell plays this fiddle simply because it infuriates McLeod. Once McLeod is dead, Campbell says he will never play the fiddle again.



Themes

Love Amidst Unusual Circumstances

One of the themes that is addressed most frequently in these short stories is the unusual circumstances from which love can grow. Love grows and blossoms even in the most unlikely circumstances and between the most unlikely characters. For instance, in the story "Sanatorium", Ivy and Templeton fall in love with each other and marry despite the knowledge that their marriage will drastically shorten their lives. It is this show of belief in love, however, that helps Chester and his wife realize that even though Chester may die and his wife may live, there is no need for resentment and anger. At the end of the story they reaffirm their love for each other.

Another odd couple is the Englishman Grantley Caypor and his German wife. Citing the reason that his wife was uncomfortable in England, Grantley has moved his family to a neutral country. Ashenden believes, however, that Caypor's wife has convinced him to work for the German Intelligence Department thus becoming a traitor to the English nation. Although Caypor's wife has to have known that her husband's position as a traitor put him in a dangerous situation, she seems to not understand why he does not write to her from England. In the end of the story, it is the dog's howl that brings her to the realization that she may have put her husband into a situation that has killed him.

The story of "His Excellency" is another story that shows how love can bloom between drastically different people. Although Witherspoon has married the woman who will make his dreams of being a successful diplomat come true, he admits to Ashenden that he is unhappy. At times he even hates his wife, an emotion that is shown by the look on his face when she first enters the room during Witherspoon and Ashenden's discussion. Although he would not have reached the political platform that he is on now, Witherspoon wishes that he would have married Alix, the acrobat with whom he had a fling before he was married. Although he would not have been the success everyone expected him to be, Witherspoon believes that with Alix he would have at least have been happy.

Unique Characters

Through his ability to observe and report what he observes, Ashenden paints a picture of some very unique characters throughout his collection of short stories. The first of these unique characters is the elderly Miss King. Although Miss King is English by birth, she has been hired by a prince as a governess. For this reason, she has been away from England most of her life. Although Ashenden tries to befriend the English lady, she refuses his advances. Ashenden describes Miss King as wearing grotesquely applied make-up and a mousy brown wig. Her clothes are bright and gay but also look as if they have been purchased haphazardly from a second hand store. Ashenden indicates that people stop and stare when they see Miss King walk by on the street.



Another of these odd characters described by Ashenden is the Hairless Mexican. The man's name itself is enough to raise an interest in this man. R. tells Ashenden that the Mexican was given this name because he is hairless and he is a Mexican. The man definitely makes a statement with his strong perfume and lack of body hair. Although Ashenden describes the man as being grotesque, it also appears that the Mexican is quite the ladies' man. Ashenden is surprised to see the way women take to the strong smelling, strange looking Mexican.

War

One of the underlying themes of these stories is the war. It is because of the war that Ashenden has been given the opportunity to have the experiences that he has. He has been hired as a spy for the British Intelligence Department. R. tells Ashenden that his job as a writer gives him an excellent cover and will allow him to be able to travel from country to country without raising suspicions. Even though Ashenden has agreed to serve his country as a spy, it is obvious that he sees his first and foremost job as that of a writer. During his spy assignment, Ashenden is still working on a play. Even when he suspects, in one story, that he is about to be arrested by the Central Powers, Ashenden writes that he hopes that he will be able to finish his play.

Ultimately it is the war that has created the circumstances that make many of the relationships and situations problematic. Without the war it would not be a problem for a German lady to be married to an English man, or for a Spanish dancer to fall in love with an Indian. These relationships would only have suffered the stigma of crossing lines of nationality, not the consequence of death for treachery and treason.

Style

Point of View

These stories are told from the third person point of view. Ashenden is the main character in these stories and they are told from his point of view. The narrator has access to Ashenden's thoughts and emotions but not to those of the other characters in the stories. Information about other characters is either portrayed by what Ashenden thinks or says about them or what these characters say about themselves. This point of view is important to the stories because the stories center mainly on Ashenden's interpretation of the characters that he meets and the situations that he experiences. If the stories were told from any other view point, the emphasis of Ashenden's observations would be diluted.

