Fifth Business

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ROBERTSON DAVIES

William Robertson Davies was an acclaimed author of novels, plays, and essays as well as a journalist and professor. He grew up in a small town in Ontario in a Presbyterian household, and even as a child demonstrated a love of reading and drama. He studied at Upper Canada College and Queen's University before leaving Canada to study at Oxford, in England. There he met his wife, Brenda Matthews. He returned to Canada, teaching at Trinity College and writing and acting prolifically. He became one of Canada's most renowned and respected authors, many of his books drawing on themes from his own life: his childhood in a small town, his religious conversion from Presbyterianism to Anglicanism, and his love of stage performance, academics, and learning. He died in Toronto a highly decorated and famous author.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The novel spans both WWI (in which Dunstan Ramsay fights) and WWII as well as the Great Depression. It examines the psychological effect of these events on the lives of individuals throughout Canada and Europe, often referring to the thinking of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, whose work was influential in the West during WWI and afterward. In many ways the novel constitutes an examination of the psychological and spiritual content of historical accounts of the prewar and postwar periods.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Texts referenced in the book are usually religious or mythological in nature. The Bible (especially the Old Testament) is referenced repeatedly, and compared to fictive or mythological texts like Arabian Nights or various Greek myths. The novel is interested in the differences and similarities between fictional and factual writings, and in historical writing (including biography and autobiography) as a kind of art form.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Fifth Business*
- **When Written:** 1969-1970
- **Where Written:** Canada
- **When Published:** 1970
- **Literary Period:** Postwar literature
- **Genre:** Conceptual / speculative fiction, historical fiction, postwar literature.
- **Setting:** Deptford Canada, Europe, South America.
- **Climax:** Dunstan finally confronts Boy about his role in the Dempster's tragic lives. Boy astonishes him by revealing he doesn't even remember the Dempster's existence.
- **Antagonist:** Percy (Boy) Staunton
- **Point of View:** First person (Dunstan Ramsay)

EXTRA CREDIT

That's Not All. *Fifth Business* is only the first and most famous installment of The Deptford Trilogy. All of the books focus on the effects of the same single event: a snowball striking Mary Dempster in the head.

PLOT SUMMARY

The novel takes the form of a letter written by Dunstan Ramsay to the Headmaster of Colborne College, where Dunstan is a teacher. A recent article in the school newspaper has portrayed Dunstan as dull and boring, and he wishes to correct this perception by telling his strange, marvelous, and complicated life story to the headmaster.

He begins with the night in the small town of Deptford Ontario that Percy Boyd Staunton threw a snowball at him, but instead hit the head of Mary Dempster, who is pregnant. Mary then prematurely gives birth to her son Paul as a result of the accident. Her husband, Amasa Dempster, a devout Baptist minister is burdened by his wife after the accident, for the blow to the head makes her "simple." Mrs. Ramsay, Dunstan's mother, takes care of Mrs. Dempster, pitying her because she has become ill equipped for sensible domestic life and because her husband's religion prevents him from thinking clearly and helping her.

Dunstan also takes care of Mary and looks after Paul after school. He comes to love Mrs. Dempster, partially because he feels responsible for her misfortune. Dunstan works in the library as a child, and develops a love of learning, fantastical stories, mythology, and magic. He teaches Paul magic tricks, but this backfires—Amasa is furious that Dunstan has corrupted his son with "gambling tricks" and bans Dunstan from his home.

One night Mary Dempster goes missing, and Dunstan is part of the search party. He discovers her having sex with a tramp, and when questioned, she serenely confirms the sex was consensual. Amasa takes her home, resigns from the church, and moves her to a small cottage where he keeps her tied up. Mrs. Ramsay's sympathy for her is gone, and she forbids Dunstan to see her. Dunstan goes anyway, and the closer he

grows to Mrs. Dempster the more he believes there is something saint-like and holy about her.

Willie, Dunstan's brother, grows ill as a result of an old back injury, and one afternoon while Dunstan is looking after him, Willie stops breathing. He has no heartbeat, and Dunstan believes he is dead. He gets Mary Dempster, and she touches Willie and calls his name, and Willie wakes up. Dunstan tells the doctor and his parents what happened, but they call him foolish and wonder why he didn't seek out a doctor instead of Mrs. Dempster. His mother is especially furious, and demands that Dunstan choose between her and Mrs. Dempster. He chooses to enlist in the army.

WWI has begun, and shortly before he is shipped out Dunstan develops a timid romantic relationship with Leola, who is Percy's girlfriend, but Percy has been sent away to school because he was caught having sex with another young girl in town. Leola still loves Percy, but says she loves Dunstan, too.

Dunstan fares well in the war, remaining uninjured until one day he suffers a blow to his leg after taking out three German machine gun operators. As he lies on the battlefield, sure he will die, he sees a statue of the Madonna, but her face is the face of Mary Dempster.

Dunstan wakes up six months later from a coma, and finds he has lost his leg but has been awarded the Victorian Cross (the highest military honor awarded in Canada) and that both his parents have died in the influenza epidemic of 1918. He has a romantic relationship with his nurse, Diana Marfleet, but realizes she is too much like his mother and ends it on good terms. He goes back to Canada to find that Boy (Percy's new name) and Leola are engaged. Dunstan gets a degree in history, becomes a teacher, and has a kind of adult friendship with Boy, who often complains to him about Leola's inadequacies.

Meanwhile, Dunstan becomes interested in renaissance art and sainthood and travels around Europe seeking out new knowledge, leaning new languages, and writing books. He comes across a traveling circus and meets Paul Dempster, who has no interest in forming a relationship with his mother, who has gone insane since he left and Amasa died from the flu, and who is living with her Aunt Bertha.

Back at his school in Canada, Dunstan encounters the tramp who slept with Mary—his name is Joel Surgeoner, he is a charity worker, and he believes Mary's act miraculously reformed him. Thus Dunstan comes to believe that Mary has performed three miracles: she has reformed the tramp, brought Willie back from the dead, and appeared to Dunstan on the battlefield.

When Aunt Bertha dies, Dunstan, who has visited her and Mary consistently since he heard of their whereabouts, is named Mary's guardian. He has to put Mary up in a public hospital, and feels horrible about it, but continues to travel. During this time, Leola finds out Boy has been cheating on her, and she attempts suicide. She withers away for years until, during World War II, she dies of pneumonia. Dunstan continues to travel and have success, earning the respect and friendship of the Bollandists, a group of Jesuits who study Saints. His closest friend is Padre Blazon, who encourages him to keep investigating Mary Dempster's sainthood.

Dunstan takes a six-month leave to go to Mexico, where he meets Paul again, who is now a successful and famous magician. Dunstan is asked to write the autobiography of Eisengrim (Paul's stage name). During this time Dunstan has a sexual encounter with a hideous, devilish woman named Liesl, who tells him he is not living life and has yet to accept himself as a human being. This encounter is later remember by Dunstan as his encounter with the Devil, and he believes it was a crucial and formative event in his life—Padre Blazon will tell him that a friendship with the Devil is indeed a good thing. Dunstan finishes the book about Eisengrim after this encounter, and it is a huge success.

Dunstan borrows money from Paul to move Mary to a private hospital. He stupidly tells her that her son is still alive, and this drives her mad. She thinks Dunstan is keeping Paul away from her, and Dunstan can no longer see her without upsetting her. When Mary dies, Dunstan feels it is his fault and weeps for the first time since childhood. She is cremated, and Dunstan keeps the ashes in his room.

Eventually, Eisengrim brings his show to Canada, and performs at Colborne College. Dunstan introduces Boy to Eisengrim. The three go back to Dunstan's for a drink, and it is revealed that Boy doesn't remember the Dempsters ever living in Deptford. Dunstan reveals to story of the snowball to Paul, and Boy says Dunstan has made a big deal out of nothing. Dunstan shows Boy the stone that was enclosed in the snowball—he has kept it as a paperweight all these years. Paul and Boy leave together, and Boy is found dead in his car the next day, with the stone placed carefully in his mouth.

At the next performance of Eisengrim's show, an audience member asks the "brazen head"—the center of a fortune telling illusion put on by Eisengrim—who killed Boy Staunton. Liesl, the voice of the head, gives a cryptic answer, which Dunstan understands as implicating Boy, Paul, Mary Dempster, and him (Dunstan), in Boy's death. Dunstan has a heart attack. When he awakens in the hospital, there is a note from Liesl, apologizing for causing him trouble and inviting him to live out the rest of his days with Eisengrim's crew on tour. The letter to the headmaster concludes with this note.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Dunstan Ramsay – Dunstan (Dunstable) Ramsay is the narrator of the story, which takes the form of a letter to the

headmaster of Colborne College, where Dunstan works as a history teacher. Dunstan's life has been defined, it seems, by a single moment from his childhood. Percy Staunton threw a snowball at him, but he ducked so that the snowball hit the pregnant Mrs. Dempster, and the trauma caused her to go into early labor. Dunstan, a serious, lonely, and contemplative person, cannot forgive himself for his role in this accident. He eventually comes to believe Mary Dempster is a saint, capable of performing miracles. He devotes much of his life to the study of sainthood, getting a degree in history, and working as a teacher so that he can take advantage of the long summer breaks to travel Europe and study little-known saints. Dunstan is brilliant and good at his work, but struggles with forming human connections, and spends much of the novel learning how to love and how to give his life meaning.

Mrs. Mary Dempster – Mary Dempster is hit with a snowball at the beginning of the novel and her life is forever changed. Her son Paul is born prematurely, and it is suspected that the blow to the head had lasting mental effects—people in the town repeatedly say that she has become "slow" or "simple." Mary's husband (Amasa) is a devout Baptist minister who does his best to take care of his wife and son, but Mary ultimately betrays him by wandering out one night and having consensual sex with a tramp (this act is considered a miracle by Dunstan, for the tramp was forever reformed after that night). After this, Amasa keeps her tied up in her house, and when her husband dies and her son Paul runs away, she goes insane. She eventually dies in a mental hospital under the guardianship of Dunstan, whom she is incapable of recognizing.

Paul Dempster – Paul was born prematurely as a result of the snowball hitting his mother Mary's head. He is a frail child, who at an early age, and under Dunstan's tutelage, displays a talent for magic tricks. Mr. Dempster believes magic is sacrilegious and will not allow it in the house. Paul eventually runs away from home after being lured into a circus by Le Solitaire, who is an implied pedophile. He becomes a famous magician and illusionist, going by the name of Magnus Eisengrim. He eventually reconnects with Dunstan, whom he hires to write his magic persona's falsified autobiography. Through Dunstan he meets Boy Staunton again, whom he kills after learning that Boy threw the snowball that hit his mother and doesn't remember the incident at all, leaving the stone hidden in the snowball that struck his mother in Boy's mouth.

Mr. Amasa Dempster – Mr. Dempster is a devout Baptist preacher, husband to Mary and father to Paul. He is considered by many to be religiously devoted to a fault, possessing no judgment of his own and deferring always to God. In many ways his religious convictions and arguably good intentions nevertheless lead him to treat his family poorly, preventing Paul from practicing magic and restraining Mary in the house with a rope and harness after she betrays him by sleeping with the tramp. He eventually dies during the influenza epidemic of 1918.

Boy (Percy Boyd) Staunton – Boy grows from being a petulant and irresponsible young boy to an ambitious and egotistic man. He is a genius with finance and manages to avoid failure during the Great Depression. He receives honors in WWI, marries his childhood sweetheart, Leola, with whom he has two children, and is all but a celebrity. But despite all of this good fortune he is unhappy. He carries on multiple affairs, and is completely unfazed when Leola discovers this. After Leola dies, he marries another woman named Denyse, who helps him to a rocky but ultimately successful career in politics. Even this is not enough to make Boy happy, and he remains unfulfilled. Though he threw the snowball that injured Mrs. Dempster, he has no memory of their family at all. Boy dies in an apparent car wreck with the stone from the snowball in his mouth—he is most likely killed by Paul.

Willie Ramsay – Willie is Dunstan's older brother. As a child he suffered a back injury that led to kidney complications. He grows weaker and weaker, until one day when Dunstan is looking after him he dies—his heart stops and he grows very pale and cold. Dunstan runs to Mary's house and asks her to help. She touches Willie and repeats his name and he begins to breathe again. He gets healthy enough to fight in the war, where he is killed. Dunstan believes Mary performed a miracle and resurrected Willie.

Leola Cruikshank – Leola is the prettiest girl in Deptford, and early on develops a romantic relationship with Percy. When he goes away to boarding school after being caught having sex with their classmate Mabel, Leola promises to wait for him, but for a short time dates Dunstan before Dunstan goes off to war. Leola eventually chooses Boy and marries him, but as he grows more and more successful she realizes she is not a good match for him, and becomes depressed. She attempts suicide after finding out about Boy's affairs, but survives. She becomes ill some years later, and dies. Dunstan suspects she left the window in her bedroom open to accelerate her own death.