Ashenden's stories are told through both dialogue and exposition. There is considerably less dialogue than exposition. These sections of exposition are important, however, because it is through these patches of exposition that Ashenden conveys his observations to the readers. The reader learns little about other characters except through Ashenden's observations. What little personal information the reader gets, except in the story "His Excellency" where Ashenden is repeating to his readers a story told to him, is given through the small bits of dialogue each character is allowed.

Setting

There are a variety of settings visited in this collection of short stories. The general setting includes the European countries of England, Switzerland, Italy and Germany. The first story, "Miss King," starts in London, England. After Ashenden is hired by the Intelligence Department he is stationed at a hotel in Geneva, Switzerland. It is at this hotel that Ashenden meets Miss King. The second story, "The Hairless Mexican," is set in Italy. In the story "Giulia Lizzari" Ashenden takes the lady Giulia Lizzari to Thonon, France. The story "The Traitor" begins in Basle, Switzerland where Ashenden visits with Gustav. Based on information Gustav gives him concerning the location of an English traitor, Ashenden then travels to Lucerne, Switzerland to try to contact this traitor.

In the story "His Excellency" it is not disclosed to where Ashenden travels. The location is simply referred to as "X." Since this is a story about a spy, it adds a level of intrigue that the location is unnamed. It is unsure if Ashenden is in a friendly or unfriendly country. Despite the fact that the name of the country is not disclosed, it is known that Ashenden spends some of his time in the country of X in the home of Sir Herbert Witherspoon, an English diplomat. Witherspoon's story takes Ashenden on a journey with a traveling acrobatic act as he tells the story of his love affair with Alix, one of the performers. In the story "Mr. Harrington's Washing", Ashenden and Harrington travel into the war torn town of Petrograd, Russia. Finally, the story "Sanatorium" is set in a tuberculosis hospital in northern Switzerland.



To understand the significance of the location of the stories, it is also important to consider the time period during which these stories take place. The stories are set during the First World War, which spanned the years of 1914-1918. Ashenden is hired as a spy for the British Intelligence Department because he can easily, and without question, travel into the Central Powers countries including Germany and Austria.

Language and Meaning

In these stories Ashenden, whose primary job is that of a writer, acts as a spy for the British Intelligence Department. Therefore, there is much spy language used in the book. Ashenden's boss is known simply by the letter "R", a technique that protects his identity. In addition one of the countries to which Ashenden travels is also not disclosed. In many of the stories Ashenden travels under an assumed name with a passport issued by the Intelligence Department.

It is indicated in the Preface of the collection of stories that Maugham, the author of the stories, based his stories on his own experiences as a spy. As a writer Ashenden writes his stories in the colorful and descriptive words of a writer. He is an unaffected observer of human behavior who uses colorful descriptions to portray his observations to his readers. One example of this description occurs in the story "Sanatorium" where Ashenden writes about the death of McLeod. He describes the actions in short, abrupt sentences that mimic the abrupt way in which McLeod died.

Structure

This book is divided into seven different short stories. Each story is approximately 30 pages long. Each story tells of a different experience in the work of Ashenden, a spy with the British Intelligence Department. Ashenden is the main character of each story while the minor characters vary from story to story. R. is the only other character in the collection of stories that appears in more than one story.

The main plot of the collection of stories centers around Ashenden's work with the British Intelligence Department. If one considers this spy work as the main plot of the collection, each individual story could be considered a sub-plot. These sub-plots deal with the people that Ashenden meets during his work as a spy. This book is not a true spy novel that deals with the excitement of the spy's life. These stories instead deal with the personality quirks and eccentricities of the people that Ashenden meets while doing his work as a spy.



Quotes

"They were hard and cruel eyes, and very wary; and they gave him a cunning shifty look. Here was a man that you could neither like nor trust at first sight." ("Miss King" p. 10)

"It was as unsatisfactory as those modern novels that give you a number of unrelated episodes and expect you by piecing them together to construct in your mind a connected narrative." ("Miss King" p. 13)

"Now it was Ashenden's principle (a good one in life as well as in the Intelligence Department) always to tell as much of the truth as he conveniently could;..." ("Miss King" p. 17)

"It might be that some new plan was in question, it might be that the very greatest affairs were at foot, and perhaps what the old woman had to say might make all the difference in the world." ("Miss King" p. 42)

"I don't believe the Hairless Mexican has a great respect for human life." ("The Hairless Mexican" p. 47)

"But, you see, they're counters that feel and think and if they believe they're being squandered they are quite capable of refusing to be used any more." ("The Hairless Mexican" p. 47)

"He rose to his feet and put on his coat with the astrakhan collar, seized in one hand his bold black hat and, with the gesture of a romantic actor giving up the girl he loves to one more worthy of her, held out the other to R." ("The Hairless Mexican" p. 53)

"It was one of his notions that only such persons were as had no resources in themselves and it was but the stupid that depended on the outside world for their amusement." ("Giulia Lazzari" p. 81)

"If she can get Chandra to cross the Swiss frontier and come into France she's to go free, either to Spain or to South America, with her passage paid." ("Giulia Lazzari" p. 94)

"Her grief was real, but there was something theatrical in the expression of it that prevented it from being peculiarly moving to Ashenden." ("Giulia Lazzari" p. 105)

"The circuitous routes by which it was necessary to get information from Germany made it difficult to transmit news quickly and it was essential to know precisely on what days certain events had taken place." ("The Traitor" p. 121)

"He brought into that dull, overclean dining room the breath of life, and everyone in it appeared on a sudden more alert." ("The Traitor" p. 128)



"People sometimes thought him heartless because he was more often interested in others than attached to them, and even in the few to whom he was attached his eyes saw with equal clearness the merits and the defects." ("The Traitor" p. 140)

"How much easier life would be if people were all black or all white and how much simpler it would be to act in regard to them!" ("The Traitor" p. 147)

"Though Ashenden had been studying human nature more or less consciously all his life, it seemed to him that he knew as little about it now in middle age as he had done when he was a child." ("The Traitor" p. 147)

"Besides, I can't afford it, I've got to earn my living. I may have a German wife, but I am an Englishman, hang it all, and I want to do my bit. I could never face my friends again if I just stayed here in ease and comfort till the end of the war and never attempted to do a thing to help my country." ("The Traitor" p. 150)

"They might have been dining in one of the great country houses of England; it was a ceremony they performed, sumptuous without ostentation, and it was saved from a trifling absurdity only because it was in a tradition; but the experience gained for Ashenden a kind of savour from the thought that dwelt with him that on the other side of the wall was a restless, turbulent population that might at any moment break into bloody revolution, while not two hundred miles away men in the trenches were sheltering in their dug-outs from the bitter cold and the pitiless bombardment." ("His Excellency" p. 164)

"The light in the station was wan and cold and the white faces of all those people were like the faces of the dead waiting, patient or anxious, distraught or penitent, for the judgments of the last day." ("Mr. Harrington's Washing" p. 191)

"There are people who say that suffering ennobles. It is not true. As a general rule it makes man petty, querulous, and selfish..." ("Sanatorium" p. 240)

"Of all those people in the sanatorium he was probably from the moral standpoint the least worthy, but he was the only one who genuinely accepted the inevitable with unconcern." ("Sanatorium" p. 242)



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the reasons why Ashenden is so suited for the job that he does. Include both factors of Ashenden's personality as well as the attributes of his job that suit him for spy work.

Why do you think that Miss King tells Ashenden the single word "England" as she is dying? What do you believe this symbolizes?

Who is "The Traitor?" Explain your answer.

Why do you think that Giulia asks for the watch back in the story "Giulia Lazzari"? What does this request symbolize?

Why, in your opinion, did Ivy and Major Templeton not stay in the sanatorium after they were married?

Consider the moral of the story "His Excellency." Do you believe it is better to marry for love or for position? Explain your answer.

Compare and contrast Ashenden and Mr. Harrington. Why did Anastasia understand Mr. Harrington when Ashenden did not?