Liesl – Liesl is a hideously ugly but highly intelligent woman who manages Paul's magic show. She has read Dunstan's work on saints and chooses him to write the autobiography of Magnus Eisengrim. Dunstan is physically repulsed by her, yet he admires her intellect. One night she tries to seduce him, but Dunstan fights her off. She comes back to apologize, and tells Dunstan his greatest error in life is learning how to love his work and Mrs. Dempster, and nothing and no one else. Dunstan sleeps with her after this conversation. Later, he will tell Padre Blazon that he met the devil in the form of Liesl, and that she taught him how to live with and enjoy the devil without compromising his own morality (or making a "faustian" bargain).

Faustina – The beautiful assistant to Magnus Eisengrim. Faustina is portrayed as a purely physical being. Dunstan admires and loves her from afar, knowing she has a kind of

relationship with Paul. One night, however, he sees Faustina and Liesl engaging in various sexual acts with one another. Liesl eventually explains that Faustina's purpose in life is to enjoy physical love in every form.

Padre Blazon – Padre Blazon is an old and eccentric member of the Jesuit group of scholars with whom Dunstan studies for a time. Dunstan has a particularly close relationship with Padre Blazon, whose understanding of Christianity, faith, and God is unusual and thoughtful. Padre wishes Jesus had lived to be an old man—for he is an old man himself, and realizes there is nothing in the teachings of Christ that tells us how to be old. He advises Dunstan on how to handle and think about Mrs. Dempster's sainthood. He dies an elderly but still energetic man, and tells Dunstan on his deathbed that he has finally figured out how to be old.

The Headmaster – The headmaster is the recipient of the letter the novel comprises. He was selected over Dunstan because he was perceived to be more "normal" and socially palatable. Dunstan writes to him after seeing an article about himself in the school paper that he believes does not do his life justice. He wants the Headmaster to know his story and therefore carry on his life's meaning.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mrs. Fiona Ramsay – Dunstan's mother is a severe and highly capable woman who demands utter obedience from Dunstan. Though Dunstan does not believe he loves his mother, he does feel guilty about disobeying or lying to her. Mrs. Ramsay dies of the influenza epidemic while Dunstan is abroad fighting in the war.

Mr. Alexander Ramsay – Dunstan's father runs the print shop in town, and is a very sensible man who does his best to care for his family. He is very disappointed in Dunstan when he enlists, because he knows how that decision will hurt Mrs. Ramsay. He also dies in the influenza epidemic.

Dr. Staunton – Boy's father is similarly concerned with status and success. He is a successful man, but when his son grows more successful than him, he resents it.

Joel Surgeoner – Joel is the tramp who is caught sleeping with Mary Dempster. The event reforms him entirely, and he becomes a devout and generous Christian who runs a charity center for the homeless.

Diana Marfleet – The pretty, romantic nurse with whom Dunstan has a relationship following his coma. She is the first person Dunstan has sex with, as well as the first intelligent woman he interacts with. Nonetheless, he never fully loves her.

Denyse Hornick – Denyse is Boy's second wife, an ambitious and goal-oriented woman who helps him into his career in politics. Her personality is quite similar to Boy's, and though they are a better match than Boy and Leola were, Boy also grows unhappy in his marriage to her.

Milo Papple – Milo is the class clown of Dunstan's class and eventually becomes the town barber. He updates Dunstan on the town gossip after Dunstan returns from the war.

Mrs. Staunton – Percy's mother is a doting woman whom the town believes spoiled her son.

Mabel Heighington – Mabel is known for her promiscuity and is eventually caught sleeping with Percy.

Mrs. Heighington – Mabel's mother, who catches her sleeping with Percy and is mortified.

Cece Athelstan – The degenerate member of one of the wealthiest families in Deptford. Cece harasses Mrs. Dempster after she is found with a tramp.

Le Solitaire – The circus master who lures Paul into running away and becoming a magician. It is repeatedly implied that he is a pedophile and that Paul learned magic in exchange for sexual favors.

Father Regan – The catholic priest in Deptford. Dunstan goes to him after the war to ask about the possible sainthood of Mrs. Dempster, and Father Regan finds it ludicrous that a Presbyterian like Dunstan would have anything to say anything about saints.

David and Caroline – The children of Boy and Leola. David eventually becomes a student and Colborne College, were Dunstan teaches.

Bertha Shanklin – Mrs. Dempster's aunt, who cares for her after Mr. Dempster dies.

Orpheus Wettenhall – The lawyer who executes Bertha Shanklin's estate. He is an avid hunter, who maintained appearances even when he lost most of his wealth in the depression. He eventually kills himself with a hunting rifle.

Dr. McCausland – The doctor who delivers Paul Dempster and looks after Willy Ramsay. He mocks Dunstan for believing that Willy was brought back from the dead.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

RELIGION, FAITH, AND MORALITY

Dunstan Ramsey's account of his life involves at almost every stage questions about religion, faith, and morality. Can one have faith without religion

(or religion without faith)? Does being faithful or religious make us morally upright?

Families in Dunstan's small hometown of Deptford, Ontario are divided by religion: one's social life and community is determined by whether one is Presbyterian, Baptist, Anglican, etc. Though Dunstan's family is Presbyterian, they provide help to the Baptist Mrs. Dempster when a snowball (meant for Dunstan) hits her in the head and causes her to prematurely give birth to her son Paul. Dunstan's exposure to Mr. Dempster, a Baptist preacher, teaches him that "deeply religious" men are not always faithful or moral men. Dunstan believes Mrs. Dempster—though she is aloof and far too trivial for this hardened protestant town's taste, and ultimately is discovered having consensual sex with a tramp—is more godly than her devout husband. In fact, Dunstan becomes convinced that Mrs. Dempster is a saint, and perceives her to perform three miracles: bringing Dunstan's brother Willy back from the dead, reforming the tramp with whom she has sex that night, and appearing to Dunstan in a kind of vision when he is an injured soldier during WWI. Dunstan's interest in saints (which is regarded by others as an illegitimate interest, since he is a protestant) drives the course of his whole life—he becomes a scholar of sainthood, and travels the world to better learn the stories of saints, allowing these stories to inform his faith and his moral decision-making.

The religion, faith, and morality of other main characters in the novel are also investigated at length. Paul grows up to be a magician—and his belief in the power of illusion is described as a kind of faith by Dunstan, who in many ways shares this belief. Boy Staunton (who threw the snowball that hit Mrs. Dempster, but doesn't remember doing so) is in many ways an investigation of moral and religious failure. He is indecisive about religion, ultimately declaring himself an atheist. Dunstan maintains that Boy only became an atheist because he worshipped himself as God, and was disappointed.

The book concludes decisively that there is nothing inherently moral about religion, though it does stress the importance of faith to a person's moral fiber as well as his self-knowledge, self-love, and self-discovery. In other words, the book posits that in coming to find and know our own personal faiths, we come to find and know ourselves. In many ways the novel (structured as a letter from an old man, desperate to reveal that his life has significance) is an investigation of how our lives come to have meaning; Davies' conclusion is that faith (whether it be in saints, God, magic, or anything else) is crucial to this sense of meaning.

GUILT AND SACRIFICE

The internal conflict driving the story is one based in guilt: Dunstan feels responsible for Mrs. Dempster's premature labor (since the snowball that hit her was meant for him). This guilt compounds over the course of the story: subsequent misfortunes also seem linked to Dunstan's behavior. He is banished from the Dempster's house for teaching Paul magic (something to which Mr. Dempster is religiously opposed). He is the one that discovers Mrs. Dempster with the tramp, leading to her imprisonment by her husband. In fact, everything he does seems to have some kind of tangential effect on the life of Mrs. Dempster, who eventually goes insane and dies after spending most of her life in a mental hospital. Conversely, Dunstan begins to think of his own hardships as sacrifices he's made to atone for his guilt. He believes in some ways that his leg—lost during the war—is a kind of cosmic punishment for his role in the unlucky accident involving Mrs. Dempster.

Another major tension in the novel concerns the fact that Boy Staunton, who actually threw the snowball that hit Mrs. Dempster, feels no guilt at all. In fact, it is revealed at the end of the story that Boy has completely forgotten about the Dempsters' entire existence. Boy still is forced to make a sacrifice in atonement, however—Paul Dempster eventually kills Boy Staunton after Dunstan confronts Boy about his role in Paul's life. This death is rendered directly symbolic by the fact that Paul places the stone that was in the snowball (which Dunstan has kept) in Boy's mouth the night of his death.

Much of the fortune and misfortune in the novel is framed by Dunstan's letter as a kind of cosmic back-and-forth between guilt and sacrifice, wrongdoing and atonement. The book therefore offers a way for the reader to understand how we sometimes cope with or comprehend tragedy. The novel spans two world wars and the Great Depression, events that were characterized by irrational—in fact incomprehensible—loss and degradation. Accordingly, the book's discussion of guilt can be read as an explanation of how its narrator learned to rationalize the irrational. Perhaps it should not come as a surprise that Dunstan is so quick to attribute a kind of significance to every loss and hardship, when so much of his life and others' seems to be defined by such hardship. Guilt is not simply a psychological phenomenon in this book—it is historically meaningful. (This theme is closely tied to the themes of "History and Mythology" and "Love, Family, and Psychology.)

THE MEANING OF SUCCESS

Dunstan, Boy, Mrs. Dempster, and Paul—as well as several other less central characters—could all be described as "successful," though their lives do not resemble one another's in any way. The novel thus wonders what "success" is, and what it means to the individual.

Boy Staunton chases "success" his whole life—he succeeds in finding fortune, prestige, and popularity. He is a "genius" (to use Dunstan's word) at making his own luck, and fortune always seems to be on his side. But, he is nevertheless morbidly unfulfilled. He cheats on his first wife repeatedly because she can never be enough for him. And when he eventually earns a

seat in government he is even unhappier, though this is arguably one of the greatest successes of his life.

Dunstan repeatedly refers in his letter to the Headmaster to his own success, which he notes is too often overlooked by his students and his colleagues at Colborne College. He has won the VC for bravery in war (though he considers this a dubious kind of "success"), published several books, has learned many languages, has traveled the world, and has attained a great deal of knowledge which has allowed him to lead a rich spiritual life. Unlike Boy's success, this kind of success often goes unnoticed—but Dunstan, we can assume, is far happier and more fulfilled than Boy.

Mrs. Dempster is reviled by her town for being insane and morally bankrupt. Her sexual act with the tramp is regarded as a failure not only for her, but also for her husband, son, and entire community. Yet this act, we learn, reforms the life of the tramp, whose name is Joel Surgeoner. Both Joel and Dunstan consider this act—far from depraved and condemnable—a miracle. In some ways we are led to believe that Mrs. Dempster's spiritual success surpasses the success of anyone else in the novel. Her son Paul, who runs away to the circus (an act typically attributed to vagrants and "failures") goes on to become a famous magician, beloved and adored on an international scale. But it is unclear whether this success means much to Paul, who is the first to acknowledge that he has not led a charmed life by any means.

The novel asks us to examine how we understand success as individuals, how we understand it as a culture, and how a single person can be simultaneously a success and a failure. Davies paints a complicated picture of the meaning of success, and forces his reader to engage difficult questions about how best to define success.

HISTORY AND MYTHOLOGY

Dunstan eventually becomes a history teacher, a historian of sainthood, a biographer of Paul's falsified history, and (in the form of the letter that the book consists of) an autobiographer, a historian of his own life. Accordingly, the novel is deeply invested in a discussion of how history is made and recorded, how history and myth are intertwined, and how we determine what is "real" (factual) and what is imagined, fabricated, and reinterpreted—in other words "mythological"—about our past.

Dunstan clearly believes that history should not consist simply (perhaps "merely") of "fact." He resents his students who wish to take a more "scientific" approach to history, and values historical accounts that include marvelous or unexplainable happenings. This is shown foremost by his own history—He maintains that Mrs. Dempster brought his brother back from death, and that her face appeared to him on the battlefield. He cannot verify these rather mystical events as factual, but, in his estimation, this should not prevent them from appearing in his history. He also believes in fate, and in the idea of destiny—in other words, that history is driven by a mythological power that essentially directs us to a certain fate. He borrows much of this thinking from the mythology of the Greeks.

His interest in the history of sainthood is also indicative of his belief that history and mythology should not be kept utterly separate. He investigates the deeds and lives of saints as one might investigate the deeds and lives of more traditionally historical figures. This earns him skepticism from his friends and contemporaries, but he carries on nevertheless.

The novel thus suggests how we might best understand history—whether it is our own personal history, or world history—as something more than the progression of verified factual events. We cannot fully understand history without grasping the non-factual elements of experience: impressions, interpretations, and misunderstandings also make history. Given that the book is a fictional account of a mythological history of its protagonist, we could say that in many ways this discussion of history and mythology could emphasize the importance of fiction and literature itself. Perhaps Davies is warning us against a view of history that excludes artistic, literary, imaginative or fictional accounts (such as *Fifth Business* itself.)

LOVE, FAMILY, AND PSYCHOLOGY

The novel demonstrates a persistent interest in psychology—the works of Freud and Jung are often cited by several of its characters. Like these psychologists themselves, Davies is interested especially in the psychology of love and family.

Dunstan often tries to understand the psychology of his family dysfunction growing up—his relationship with his mother was not strong, yet he always felt guilty about lying to her as a child, and wonders if his attraction to certain women is a function of the Freudian oedipal complex (where the subject feels a sexual attraction for his mother.) And Boy's sexual promiscuity is also often described in psychological terms. Dunstan is less sexual than Boy, and has trouble comprehending Boy's relentless pursuit of adventurous sex.

There are many examples of split identities in this book—it is especially significant that Dunstan, Paul, and Boy all rename themselves. Dunstan often reflects on this as a kind of psychological phenomenon wherein the three of them all leave past versions of themselves behind and grow into new identities. This resembles discussions in both Freud and Jung about repression of childhood memories and the divided self—a concept (appearing in both Freud and Jung) that describes how the human psyche is divided into the conscious and unconscious, which together make up the self.

Mrs. Dempster's insanity is in many ways at the heart of the novel's conflict—and Dunstan's (perhaps neurotic) attachment to Mrs. Dempster is also a focus of the novel's psychological discussion. Dunstan's love life, though perhaps seemingly uneventful, is deeply psychologically complicated. In many ways the novel serves to describe Dunstan coming to understand himself and his psychological capacity to love not only his work but also other people—to love his family, his friends, the women in his life.

Published in 1970, *Fifth Business* was written at a time when the western interest in Freudian (and post-Freudian) psychiatry was still quite avid. Davies incorporates contemporary questions about the meaning and merit of psychological science—for psychology is yet another way we can understand ourselves and our humanity, and this book is in many ways an effort to do just that.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in blue text throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE STONE IN THE SNOWBALL

Percy packs a stone into the snowball that accidentally strikes Mary Dempster's head instead of Dunstan's. At the end of the novel it is revealed that Dunstan has kept this stone his whole life, unwilling or unable to discard it. This stone is finally placed (presumably by Paul) into the mouth of Boy Staunton after his murder (which is made—by Paul—to look like a car accident). The stone is a symbol for Dunstan's enduring guilt and sense of responsibility, as well as a symbol for Boy's complete ignorance and lack of responsibility. In this way it functions more generally as a symbol for the disparity in individual experience. The event containing the stone—the throwing of the snowball—is perceived completely differently by Dunstan and Boy. While it almost mystically shapes Dunstan's whole life, it doesn't even exist in Boy's memory at all. In a novel so dedicated to examining history and its meaning, the stone serves as a reminder that history is filtered through the psyches of the individuals who experience it.

DUNSTAN RAMSAY'S LEG

Dunstan's leg is lost due to a wartime injury. The injury occurs during a mission that Dunstan succeeded in only because he got lucky, in which he unintentionally snuck up behind a German Machine gun operator when he meant to head back to his own side. He is awarded the Victorian Cross for his heroism and bravery. The leg is a symbol for the chaos and irrationality of history, and of war especially. Dunstan cannot understand why he survived when he so easily could have died. He thinks of the leg as a kind of atonement for his role in Mary Dempster's misfortune. Thus the leg also stands for the human tendency to rationalize, our psychological need for explanation and cosmic order—perhaps the leg could be said to stand for faith itself. It is at the center of an effort to make sense of chaos, calamity, and chance.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *Fifth Business* published in 2001.

Part 1 Quotes

> But what most galls me is the patronizing tone of the piece—as if I had never had a life outside the classroom, had never risen to the full stature of a man, had never rejoiced or sorrowed or known love or hate.

Related Characters: Dunstan Ramsay (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

The passage introduces Dunstan Ramsay as an outspoken, energetic, somewhat curmudgeonly person, who teaches at a school. The conceit of the book is that Dunstan is writing a letter to his headaster, responding to a recent article in a newspaper that claims that Ramsay is a boring, old-fashioned, and generally uninteresting man. Ramsay takes great pains to correct the newspaper's position, writing a long, careful letter to the headmaster (the book itself) in which he explains his rich, strange, and complex life.

The passage sets the tone for the entire novel by endeavoring to show how ordinary things (or people, rather) often have extraordinary capabilities and histories. To his students, Ramsay seems like an ordinary, boring man, and yet his life has been full of passion and magic, even if the passion and magic haven't been shared with the people he lives among now.

> Can I write truly of my boyhood? Or will that disgusting self-love which so often attaches itself to a man's idea of his youth creep in and falsify the story.

Related Characters: Dunstan Ramsay (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

Ramsay is going to tell us (or rather, the headmaster) about his extraordinary life, and yet he worries that he won't be an unbiased source. Ramsay considers the possibility that, when talking about his life, he'll unknowingly or knowingly distort certain details in order to present himself as better (or at least different) than he really is.

Notice that the passage doesn't offer an answer to Ramsay's own question--in fact, once the question is raised, no answer could possibly satisfy readers! Because Ramsay is our only source throughout the novel, we'll have to take what he says with a grain of salt. Here, Davies seems to wink at readers, acknowledging that what we're about to see is not exactly real or trustworthy.

> I had made her what she was, and in such circumstances I must hate her or love her.

Related Characters: Dunstan Ramsay (speaker), Mrs. Mary Dempster

Related Themes:

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

Dunstan Ramsay forms an unusual attachment to Mrs. Dempster. A snowball is thrown at his head, and Dunstan ducks to avoid it: as a result, the snowball hits the pregnant Mrs. Dempster in the head, causing her to become "simple" and go into labor early.

Dunstan feels a strong sense of guilt for what he did to Mrs. Dempster--though of course, he didn't really "do" it at all. He thinks that he's responsible for her fate, and as a result, he concludes that he "must" either love or hate her. Dunstan's thought process might seem unusual, and yet because Mrs. Dempster is such a huge part of his life, whether he likes it or not, he's forced to make a such a drastic assessment of her. At time Dunstan is a somewhat comical character, we'll see, because he can't even entirely control what's happening around him, and yet his first instinct is always to take full responsibility. It is this sense of fatedness, responsibility, and guilt, that makes Dunstan feel a connection to Mrs. Dempster for so many years.

> Nobody—not even my mother—was to be trusted in a strange world that showed very little of itself on the surface.

Related Characters: Dunstan Ramsay (speaker), Mrs. Fiona Ramsay

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Dunstan learns an important, if ambiguous, lesson about human beings. Dunstan has become obsessed with magic tricks: he's still a child, and gets a lot of pleasure and wonder from making objects disappear and reappear. Dunstan plays with an egg and accidentally breaks it: a "crime" for which his mother beats him, only to apologize later, tearfully. Dunstan isn't sure how to interpret his mother's actions: his conclusion is that his mother's aggressiveness and affection are linked at the core, and that nobody can be entirely trusted or understood, not even his own family members.

The passage is a good example of the way that Davies conveys a sense of magic and enchantment without ever actually showing any magic: Mrs. Ramsay is a confusing, mysterious person, meaning that her personality itself is like the magic trick (she "transforms" anger into love in a flash; not a bad illusion). The passage is also a good summing-up of the novel's Freudian motifs (a broken egg, for example, is a classic Freudian symbol for fragmented motherhood and femininity, suggesting that Mrs. Ramsay somehow feels out-of-joint from her son).

> In later life I have been sometimes praised, sometimes mocked, for my way of pointing out the mythical elements that seem to me to underlie our apparently ordinary lives.

Related Characters: Dunstan Ramsay (speaker), Mrs. Mary Dempster

Related Themes:

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

Dunstan and his peers are sent out into the night to track down Mary Dempster, who's gone missing suddenly. Dunstan is sent out to the gravel yard at the periphery of his

community, and as he goes off into the night, he feels a sense of exhilaration: he's having an adventure.

Dunstan is smart enough to acknowledge that his sense of magic and wonder is totally arbitrary (it's all in his head, at the end of the day). And yet Dunstan seems proud of his ability to spin wonder and meaning out of the most trivial occurrences. Mrs. Dempster's disappearance isn't really much an adventure at all, but Dunstan*makes* it an adventure. He is already a historian, in a way, finding larger narratives and meanings within seemingly ordinary events.

Part 2 Quotes

I cannot remember a time when I did not take it as understood that everybody has at least two, if not twenty-two, sides to him.

Related Characters: Dunstan Ramsay (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

Dunstan is now fighting in the war (World War One), and one day he entertains his fellow troops by doing an impersonation of Charlie Chaplin, which everyone finds highly amusing. Dunstan's peers are amazed that Dustan can be so amusing--they'd always thought of him as a dry, humorless kind of person. One gets the sense that Dunstan is used to being taken for a humorless man, and then disproving his peers (just as he's doing with the headmaster in his long letter). It's even possible that Dunstan *enjoys* surprising people: he enjoys seeming ordinary and then revealing his "other sides."

Dunstan clarifies his point by noting that all people have many sides to their personalities: his point seems to be that it's impossible to know people completely--at best, we can know a couple of their "sides," but never the complete human being. Thus, we can never know the real Dunstan, the real Mrs. Ramsay, etc. As with magic tricks, so with people: we must preserve a certain sense of wonder and enchantment, accepting that there is always something more beneath the surface.

I felt that everything was good, that my spirit was wholly my own, and that though all was strange nothing was evil.

Related Characters: Dunstan Ramsay (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

In the midst of World War One, Ramsay is struck down in combat and sent to the hospital, where he spends the next half a year. Ramsay awakes in a hospital bed and learns that he was hurt on the battlefield. He's not shocked or traumatized by his experiences, however: he remembers seeing the apparition of Mary Dempsey just before he lost consciousness. Ramsay accepts that his life isn't fully in his control. And yet he *also* believes that he is in complete control of his own spirit: no matter what happens to his body, he'll maintain an inner strength and peace, rooted in his acceptance of magic and mystery.

Dunstan's beliefs in the independence of the spirit can be vague and frustrating, but it's clear that he believes that the world is a place of wonder. Dunstan tries to keep an open mind when he explores the world, even when he's a soldier risking his life in battle. He's an eternal optimist, who believes that everything is happening for a reason, even if the reason is very hard to see.

We are public icons, we two: he an icon of kingship, and I an icon of heroism, unreal yet very necessary; we have obligations above what is merely personal, and to let personal feelings obscure the obligations would be failing in one's duty.

Related Characters: Dunstan Ramsay (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

Ramsay is wounded in the line of combat in World War One but survives, even killing some Germans before he loses consciousness. He only gets into danger because he loses his way, and yet he's ultimately rewarded for his behavior with the Victorian Cross--the highest military honor awarded to Canadian soldiers. Here the King himself gives Ramsay the Victorian Cross. Ramsay isn't dazzled with his award, however--on the contrary, he's thrown into an existential crisis as he wonders *why*, exactly, he is being given an award. If he hadn't lost his direction, or if he'd been wounded a little earlier, nobody would think him a hero at

all. Total randomness led to Ramsay's receiving the award, but everyone treats him like a hero. Ramsay comes to see that, like the King, he's just impersonating a hero and playing a role, rather than *being* one.

If honor and achievement are random, is Ramsay's entire life random? Although Ramsay's achievements are always dictated by random chance, he seems to maintain a sense of control and independence in his own spirit. No matter what happens to him externally, we've seen, Ramsay is still the same person, deep down: happy, optimistic, worshipful, mystical.

❝ She had fallen in love with me because she felt she had made whatever I was out of a smashed-up and insensible hospital case.

Related Characters: Dunstan Ramsay (speaker), Diana Marfleet

Related Themes:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

Dunstan finds himself in the middle of a relationship with Diana Marfleet, the nurse who helped restore him to health. Dunstan thinks that Diana has come to love him because she took care of him in the hospital: as with plenty of other nurses, she's come to think of him as her own creation, almost her own child.

The passage has a heavy Oedipal flavor (in Freudian psychology, men feel a strong desire for the mothers, or for maternal figures; Diana could be considered one such maternal figure). The passage is also a challenge to Ramsay's philosophy of the soul: Ramsay, deep down, is the same person he always was (his spirit has remained intact, even as his body and his life change). And yet Diana thinks that she exerts control over Ramsay by virtue of having tended to his body.

Part 3 Quotes

❝ It was characteristic of Boy throughout his life that he was always the quintessence of something that somebody else had recognized and defined.

Related Characters: Dunstan Ramsay (speaker), Boy (Percy Boyd) Staunton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

The contrast between Boy and Ramsay couldn't be clearer. Boy grows up to be a conceited, successful person, who makes lots of money and succeeds in everything he does. And yet Boy defines himself by his outward success: his material wealth, his professions, and particularly his ability to become what people want him to be. At every turn, Boy measures himself against others'opinions and beliefs*about*him. On the other hand, Ramsay never achieves remotely the same success that Boy achieves--but he doesn't seem to care too much what other people think of him (even when he gets his medal from the King, he's strangely indifferent, thinking of the occasion as an example of the arbitrariness and meaningless of success). Instead, Ramsay maintains control over the purity of his own spirit: his life and his achievements in life are always secondary to his inner happiness. (One could argue that such a way of living is heavily influenced by Christian ideals.)

❝ I was rediscovering religion as well...The Presbyterianism of my childhood had effectively insulated me against any enthusiastic abandonment to faith

Related Characters: Dunstan Ramsay (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

Ramsay becomes obsessed with tracking down the mysterious statue that he thinks he saw just before he lost consciousness on the battlefield (the statue that, supposedly, looked just like Mary Dempster). As he researches the religious statues of Europe, Ramsay finds himself developing a passion for religion and religious studies itself. Oddly, he claims that by growing up in a strict Presbyterian home, he was "insulated" against enthusiastic faith.

What is the difference between religion and faith? Ramsay suggests that the Presbyterian, with all its tenets and rules, is designed to train Christians to be stoic, reserved, and orderly in all ways. To have enthusiastic faith, on the other hand, has nothing to do with following rules or prohibitions:

instead, faith comes from within (i.e., from Ramsay's spirit). Ramsay rediscovers his religious faith, it's implied, during his hunt for the statue, precisely because it's he and he alone who's embarked on such a quest--and because he's passionate about what he's searching for. (The journey, as the cliche goes, is more important than the destination.)

> I rather liked the Greek notion of allowing Chance to take a formative hand in my affairs.

Related Characters: Dunstan Ramsay (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

As Ramsay pursues the religious sculpture, his investigation is contrasted with the life of Boy. Boy converts to Anglicanism because he wants to please or rebel against the people around him (such as his father). Where Boy thinks in terms of external events, Ramsay thinks in terms of his own spirit and his faith. In turning away from the external world, Ramsay implies that he's putting his fate in the hands of random chance, like the ancient Greeks (supposedly).

In practice, what does it mean to submit to the power of Chance? Ramsay doesn't explain exactly what he means, but it's suggested that he sees the kind of political and worldly "climbing" in which Boy engages as futile, precisely because it ignores the supremacy of Chance in all earthly affairs. Although Ramsay describes his worldview as Greek, it's also somewhat characteristic of Christian theology: the material world is an arbitrary, uncontrollable place, so we should focus on our souls, putting our trust in the grace of God.

> "A fool-saint is somebody who seems to be full of holiness…but because he's a fool it all comes to nothing…because it is virtue tainted with madness, and you can't tell where it'll end up."

Related Characters: Father Regan (speaker), Dunstan Ramsay, Mrs. Mary Dempster

Related Themes:

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ramsay, obsessed with the potential sainthood of Mrs. Mary Dempster, goes to speak with a priest, Father Regan, about the issue. Ramsay describes Mary's supposed "miracles," and tries to convince Regan of his position. Regan, however, is highly skeptical of Mary's status as a saint, and his reasons for skepticism are interesting. Regan argues that Mary is a "fool-saint," not a real saint. A fool-saint, as he understands the term, is a person who's capable of seeming holy (and maybe even capable of performing holy acts), but who is too mentally unstable to be considered fully in control of their actions.

In other words, Regan believes that sainthood isn't just about external acts, as Ramsay seems to believe. A saint must accomplish miracles, but must also exemplify a certain state of mind and be a virtuous person. Someone who appears saintly but isn't really sane (like Mary) isn't really an appropriate model for human behavior--she's just stumbled upon holiness.

Part 4 Quotes

> Now I should be able to see what a saint was really like and perhaps make a study of one without the apparatus of Rome, which I had no power to invoke. The idea possessed me that it might lie in my power to make a serious contribution to the psychology of religion.

Related Characters: Dunstan Ramsay (speaker), Mrs. Mary Dempster

Related Themes:

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

After Ramsay is named the guardian of Mary Dempsey, he continues to believe that she is a saint. As such, he rejoices that the universe has given him the chance to "study" a saint in real life: he intends to explore what's going on in Mrs. Dempsey's mind, now hopeful that his investigations will make a contribution to the "psychology of religion."

It's characteristic of Ramsay that he doesn't take no for an answer. Even after people tell him that Mary isn't a true saint at all, he continues to believe that she is, and studies her life in the hopes of proving to other people that he's right. Ramsay is such an iconoclast because he makes his own meaning. Despite being a faithful, religious person with a lot of respect for other people's religions, he always returns to his own instincts and inclinations: thus, he

continues to believe that Mary is a saint because it's what his instinct and "faith" tell him to believe.

❝ Thus I learned two lessons: that popularity and good character are not related, and that compassion dulls the mind faster than brandy.

Related Characters: Dunstan Ramsay (speaker), Orpheus Wettenhall

Related Themes:

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, a prominent lawyer, Orph, has killed himself after his best client, Bertha, dies. Orph is a popular figure in the community, even after it comes out that he's been embezzling funds and stealing from his peers. Ramsay is shocked by the way Orph's own victims continue to think of him as a good man, and forgive his crimes and sins. Ramsay saysOrph's suicide teaches him that compassion is irrational, and that popularity and good character aren't necessarily related.

The passage confirms Ramsay's preexisting belief that external events don't reflect the true nature of a man's soul: Orph might be popular and successful, but he's also sinful. Second, it's interesting to see Ramsay level his criticism at compassion. Ramsay seems like a good, optimistic person, and yet he's suspicious of this kind of compassion because it's irrational. Ramsay feels something somewhat different from compassion: it's a kind of obsession, over which he feels he has no real control. Ramsay feels no real *compassion* for Mary; rather, he feels that it's his duty or his purpose in life to discover the secret of her saintliness.

❝ "What good would it do you if I told you she was indeed a saint? I cannot make saints, nor can the pope. We can only recognize saints when the plainest evidence shows them to be saintly."

Related Characters: Padre Blazon (speaker), Dunstan Ramsay, Mrs. Mary Dempster

Related Themes:

Page Number: 161

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ramsay meets with an elderly Jesuit named Padre Blazon. Blazon takes a very different view of sainthood than Father Regan did: unlike Regan, he thinks of sainthood as a fluid concept, to be determined by individuals, not just the Pope in Rome. Thus, if Ramsay believes that Mary really is a saint, then in some sense she truly is.

Blazon's philosophy of religion is more individualistic than Regan's: he sees *faith* (i.e., the personal, close relationship between man and God) as being more important than a specific set of rules and practices (i.e, a complex beatification process). The very fact that Ramsay explains himself to Blazon indicates that he agrees more with Blazon's philosophy: instead of stopping when Regan tells him to stop, Ramsay continues looking for a religious authority who'll tell him that Mary is, indeed, a saint.

Part 5 Quotes

❝ Why do people all over the world, and at all times, want marvels that defy all verifiable facts?...The marvelous is indeed an aspect of the real.

Related Characters: Dunstan Ramsay (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 186

Explanation and Analysis

This passage could well be a thesis statement for the entire novel. Ramsay wonders aloud why people think of magic and wonder as being somehow "supernatural." Why, in other words, should a wondrous natural phenomenon like lightning or flight be thought of as normal, while something like resurrection or reincarnation be thought of as wondrous? The marvelous, Ramsay argues, is really just a part of the real. The only reason we think of reality and wonder as being different things is that we're ignorant of the true nature of the world: as with people, we only see one "side" of things, and therefore neglect the other sides.

The passage is also a good example of Ramsay's balanced, optimistic approach to living. Unlike most other adults, Ramsay doesn't give up on the concept of magic altogether. Instead of losing his childhood sense of innocence and wonder, Ramsay actually becomes *more* innocent and *more* curious in his philosophy of living; everything is a miracle, or a miracle in disguise. (All this makes us wonder why Ramsay

is so singularly fixated on Mary's sainthood: if everything is potentially wondrous, what makes Mary so special?)

"Life is a spectator sport to you."

Related Characters: Liesl (speaker), Dunstan Ramsay

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 208

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage the hideous Liesl confronts Ramsay about his feelings for the beautiful Faustina. Ramsay is concerned that if he shows physical affection for Faustina, his actions will offend Paul, who has a relationship with Faustina. Liesl accuses Ramsay of being passive in the face of reality: he just sits back and soaks everything in, not really committing to any one person, idea, or cause.

Liesl has a point. Ramsay thinks of himself as moving through life, guided by magical forces like chance and fate. He controls his own soul, and yet he seems remarkably indifferent to the external events of the universe, from war to suicide. Ramsay *does* concern himself with certain people, such as Mary, but even here, there's always the sense that he's holding back, placing more value in abstract concepts than in his relationships and feelings for individuals. Liesl sizes Ramsay up pretty well, even if she is otherwise seen as an almost devilish character.

"You make yourself responsible for other people's troubles. It is your hobby."

Related Characters: Liesl (speaker), Dunstan Ramsay

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 212

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Liesl and Ramsay have wrestled and argued with each other. Liesl explains that she wanted to have a fight with Ramsay to prove to him that he was a human being, not a concept or a spirit. Liesl knows all about Ramsay's life, and she's determined that his problem is his desire to make himself responsible for other people at all costs. We've seen this firsthand: he blames himself for other people's problems, even when he had little or nothing to do with such problems (for instance, he blames himself for Mary's accident). Ramsay's desire to make himself responsible for everyone else, paradoxically, translates into a kind of distance from the world: because he sees himself as the scapegoat for everyone, he's a friend and lover to no one. Ramsay's mistake is to make a distinction between his life and his spirit: he thinks that what happens to him in real life is ultimately irrelevant to his spirit, and therefore he doesn't really care about it. Liesl wants to unite Ramsay's spirit and his external life, showing him that one can only be truly human by savoring the here-and-now.

"It is not spectacular but it is a good line of work...Are you Fifth Business? You had better find out."

Related Characters: Liesl (speaker), Dunstan Ramsay

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 214

Explanation and Analysis

In this important passage, Liesl tells Dunstan that he's meant to be the "fifth business" in life. Dunstan has an important part to play in his peers' existences: he's not really the hero of his own life, nor is he the antagonist or the comic relief. And yet Dunstan must eventually play a different role in life (a role that Liesl nicknames the "fifth business"--a character that doesn't fit a traditional role, but is nonetheless crucial to the plot). In order to find out what his "fifth business" is, Dunstan must actively engage in life, instead of standing aloof from others.

The passage is interesting because of the way Liesl both challenges Dunstan's beliefs and reconfirms them. Dunstan already believes in the notion of fate; the idea that people just play roles in life, which have been written for them by other people (or God, if you prefer). And yet where Ramsay thinks that he should escape his role by maintaining a stoic control over his own spirit, Liesl insists that he should try to explore his role in life (the role of fifth business). In short, Liesl and Dunstan seem to believe in two different version of fatedness: Dunstan thinks of fate as something to be accepted passively, with the help of one's spirit. Liesl, on the other hand, thinks that fate requires human beings to try hard and play an active role in life: just because life is fated doesn't mean that we get to put our feet up.

Part 6 Quotes

"*The Autobiography of Magnus Eisengrim* was a great pleasure to write, for I was under no obligation to be historically correct or weigh evidence.

Related Characters: Paul Dempster (speaker), Dunstan Ramsay

Related Themes:

Page Number: 215

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage we learn that Dunstan has finished writing an autobiography of the magician Magnus Eisengrim, who's really Paul Dempster: a man Dunstan knows quite well (and whom he introduced to magic years ago). Dustan cheerfully notes that writing the book was fun because he didn't have to be truthful at all. The notion that Dunstan could 1) write someone *else*'s autobiography, and 2) not be truthful in such an autobiography, is pretty funny--but there's also a serious point being made here. Whether he's dealing with spiritual truth or literal truth, Dunstan takes great liberties. He creates his own reality, using pleasure, instinct, and a kind of loyalty to storytelling as his guiding principles, rather than fidelity to "reality." In short, he blends mythology with history, and sees little different in the two.

Boy had always been fond of the sexual pleasure that women could give him, but I doubt if he ever knew much about women as people.

Related Characters: Dunstan Ramsay (speaker), Boy (Percy Boyd) Staunton

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 220

Explanation and Analysis

Boy, we're told, marries someone new, but Dunstan isn't optimistic about their chances for happiness. Dunstan knows Boy pretty well at this point, and he claims that Boy is more interested in women as objects than he is in women as human beings: as far as he's concerned, women are just devices to help him toward sexual gratification.

It's important to take Ramsay's critique of Boy's sexism with a grain of salt. While Boy is in many ways the principle antagonist of the story, our impressions are filtered through the prism of Ramsay's own experiences and perceptions, to the point where we really don't know anything about him. In many ways, Ramsay's critique of Boy sounds a lot like the critique we could make of Ramsay himself: he's clueless around women, and never really understands them as people (although his encounter with Liesl could be interpreted as a turning point). As the novel goes on, Ramsay seems to become more confident in the legitimacy of his own philosophy of life, and more critical of Boy's: as he sees it, Boy lives for eternal pleasure, and fails to be truly content because he's too invested in what he can "get out of" other people (sexual gratification, for example).

"You created a God in your own image, and when you found out he was no good you abolished him. It's a quite common form of psychological suicide."

Related Characters: Dunstan Ramsay (speaker), Boy (Percy Boyd) Staunton

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 227

Explanation and Analysis

In this confrontational scene, Boy and Ramsay finally argue with one another about the ways they've lived their lives. Ramsay notes that Boy has become an atheist: in Ramsay's view, Boy has given up not only on God, but on himself, and on life. Boy has always been a narcissist: he was his own God. Now that Boy has seem himself as he truly is (flawed, vain, weak), he naturally gives up on "God" as well.

Ramsay's interpretation of Boy's life is insightful in the way it associates atheism with narcissism. Some religious people (like Dunstan, apparently) argue that an atheist is a person who values nothing more highly than human life, and his own human life in particular (this is a debatable interpretation, however). The passage also makes the paradoxical point that people who live "for other people" (i.e., trying to please or impress them) may be *more* narcissistic and self-hating than people like Ramsay, who seem to set themselves apart from worldly concerns and embrace their own souls. Because Boy has no real respect for himself, he can't have any respect for other human beings, and so he treats others as mere objects.

"Come to Switzerland and join the Basso and the Brazen Head. We shall have some high old times before The Five make an end of us all."

Related Characters: Liesl (speaker), Dunstan Ramsay

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 252

Explanation and Analysis

The novel ends ambiguously, with Dunstan recreating the letter he's received from Liesl, the woman who tried to bring him enlightenment (but who was also presented as a devil-figure). Liesl wants Dunstan to join up with her and Eisengrim, so that they can travel around the country performing magic and discovering their own unique form of spirituality.

The implication of the passage is that Dunstan's enlightenment is a constant, ongoing process, rather than a distinct event. Dunstan has learned to invest himself in other people, thanks to Liesl's mentorship, and yet he's still a neophyte. It's suggested that after writing his letter he chooses to rejoin Liesl and discover what it means to invest himself in his relationships with others (rather than holding his soul aloof and believing in destiny, as he had previously). The biggest surprise of the novel is that we're never given an entirely satisfying account of what the "fifth business" is: instead of telling us the solution to the mystery, Davies suggests that Dunstan must struggle and act in order to find out what his role in life is (if, indeed, he really has one). It's important to recognize that the end of the novel is really the segue into the second book in the trilogy: we're left with a lot of questions, but perhaps some of the questions will be answered in the later books.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1: "MRS. DEMPSTER"

The first chapter of the book is preceded by a quote attributed to "Tho. Overskou" which defines "Fifth Business" as describing those roles that are not of the hero or heroine, confidante or villain, but are nevertheless crucial to the unfolding of a drama. "The player who acted these parts was often referred to as 'Fifth Business'"

Thomas Overskou is a Dutch Playwright, who does indeed exist, but Davies has admitted this quote is one he made up and attributed to Overskou. This can be seen as a rather playful opening to a book interested in breaking history apart from fact, and asserting that the factual account and the true account are not always the same.

1. The book opens with narrator Dunstan Ramsay accounting for the exact date and time that his "lifelong involvement" with Mrs. Dempster began. Young Dunny (short for Dunstable) has been spending the afternoon sledding with his friend, Percy, who is angry that Dunny's sled is faster than his even though it is old and inexpensive. Dunny decides to simply ignore Percy's taunts and heads home so as not to be late for dinner. Percy follows him through the streets, yelling insults. Dunny senses that Percy is about to throw a snowball, and he steps in front of Mr. and Mrs. Dempster, imagining Percy will not throw if there is a chance he might accidentally hit someone other than Dunny. He throws anyway, and Mrs. Dempster is struck in the head. Mrs. Dempster falls to the ground in pain, and Dunny immediately feels guilty. Percy is not seen.

This is the central event of the book, around which the drama of Dunstan's life will unfold. Percy, already greedily concerned with the relative success of his expensive sled, attacks Dunny, but Mrs. Dempster is struck instead. Dunny's guilt is instant, whereas Percy, perhaps the more obviously guilty party, vanishes right after he releases the snowball. There is a significant kind of symmetry here: just as Percy vanishes from the scene, the scene itself will vanish from Percy's memory (as we will discover at the end of the novel.) Dunny, on the other hand, will carry his guilt through the rest of his life.

Mr. Dempster asks Dunny for help and he agrees. Mrs. Dempster is put on the sled and Dunny pulls it as Mr. Dempster walks alongside it comforting Mrs. Dempster, who cries like a child. When they arrive at the house Mr. And Mrs. Dempster go inside and Dunny is not asked to join them. Dunny is late for dinner but has a good excuse, and tells his parents everything except that the snowball had been thrown by Percy, and was meant for him.

Dunny assists the Dempsters, and in so doing begins a life of atonement for what he believes he has done to them. Mrs. Dempster's psychological difference is already on display, as she cries, notably, "like a child." Mr. Dempster's love for her is also apparent. Here Dunny keeps his first secret, writing Percy out of the history as he tells his parents what happened.

Mrs. Ramsay is interested in the condition of Mrs. Dempster. She decides to go over and see if she can help. Dunny recognizes this as a curious decision—Mr. Dempster is the Baptist minister in this small Canadian town of Deptford, and the Ramsay are Presbyterian. Usually a Presbyterian family would stay out of the business of a Baptist family, and vice versa. But Mrs. Ramsay's unusual cleverness and competence has made her able to help in various medical situations before, and she has always felt sorry for Mrs. Dempster, who is not even 21 years old yet, and who is in Mrs. Ramsay's opinion "silly" and "utterly unfit to be a preacher's wife."

We begin to see how religion divides towns like Deptford. Though it should not seem strange that Mrs. Ramsay might want to help a neighbor in need, the fact that the two households belong to two denominations makes this kind of behavior surprising. Mrs. Ramsay's competence and judgmental attitude makes its first appearance in this scene—we get the sense that her compassion is real, but also that she enjoys being in control and displaying her talents.

Dunny stays up late and hears his mother come back to the house for supplies, saying that Mrs. Dempster has gone into premature labor, and that the birth is looking to be a difficult and dangerous one. Thus Paul Dempster is born.

The effects of the snowball and Dunny's part in the accident proliferate—not only has he caused Mrs. Dempster's injury, but he has also caused the premature birth of her child.

2. Dunstan explains to the headmaster, who is the ostensible recipient of this letter, why he begins his account with the birth of Paul Dempster. He explains that he has been deeply offended about an article in the school newspaper that describes him in dull terms—he is a devoted teacher though with an old-fashioned view of history. He is not even particularly mad that the article neglected to mention the fact that he was a recipient of the Victorian Cross, the highest military honor in Canada. Dunstan laments that the article treated him as though he had never known love, excitement, or hate. He maintains that he has been cast in the "glorious role of Fifth Business" and scornfully maintains that the young author of the article probably couldn't even comprehend the meaning of the Fifth Business if he tried.

This interjection from Dunstan as an adult (the letter-writing Dunstan who is narrating this story of his life) reveals a great deal about his personality and motivations. He resents that the school newspaper has simplified his life and his mind, and glossed over his successes. He contextualizes the opening quote by asserting that he has been cast in the role of "Fifth Business," calling this appointment "glorious"—a word with a distinct religious connotation. We begin to see a picture of Dunstan as a psychologically complex man who is successful according to his own definitions.

Dunstan concludes to the Headmaster that he must lay down his strange life, its truths and its illusions, so that someone may understand he is not what his meager reputation among his students suggests he is. He writes that he hopes his account of the night of Paul's birth has already started to convey the "extraordinary" nature of his story. He maintains that he will try to accurately describe his own boyhood, but notes that men are often incapable of being honest about their pasts, as their self-love skews their perception.

We learn the nature of the account we are reading—though it is a life story, a history, it will contain "extraordinary" elements, strange realities, and illusions. Dunstan does not seem to think that any of these elements contradict the nature and function of "history," He does, however, comment that the psychological reality of ego and self-love might lead him to misremember his childhood.

3. Deptford is a tiny Canadian village containing five churches: Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Roman Catholic. There are two doctors, Dr. McCausland and Dr. Staunton, Percy's father. The village was built by the Athelstan family, who made their fortune in lumber some years ago.

Tellingly, Dunstan begins his description of Deptford with a list of Deptford's churches, then proceeds to mention the townspeople who have achieved notoriety and success. Deptford is a town defined by religion and social hierarchies.

Dunny's father owns a paper, *The Deptford Banner*. This puts their family in a good social and economical position, and they live a modest but pleasant life. The family is known for its common sense and cleanliness, and they are generally respected by everyone in the town.

The Ramsays are not too far down in this hierarchy, and enjoy their lives. Their good standing here is described in terms of Mr. Ramsay's employment and the public's opinion of their life and home.

4. Mrs. Ramsay enjoys being able to help with the birth and care of Paul, because it puts her competence and ability on full display. Paul is born roughly 80 days premature, and when he is born, small and weak, Mr. Dempster wants to dip him in water to baptize him. Mrs. Ramsay and Dr. McCausland forbid this, and so the minister must settle for simply sprinkling some water on the infant's forehead.

Amasa Dempster's almost absurd devoutness shows through here—his first thought when Paul is born, weak and fragile, is to dunk him in water. It is as though he comprehends religious realities and nothing else—his faith seems to blind him. Notably, this is the first of many times that Amasa will display his religion by attempting to force it on others.

A baby has never been born so prematurely in this town, and many expect that Paul will not survive. Dr. McCausland and Mrs. Ramsay do everything to keep Paul healthy, keeping him warm and feeding him while Mr. Dempster prays over his barely conscious wife as though she is about to die. He also prays that God will, if necessary, accept both his wife and son into heaven, though they are still both alive. Finally Dr. McCausland tells him he must stop with such nonsense. Mrs. Ramsay shakes her head sharply when she tells the rest of her family about Mr. Dempster's behavior.

Mr. Dempster is no use in keeping his wife and child alive because he is too busy preparing them spiritually for their deaths. Dr. McCausland's reproach and Mrs. Ramsay's disapproval confirm that Mr. Dempster's practices—though this town is a religious one—are abnormal. It is also notable that yet again, his religion seems to serve the purpose of control—he asks God to secure the fate of his family, even though his family is still alive. He seems to live only for the after life, not for this life.

The Ramsay's house becomes disheveled and disorganized as Mrs. Ramsay spends long days at the Dempsters, but Mr. Ramsay thinks his wife is a wonderful woman, and would never "do anything to prevent her from manifesting her wonderfulness." The hard work pays off, and Paul is finally able to keep milk down. He begins to put on a modest amount of weight and grows slightly stronger, though it is doubted that he will ever be fully healthy. Mrs. Ramsay maintains that he is a fighter, and believes he will grow to be strong.

Against long odds, Paul Dempster's condition improves. More of the Ramsays family dynamic is revealed: Mr. Ramsay's adoration for his wife is unfaltering, and Mrs. Ramsay's headstrong approach to problem-solving is emphasized. Mrs. Ramsay is notably one of the few people who believe in Paul—this is a part of his own history that Paul will shut out as an adult.

All this time, Dunny is convinced that the premature birth of Paul Dempster is his fault. He talks to Percy about it, but Percy tells him that the snowball hit his head, as it was supposed to, and not Mrs. Dempster's—threateningly adding that Dunny ought to believe this story, too, or else. Dunny knows from the look on Percy's face that he is afraid, and that he will do anything to prevent the truth from coming out. So Dunny is left alone with his guilt, which makes it all the worse. His religious upbringing combined with the fact that he is just starting puberty makes his mind one in which guilt can utterly take over, and this is what happens. He lives with a persistent fear of sex, of his parents finding out about the smutty conversations he has with other boys, and feels responsible for "a grossly sexual act—the birth of a child."

Dunny's sense of guilt grows deeper and stronger. Percy rejects the idea that he is responsible for the accident, and gives Dunny a version of the story that exonerates both of them. Dunny cannot think this way, however, and is tormented by his feeling of responsibility. The narrative also points out that as an adolescent, Dunny's mind is more prone to guilt than a young child's or an adult's might be—this psychological thinking will continue in various ways throughout the novel. Notably there is a Freudian kind of emphasis on sex and its effect on the mind; to Dunny, everything in his life seems shamefully sexual.

One night a few months after Paul's birth Dunny overhears his mother telling his father that Paul will likely survive—but that Mrs. Dempster seems to be permanently mentally impaired from the blow to the head. She's "gone simple." Mr. Ramsay wonders who threw the snowball, and Mrs. Ramsay supposes that whoever it was, the devil guided his hand.

Another consequence of Dunny's actions makes itself clear. Mrs. Dempster has "gone simple"—a small-town euphemism for mental impairment. Mrs.. Ramsay's comment about the devil guiding the hand of whoever threw the snowball no doubt increases Dunny's fear and guilt.

5. As time passes, Percy's refusal to accept guilt eventually translates to Dunny's inability to blame him anymore—he comes to find himself alone responsible for Mrs. Dempster's condition.

Interestingly, Percy's refusal to accept guilt worsens Dunny's own feeling of responsibility. He begins to feel that he alone caused the accident.

Even before Mrs. Dempster suffered the blow to the head, she was perceived to be "silly" or strange. She smiled too much, and was often out in public even when she was pregnant. She seemed improperly happy when she was meant to be the shy and modest wife of a preacher. And Mr. Dempster was far too fond of her, helping her too willingly and sometimes even taking chores off her hands and doing women's work around the house.

Deptford's norms are further outlined in this passage. This small town is one in which affection, excitement, and love should be kept out of sight (we could perhaps call Deptford "repressed"). Even Amasa's marital love for his wife is deemed unseemly or strange.

Mrs. Ramsay always tried to help Mrs. Dempster learn how to do feminine work. She'd had a servant as a child and was not good at keeping house, mending clothes, etc. But Mrs. Ramsay agrees with the townspeople that Mrs. Dempster has become even more inappropriate after Paul's birth, going so far as to breastfeed him in front of Mr. Dempster and houseguests. Though they agree she is a good mother, they think she does not take it seriously enough.

Deptford's "repressed" mindset becomes increasingly clear—it is inappropriate that Mrs. Dempster would think to breastfeed in front of anyone, including her own husband. And Mrs. Dempster's charmed childhood is looked on as a kind of deficit—Deptford is a place where one should know how to work.

Dunny is tasked by his parents with looking after Mrs. Dempster and Paul most afternoons after school when Mr. Dempster cannot be there. The house and grounds are neglected, and Mrs. Dempster often gets into trouble by giving away too many of her belongings to neighbors or beggars, giving compulsively even when it is unnecessary or inappropriate. While the rest of town becomes increasingly off-put by the Dempsters, Mrs. Ramsay's compassion does not waver, and the Ramsays take care of the Dempsters in every way they can.

Dunny's atonement (which will be, as we will see, a lifelong process) continues as he is tasked with taking care of Mrs. Dempster and Paul. Mrs. Dempster displays a strange compulsion to give (a nod to her potential sainthood), to the extent that her generosity is off-putting to their neighbors. But, to Mrs. Ramsay's credit, she commits to taking care of the Dempsters in every way she can. Though Paul will not remember this generosity as an adult, Dunstan certainly notices it.

6. Dunny faces some social rejection due to his time spent with the Dempsters, but he has a quick wit and a way with words, and is able to defend himself against taunts. He has an insult saved for Percy should Percy ever give him any trouble: Mrs. Staunton calls her son "Pidgy Boy-Boy"—this would be a terminal embarrassment for Percy, and Dunny enjoys knowing he has the power to humiliate him. Dunny feels he needs this sense of power, as his duties at the Dempster's house are depriving him of certain parts of his childhood—he is not playing games after school or dating girls, though he does have a slight crush on Leola Cruikshank.

Dunstan's proud account of how smart he was as a boy perhaps suggests to us that his ego is re-shaping his boyhood. We are asked to wonder how "accurate" this history is. Dunstan also calls attention to the psychologically abnormal aspects of his childhood—he cannot develop relationships with friends, and he cannot pursue girls. He does develop a crush, however, on Leola (an ill-fated choice, as we will see.)

But Dunny believes he is truly in love with Mrs. Dempster. He loves her not in the way young boys often love older women, in a trivial, confused sort of way, but in a painful, real way. He believes he has made her into what she is, and this makes him love her (for he believes his only other option is to hate her.) Because he loves her, he defends her against the insults of his classmates, especially Milo Papple, a class clown who possesses very little wit. Dunny hears him insult Mrs. Dempster and insults him cleverly. His classmates then refrain from talking about Mrs. Dempster in front of him, but he knows they do it behind his back, and this makes him feel all the more isolated.

A "real" passionate love for Mrs. Dempster grows out of Dunny's guilt. He believes that, psychologically, he must either hate or love Mrs. Dempster, since he has "made her what she is." He speaks of creating her and caring for her as though he is a parental figure (and his conviction that he must either love or hate her is distinctly reminiscent of the Freudian idea of Oedipal love). What's more, he becomes socially isolated by this love—his classmates, though they don't taunt him directly, implicitly reject him.

7. Dunny is thirteen, and should be getting the hang of the printing business. But he is clumsy with his hands, and does not excel at the job like his brother Willie does. Useless in the print shop, he instead gets a job at the front desk of the library, a job he much prefers. He likes helping other kids find what they are looking for, and when no one is at the library he can spend the afternoon reading. He becomes especially enamored of books about magic, and studies them devotedly, admiring and believing in the work of famous magicians throughout history.

Dunny's physical awkwardness drives him to work in the library, where he discovers what will be a lifelong love of magic. At this stage, Dunny begins seeing magic, illusion, and tricks with a kind of religious reverence. He pores over the texts as though they are sacred and studies them as though he is a devoted follower. He also appreciates the historical aspect of this study, and it is easy to see how his study of the history of magicians might prefigure his study of the history of sainthood.

Dunny becomes especially interested in slight of hand tricks, partially because they are the only ones that require few supplies. He practices with an egg stolen from home, and has some success, until one day he puts his thumb through it. His mother demands to know where the missing egg has gone, and he lies, claiming ignorance. She finds the yolk on his pants in the laundry, and she gets out the whip and strikes him on the shoulder. He commands her not to touch him. She becomes furious, chasing him around the house and beating him. They both cry, and she yells about how ungrateful he has become, how strange and arrogant his intellect is.

This confrontation between Dunny and his mother will have a lasting effect on Dunstan's psychological integrity. This is a moment of culminating defiance—Dunny is rejecting his mother as he grows into a man. They are mutually affected by this development—Dunny and his mother both cry, and his mother insists he has been acting especially defiant lately. The fact that such an intense fight erupts from the absence of a single egg suggests that tension has been building for a long time, as well as the degree of control Mrs. Ramsay expects to exert in her home.

Mrs. Ramsay locks herself in her room and cries after this episode. When Willie and Mr. Ramsay come home to find that no dinner has been made, they immediately side with Mrs. Ramsay, and Dunny is made to apologize to her. She forgives him, and hugs him and kisses him. Dunny does not know how to reconcile his mother's violence with her affection. As an adult Dunstan thinks Freud might help him understand his mother, but as a child the episode simply convinces him that nothing is what it seems on the surface.

Dunny does feel guilty about making his mother cry, and shows appropriate contrition. Nevertheless, he has learned from this experience that people are not what they seem—a doting mother one minute is perfectly capable of being an abusive mother the next. Dunstan guesses his mother's strange behavior might be explained by certain Freudian concepts—but his most important takeaway is that people are complicated; a person's psychology and personality are varied and conflicted.

8. The incident doesn't keep Dunny away from magic—in fact it makes him more enthusiastic. He takes up card tricks next, mastering a few simple illusions and sleights of hand. He chooses for an audience the young Paul Dempster—and displays his talent for teaching as he shows Paul how to do certain tricks.

Again Dunny's study of magic mirrors religious devotion: after a pronounced hardship, he becomes more devout, and even takes a kind of disciple. His talent as a teacher (this is ultimately his profession) thus seems to grow out of his spirituality.

Eventually Dunny progresses from card tricks to coin tricks, which are vastly more difficult. Dunny has clumsy hands and limited access to appropriately sized coins, but does his best anyway. One day Paul sees Dunny working on a sleight of hand trick that involves flipping a coin between two fingers and palming it—a difficult maneuver that Dunny struggles with. Paul listens to Dunny's explanation and then performs the move perfectly on his first try, his small hands prodigiously dexterous and smooth. Dunny is jealous, of course, but knows he cannot change anything and continues to teach Paul. Besides, he knows Paul has no friends, as the rest of the village dislikes his "queerness."

Paul, it turns out, is far better than Dunstan at sleight of hand tricks. Dunny ought to be jealous—this would be a normal response for an adolescent boy who is bested by a child much younger than him at his favorite hobby. But Dunny ends up being remarkably accepting—not least because he knows Paul has very few friends and struggles at school. Thus we have another example of atonement and sacrifice: Dunstan's teaching of Paul becomes a way to repay him after causing his premature birth.

9. Dunny's hatred is reserved for Mr. Dempster, whose first name is Amasa. Mr. Dempster's devout religiosity is something Dunny and others find strange and out of place. The intensity of Mr. Dempsters prayers strike many in the town as "indecent." Dunny often hears him asking God for strength in bearing his heavy burden—and knows he is talking about his wife. Mr. Dempster used to love her authentically; she used to be "the blood of his heart." But now he seems to love her "on principle."

The hatred that Dunny cannot feel for Paul or Mrs. Dempster (due to his feelings of guilt and responsibility) is instead directed towards Amasa. Dunny resents that Amasa calls Mrs. Dempster a "burden" in his prayers, and he recognizes that the only thing making Amasa "love" his wife is "principle"—a devotion to righteous conduct. Dunny therefore sees Amasa's love as forced and inauthentic.

One afternoon Mr. Dempster calls Dunny into his study and scolds him for bringing sin into his house by teaching Paul "gambling tricks" and making him into a cheat. What's more, Amasa has heard that Dunny has been telling Paul stories about saints (about which Dunny has been doing some reading.) This is, according to Amasa, encouraging "vile superstition." Mr. Dempster threatens to tell Dunny's parents, and Dunny agrees that maybe he should, knowing this is not a threat he will likely follow through on. Mr. Dempster responds by saying Dunny is never welcome in his house or near his family again.

Dunny's attempt to repay his debt to Paul has backfired: Amasa's staunch religious views reject magic tricks as sinful. Where for Dunny magic is a revelatory discipline, for Amasa it is cheap, and amounts to "cheating." What's more, Amasa's Baptist faith proscribes the worship of saints, and he is furious that Dunny would tell Paul about the Saints he has been reading about in the library. Yet all this raises the question of why Amasa feels the right to define what is a true history or Jesus versus "vile" superstitions. Why is Amasa wanting to dunk his just-born son in water better than Dunny's magic or stories about Saints?

Dunny is angry with himself for forgetting how much Baptists dislike cards and card-playing. And as for the stories about saints: he found them to be entertaining diversions, compelling and amusing, not unlike *Arabian Nights*. He is also hurt that Mr. Dempster reduced magic to mere gambling and cheating.

For obvious reasons this outcome is hurtful to Dunny, who now feels even more guilty for getting Paul in trouble and getting himself kicked out of the Dempster's life. But he still remains devoted to his interest in magic and sainthood, and we have the sense he will continue on with his study.

Dunny does not see much of the Dempsters after this. Every once in a while, he will see Mr. Dempster, looking more and more ragged and hunched. Mrs. Dempster will wander around town offering strange "gifts" of wilted garden vegetables to her neighbors—Mrs. Ramsay always accepts kindly. Dunny only sees Paul once, and he runs away crying. Dunny cannot see Mrs. Dempster or think of Paul without feeling guilt or sorrow, but he has no pity for Mr. Dempster.

The time following Dunny's conversation with Amasa is characterizes by more guilt and sadness. Mrs. Dempster continues to give compulsively (again her sainthood is suggested) and Mrs. Ramsay responds to her with affection and kindness—she is a compassionate mother once more. Mr. Dempster, despite his repeated prayers for strength, looks defeated.

10. On a night in October in 1913, Mrs. Dempster disappears. The village organizes a hunt for her, and Dunny is told by his mother to go help. Dunny feels he has been acknowledged as a man for the first time. They go to "the pit" a gravel yard owned by the railway company where tramps and other shady characters often gather. Dunstan has always considered the pit a kind of hell—as it is his wont to "point out the mythical elements that…underlie our apparently ordinary lives."

Dunny is recognized as a man by his mother, which makes him feel important. They search for Mrs. Dempster in the "hellish" gravel pit where trams and other ne'er-do-wells often reside. By comparing this space to Hell, Dunstan engages in what will become a characteristic activity: mythologizing everyday life, and mythologizing history itself.

The men spread out and begin to sweep across the pit in search of Mary Dempster. After about a quarter of a mile, Dunny hears a rustling in a clump of small bushes—he makes a sound that brings the men around him instantly. A light is shined through the branches, revealing a man having sex with a woman. He rolls off of her and the woman is Mary Dempster.

This moment of startling revelation again emphasizes the marvelous and perhaps fatalistic force that keeps bringing Dunny into the Dempster's lives—how appropriate that he is the one who discovers Mrs. Dempster, and reveals her indiscretion to everyone.

Someone points a pistol at the tramp and Amasa Dempster appears. He asks his wife, "'Mary, what made you do it?'" Her simple answer becomes famous in Deptford: "'He was very civil…And he wanted it so badly.'" Mr. Dempster takes her arm and walks her home.

This act, and Mary's explanation of it, will be interpreted by the townspeople as madness, but by Dunny and the tramp as miraculous. Questions of spiritual interpretation, and personal faith are centered on this moment. If generosity is to be treasured, is this not a most generous gift?

11. Mr. Dempster decides not to press charges against the tramp, who is driven out of town and told never to return. Mr. Dempster resigns as minister at Sunday services the next morning. The town's opinion of Mrs. Dempster has changed—she is no longer a benign if off-putting simpleton. She is a filthy adulteress. Even Mrs. Ramsay's position has shifted—she and Mr. Ramsay get in a loud fight about it. Mr. Ramsay accuses his wife of not being charitable, and she responds that she is shocked the man she married would support such filthy, godless behavior. He calls her cruel, but eventually agrees that the family will provide no more help to the Dempster's.

Dunny's realization that people are not what they seem and are capable of immense psychological contradiction is supported by the town's response to Mrs. Dempster's actions. Mrs. Ramsay, who has been nothing but compassionate and sympathetic to Mrs. Dempster, suddenly thinks her an irredeemable menace, and decides to refuse to give any more help. Mr. Ramsay identifies his wife's cruelty but complies with her demands anyway. This is a telling moment regarding the family's dynamic.

All of the women in Deptford seem to be horrified that Mrs. Dempster was not raped—decent women could be raped by tramps, but no decent woman would ever have consensual sex with one. Men who defend her are thought by women to be adulterers themselves. At school, boys pester Dunny about the details of what he witnessed in the pit, and Dunny tries to avoid the gossip but Cece Athelstan (the fat black-sheep son of the wealthy Athelstan family) and his crew of drunkards spread the story around. When the Dempsters move to a new house on the edge of town, a group of men with blackened faces throw a broom that's been lit on fire on the roof, but it doesn't catch. Cece's voice can be heard shouting for Mary to come outside. Dunstan wishes he could say Amasa Dempster came outside and faced them, but he can say no such thing.

More psychological and spiritual hypocrisy is evident in this passage. Deptford's moral system is one in which it is acceptable to think of rape as decent but consensual sex as depraved. This demonstrates not only a strange kind of sexual repression (once again easy to consider in Freudian terms) but also a glaring moral and spiritual hypocrisy: in the name of "decency," the townspeople have become indecent, forsaking kindness, compassion and understanding, instead turning to cruelty and violence. And Amasa, for all his praying for strength, demonstrates only weakness.

Mr. Dempster gets a new job as a bookkeeper at the sawmill. It is rumored that he keeps Mary tied up in the house, with a long rope that allows her to move from room to room but not go outside. Everyone in the town agrees that if she was not mad before, she is mad now.

Amasa's obligatory "love" for his wife turns into something sinister: he keeps her tied in the house like an animal in order to make sure she does not "transgress" again, or embarrass him again—even the townspeople who no longer care about Mrs. Dempster's well-being acknowledge that this is damaging treatment.

One day Dunny goes over to visit Mary. She is uneasy at first but then warms to him and they talk eagerly—she knows nothing about the outside world because Amasa does not have a paper delivered. Dunny goes over a few times a week and reads to her from the *Banner*, stories he thinks would interest her and bits of town gossip. He plays with Paul oftentimes, too, knowing that Paul has no playmates to speak of. It is understood they must keep these sessions a secret from Mr. Dempster, who likely still considers Dunny a bad influence.

Dunny takes a risk to go visit Mrs. Dempster—no doubt he continues to feel responsible for her misfortune and her son's isolation. He kindly keeps her updated on town gossip. Ironically, this kindness would likely be regarded as a "bad influence" by the devout Mr. Dempster, whose religion—though it guides everything he does—seems to prevent him from leading a moral or spiritual life.

Dunny must also keep this secret from his mother, who would be furious if she knew. But Dunny begins to realize that Mrs. Dempster is helping him as much as he is helping her. He cannot fully explain it: she seems to him to be unnaturally wise, but she was not philosophical. Rather, it seems to be a religious wisdom—but not religion as her husband understands it. Mr. Dempster sees religion as a thing to be imposed on others, where Mrs. Dempster seems to "live by a light that arises from within." Dunny thinks this light is akin to splendors he has read about in fantastical and mythical books.

Dunny's mother would also hypocritically condemn his kindness and generosity. But Dunny persists, because he realizes he has much to learn from Mrs. Dempster. Where her husband's practice of religion involves externally manifesting his faith in the interest of controlling others, Mrs. Dempster's faith "arises from within"—it is something innate and not judgmental. Dunny begins to see a kinship between Mrs. Dempster's splendid inner light and the spectacular figures in mythological books.

Eventually Dunny becomes so comfortable he doesn't even notice the harness Mary has tied around her, or the dirty raggedness of her clothes, or her momentary lapses in comprehension and judgment. Mrs. Dempster is his greatest friend, and their relationship amounts to nothing less than his purpose in life.

Though Mrs. Dempster is an unlikely spiritual leader—with her ragged clothes, harness, and seeming insanity—Dunstan is able to look past this, and in fact Mary Dempster becomes the center of his psychological and spiritual existence.

Though they grow increasingly close, Dunny can never bring himself to ask Mary about the night with the tramp. He notes that her sexual indiscretion was a particular "kind of reality" which his religious small-town upbringing had declared obscene. He sees in this act something unknown to him, something he cannot or will not recognize, and he decides this "unknown aspect must be called madness."

Still, the repressed attitudes of Dunny's small protestant hometown have had their effect on Dunny, and like others in Deptford, he assumes anything he doesn't understand must be an example of madness. The way in which he reflects on this (in the narration of the letter) suggests that he will eventually grow out of this attitude.

12. Besides Mrs. Dempster, Dunny has no friends, and his life is lonely. Other kids at school accuse him of being a "know-all" and, though he knows it is meant to be an insult, he rather enjoys the title. He sets out to become a "polymath"—someone with extensive knowledge in many fields. He reads the encyclopedia, finding entries that are of particular interest to him.

Dunstan pours all of himself into forging a relationship with Mrs. Dempster and, when he is not doing that, competitively cultivating a superior intellect. He is constructing his identity in a certain way, and notably this identity does not involve friendship, companionship or love, unless Mrs. Dempster is involved.

Dunny's father, in the aftermath of the mess with Mrs. Dempster, tries to befriend Dunny, and helps teach Dunny Latin. In addition, Mr. Ramsay has joined the school board, which makes Dunny's attitude in school even more arrogant and argumentative. Dunny's classmates have all grown up quite a bit—Leola is now the town beauty, and is known to be dating Percy.

Dunny, edging ever closer to manhood, begins spending more time with his father and his arrogance grows even more severe. Dunny's classmates are also growing up—Percy has begun to date Dunny's crush, Leola. This highlights the fact that Dunny has not been pursuing romance and dating like most boys his age.

In spring, the most significant piece of gossip in the town is that Percy and Mabel Heighington (a notoriously promiscuous young girl) have been caught having sex by Mabel's mother. Dr. Staunton is thought to have paid Mrs. Heighington off. Percy is sent away to boarding school (Colborne College, where Dunstan will eventually teach), and despite his betrayal, Leola still pines for him, which makes Dunny "cynical about women."

As is to be expected, Dunny and his classmates are experimenting and learning difficult truths about the nature of love and romance. Percy's sexual appetite becomes apparent at a very young age, and Leola's pathetic (at least in Dunny's opinion) loyalty to him repulses Dunny—who will struggle to understand the irrational nature of human connection throughout the novel.

13. The following fall, Willie's illness—the result of a childhood injury to his back—grows worse. He is having kidney problems, and has become delirious and weak. Dunny is asked to look after him one afternoon, and Willie begins moaning and thrashing. Dunny tries to comfort him, but Willie ceases moving and Dunny can hear no breath or heartbeat. Willie's skin is cold—he is dead.

Something terrible once again happens under Dunny's watch. Dunny is suddenly faced with the loss of his brother—perhaps the one person in his family he has no complaints about. Dunny firmly believes he has witnessed Willy's death, and his account makes room for no other possibility.

Without knowing why, Dunny feels compelled to get Mrs. Dempster. He brings her back, and she touches Willie and calls his name. Willie wakes up and moves his legs a little—Dunny faints.

Mrs. Dempster's seeming strangeness is turned into a marvelous capacity for miraculous deeds: according to Dunstan, she literally calls Willie back from the dead.

Word gets out that Mrs. Dempster is in the Ramsay's house, and when Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay get home Amasa is with them. Amasa takes Mary home and Dunny's parents grill him about why he chose to get Mrs. Dempster and not a doctor.

Dunny is the only witness to this miracle, and the rest of the town continues to concern itself with relatively trivial matters—they do not know that Mrs. Dempster has just performed a miracle, and think Dunstan should have called someone more qualified.

When Dr. McCausland does arrive, Dunny tells him Willie died and came back to life. The Doctor dismisses this, concluding that Dunny is simply young and unscientific. Dunstan, as the writer of his letter, comments that causing Willie to rise from the dead is what Dunstan considers to be Mrs. Dempster's "second miracle."

No one believes Dunny when he tells them what he saw. They write him off as young and silly. But Dunstan's belief in Mary's saintliness persists—we even learn that this is not the first time she has performed a miracle.

14. Gossip gets out about Dunny's story, and the fact that he believes his brother was brought back from the dead. People wonder if he has gone mad, and the Minister pulls him aside and tells him that it is blasphemous to believe that any mortal can bring someone back from the dead, let alone someone with a deficit of character like Mrs. Dempster.

Dunny is ostracized further for his beliefs. As a protestant, Dunny should not even be thinking about saints and sainthood—and the fact that he is thinking of someone whom the town considers depraved as a saint is even worse.


Dunny's mother, whom Dunny thinks understands loyalty to be the same as love, cannot understand why he would disobey her. He simply remains silent, and she correctly interprets that silence as resolve—Dunny will not change his mind about Mrs. Dempster. Finally his mother demands that he choose between her and "that woman." Rather than choose, Dunny decides he will join the army. His mother is distraught and his father is disgusted, for he knows Dunny is joining in order to hurt his mother.

Dunny's family dysfunction comes to a head: his mother's view of love as being equal to loyalty causes her to demand Dunny choose between his mother and his dearest friend. Rather than make this choice, Dunny vindictively signs up for the army. His father, though once again disapproving, does nothing to stop him.

Though his parents are angry, his classmates admire Dunny for his brave decision. Leola, who still pines for Percy but who has not seen him since he left for school, makes it clear that she will be Dunny's "on loan." Leola is a lovely girl, and Dunny enjoys their relationship, though it is not particularly physical or intimate.

Dunny's enlisting makes him (at least temporarily) popular in school. He is admired as brave (though he joined the army to avoid a difficult choice) and even attracts the interest of Leola. However this love is not particularly intimate—we are led to believe that Dunny's social "success" is more or less superficial.


Dunny knows that he will be called to fight in WWI soon, and cannot bear to leave without saying goodbye to Mrs. Dempster. They had often discussed the war during Dunny's visits. When he tells her he is leaving, she grabs his face gently and tells him "it does no good to be afraid." He promises not to be afraid, and soon enough his call comes and he boards a train. Leola does not come to see him off, for fear of how it might look. But the night before he leaves she tells him she has forgotten Percy and now loves only him.

Mrs. Dempster's advice, though Dunstan will think of it many times during the war, will prove to be difficult to follow. And Leola's promise to him is undermined by the fact that she cannot come to see him off, for fear of social repercussions. The love triangle between Leola, Percy, and Dunstan begins to take shape.


PART 2: "I AM BORN AGAIN"

1. Dunny fights in the war from 1915 until 1917. Though there was much camaraderie and bonding, Dunny rarely socializes and doesn't really make friends. He is horribly bored without anything to keep him intellectually active. Nevertheless he excels in acquiring the necessary skills and passes his training.

Dunny's social isolation continues into his adult life. He is bad at forging relationships and finds a way to isolate himself even in environments where camaraderie is easy and encouraged.

Dunny goes home one leave before being sent abroad, and he and his parents do not speak much. He longs to see Mrs. Dempster but knows he cannot. Leola admires him even more now that he is in his uniform, and they go "a little beyond the kissing stage." He sees Paul once, but believes Paul doesn't recognize him because he simply stares blankly.

His brief trip home is another telling psychological event. He does not speak to his parents—in fact barely mentions seeing them. He describes his pseudo-sexual encounter with Leola in a bragging tone, but his euphemistic language betrays his ignorance and inexperience.

Dunny heads off on his ship, and listens to officers tell stories about German atrocities, and Dunny concludes the Germans are "absolute devils." Once Dunny is stationed in France, he is still bored, but instead of lonely he feels constantly afraid. He is able to hide it, but the fear eats away at him always. He sees quite a lot of action, as he "miraculously" manages to avoid injury and he is strong and sturdy. Dunny learns to ignore the horrible reality of war, and steps over dead bodies as though they are nothing.

Dunny continues to apply mythological language to his daily experiences: the Germans are "devils;" his continued health is "miraculous." Though he appears calm, in reality he is simply bottling up his fear and dread, pushing forward in spite of these emotions, rather than dealing with them in any way.

Most of the time, however, there is no fighting. In his down time, Dunny reads the only thing available to him—the Bible, and earns a reputation for being very religious, even though he is reading it for entertainment. He decides the Bible is true in the same way *Arabian Nights* is, and especially likes the Book of Revelation. His fellow soldiers begin to call him "Deacon."

Dunny continues to grow spiritually during this time, investigating and refiguring his relationship with the Bible and other texts—ultimately deciding that the Bible is "true" in the same way other fantastical and Mythical tales are—it contains truth, but is not a factual history. The other men interpret his bible reading as devout and religious, even though Christian churches would consider his view regarding the Bible—that it is similar to other mythologies—sacrilegious.

One day an impromptu show is organized, and a call for volunteer performers is put out. Dunny decides to perform, and does a good imitation of Charlie Chaplin, telling disparaging dirty jokes about the officers. The audience loves it, and he is re-named Charlie, and they tell him they are shocked to see how funny he is. Dunny is shocked that these people don't understand how many sides to him any man has.

Dunny surprises the men with his lewd jokes—they had believed him to be modest and devout. Dunny is also surprised, but his surprise concerns the fact that these men are not aware that every man is a contradiction in some way—personalities have many sides to them.

2. Dunny's fighting days come to an end sometime in early November of 1917. His group is trying to take out a German machine gun operator firing from a shed across an open field. Dunny crawls through the mud, but when flares start raining down he decides he must get out. He hears gunfire from both sides, and realizes he may be shot accidentally by his own side. He stumbles around until he finds himself at a door. He crawls inside, and there are three Germans with the machine gun. He shoots all of them.

Dunny achieves great success on the battlefield basically by accident. He does take out the German machine gun operators—admittedly no easy feat—but he is able to do so only because he accidentally stumbles upon their hideout, inadvertently sneaking up on them from behind. The way Dunstan remembers this act is distinctly unheroic.

As he crawls back through the mud to his own side, he notices his left leg is injured. It begins to "scream" with pain. He thinks of himself dying of tetanus. He thinks of Mrs. Dempster's advice that he never be afraid. He finds this advice ludicrous now.

Dunstan is injured and cannot hold back his fear—he even begins to doubt the validity of Mrs. Dempster's advice. This moment greatly resembles a kind of crisis of faith.

Dunny hears the bombardment stop, and as flares light up the sky he sees a statue of the Virgin and Child. He thinks for a moment it is the crowned woman from Revelation, but suddenly sees that the face on the statue is Mrs. Dempster's face. He loses consciousness.

Seemingly in response to his spiritual moment of doubt, Mary Dempster "appears" to Dunstan on the battlefield, via the statue of the Virgin Mary. Her saintliness is once again confirmed to him—she has performed another miracle.

3. Dunny wakes up in a bed with a very pretty nurse watching over him. He feels he has been in a peaceful place, where his spirit was "wholly his own" and where nothing was evil. Now he gives his name (Ramsay, D.) to the nurse and asks how long he has been unconscious. He is told about six months.

Dunny's way of describing the heavenly place he went to during his coma is telling: a place where his spirit was "wholly his own." This draws attention to the fact that Dunny does not know how to live for himself, how to accept himself and his humanity. It also refers to his desire to be his own man, to be unencumbered by human connections.

The doctor thinks he is a medical curiosity and is very interested by him. It had not looked like he would survive, so his reawakening now is a special surprise for everyone who worked on his case. The bad news is that he has lost his leg, but Dunny accepts this.

Dunny survives against long odds. His only real loss is of his leg—which he will think of as another atonement for his guilt in his role in Mrs. Dempster's injury, making it easier for him to accept.

The nurse's name is Diana Marfleet. She is an intelligent, compassionate and beautiful girl, and Dunny thinks his unusual rate of progress is due to her. She tells him he has won the V.C. (the Victorian Cross, a medal for bravery) for his work on the battlefield, but since he was declared dead, it was given to him posthumously. When he hadn't returned, the men had assumed his death, and the man pulled out of the mud was not identified as him.

Dunny, via a kind of clerical error, has also been "brought back from the dead." In a book about religion and reality, this is both a good joke and a commentary on how myth is made. He attributes much of his recovery to Diana, who is notably the first truly intelligent woman he has met in his life (perhaps with the exception of his mother), and therefore represents the broadening of Dunstan's horizons.

Diana says she will let Dunny's parents know at once, so that they may stop mourning him. But she soon receives a letter saying that Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay died in the influenza epidemic of 1918 after hearing of Dunny's death. Dunny is ashamed by the fact that he feels very little in response to their deaths.

Dunstan's parents have both died. He feels ashamed—not because they died without him after he vindictively joined the army; not because his last encounter with them was unloving and disinterested—but because he does not feel sad about their deaths.

4. In fact it is years before Dunny can think of his parents' deaths without feeling relief. He confides in Diana, with whom he is growing increasingly close. She is a romantic, and Dunny learns from her that women are capable of exploring emotions sagely and intelligently.

Diana is also the first woman who is contemplative and curious about emotions—Dunny's upbringing has only exposed him to repressed, emotionally stunted women (his mother and Leola).

Eventually Dunny realizes that Diana wants to be with him, romantically. He meets her equally intelligent and charming family, and in their home he feels his "spirit expand." He hopes he has behaved himself in front of them and not sounded like a fool.

Diana's entire family teaches Dunstan there is more to the world than Deptford—they "expand" his spirit. What's more, Diana is becoming Dunstan's first real lover; unlike Leola, she truly wants to be with him,

5. Though Dunny is not absolutely in love with Diana, he is flattered by her attention. He knows he has earned a pleasant rest after fighting in the war. Eventually the war is won, and he goes with Diana to London to witness the revelry. Dunny notes that people spared from violence become very violent themselves, and generally detests the dirtiness and depravity of postwar celebrations. However, he joins in, in some respect, for on this night he loses his virginity to Diana. Dunstan says he will always be grateful to Diana for kindly and compassionately teaching him how to be a lover and thus helping him on his way to manhood.

Dunny does not love Diana, but he is grateful to her for teaching him how to be a lover—Diana is his first fully-realizes sexual relationship, and Dunstan believes this relationship is integral to his becoming a man. However, though he can see his carnal relationship with Diana as a beautiful, human thing, the rest of the celebrations occurring appear to him to be violent and depraved. Liesl will later accuse Dunstan of refusing to be human. His distaste of the postwar revelry is perhaps an example of this.

The next great moment in Dunny's life is his reception of the Victorian Cross from the King himself. The most memorable moment of the ceremony for Dunny is when he looks into the King's eyes and realizes that though everybody sees him as a hero, he could have easily failed to kill the Germans, and simply died in the mud like so many others. Just as the King is only an icon of Kingship, Dunny realizes that he himself is only an icon of heroism—but there is no reason he ought to be a hero, and there is no reason the king ought to be the king. These are simply the roles in which they are cast.

Dunny's reception of the Victorian Cross inspires in him a kind of existential crisis. He realizes that publicly revered figures often amount to icons—people who have earned nothing more than false praise. What many would consider to be Dunstan's greatest achievement, his biggest success, Dunny realizes is an incidental and meaningless honor. He thinks of himself as simply playing the "role in which he's been cast," a fatalistic kind of comment that also echoes the book's title. It is also a comment on the complexities of people versus the simplicity of "roles." The world needs heroes, so complex people are put into those simple roles. No one wants to know that he became a hero by getting lost.

6. Dunny is not sure what to do about Diana. He knows she loves him in part because she regards him as her own creation—she did save him, Dunny reasons, and it is only natural she would feel that way. But Dunny, in spite of what he's heard about Oedipal complexes, is not in a hurry to acquire another mother figure, having just recently found out he was rid of his real mother, and decides he never wants to be anyone's "dear laddie" ever again.

Contrary to Freud's belief that boys posses a latent desire to sleep with their mothers, and often seek out women who resemble their mothers in adulthood, Diana's motherly disposition is off-putting to Dunny, who doesn't wish to have another mother figure in his life ever again.

Diana has made it clear she expects Dunny's future will be her future. Every two weeks, she delivers Dunny a letter from Leola, but never asks questions. Dunny always answers Leola's letters, trying not to be rude but also trying to avoid leading her on. Finally, on Christmas Eve, Diana asks about the letters, and Dunny makes a mess of his explanation and leaves Diana crying. Dunny argues with her, claiming she had been engaged before him, but Diana's fiancé died a hero's death in the war and Dunny's point is not well-received.

Dunny is still understandably clumsy in romance. His desire not to hurt anyone's feelings leads him to be dishonest with both of the women in his life. He continues to answer Leola's letters even though he doesn't seem to be interested in her anymore, and does not know how to tell Diana that he doesn't love her. He even goes so far as to bring up Diana's dead fiancé, betraying his youth and ignorance with respect to romance.

Eventually they make up, but there is still distance between them because their expectations are mismatched. Finally, Dunny tells her he cannot see himself getting married. They talk late into the night, and Diana eventually accepts that they should not be together. But she does tell him he should not go back and marry a small-town girl from his childhood, because he is more than that. Dunny is grateful for her understanding, and thanks her.

Fortunately, Diana has loved before, and is mature enough to have a productive conversation with Dunstan about whether or not they should be together. Her eventual understanding of his feelings further points to her maturity. That she sees him as having grown bigger than a small-town marriage speaks to his growth and experiences and, even, "success" in the war.

Diana asks Dunny if she can do one more thing for him—she wants to rechristen him, and name him Dunstan, as "Dunstable" does not suit him. He agrees, and Diana gets wine and rechristens him. She is Anglican, and takes religious ceremonies less seriously—though this surprises the Presbyterian in Dunstan, he accepts his excellent new name. And though he loses his lover on this Christmas, Diana and her family become some of his best friends.

"Dunstan" is finally christened in a moment that he will later describes as his "second birth." The ceremony is fairly casual, which startles Dunstan, as he has still had very little contact with faiths that are not his own. Diana, though she cannot be Dunstan's lover, is a valuable friend from whom he learns a great deal.

7. Dunstan goes back to Canada, where there is much ceremony and pomp waiting for him. He was Deptford's very own hero, and his reception is elaborate. As he is sitting onstage during the ceremony, he notices Percy and Leola sitting together in the front row of the audience, and Leola is wearing a ring. Dunstan feels tricked and resents Leola for not mentioning her engagement in any of her letters.

Dunstan is received as a hero by his hometown. In one sense, he has transformed from a strange, isolated child to town celebrity, though again he is in some sense just filling a role—the town needs a hero, and his exploits (of which the town knows no details) easily fit into a mythic here-story. Ironically he is mad at Leola for being vague in her letters and leading him on—when he was doing a very similar thing to her.

During the ceremony, which is long and tedious, Willie's name is read on the list of those killed in action. This is the first moment that Dunstan really understands he will never see his brother again.

Though the loss of Dunstan's parents does not have much of an effect on Dunstan, the loss of Willy is felt more fully. In many ways, this is Dunstan's first real experience with grief.

After the ceremony, Dunstan takes Leola in his arms in front of Percy and kisses her. Percy nervously tells Dunstan of he and Leola's engagement, and Dunstan good-naturedly shakes his hand, telling him "the best man has won." Dunstan enjoys this moment thoroughly, and happily notes that Percy's medal, the D.S.O., is not as illustrious as his V.C.

Dunstan, though he has repeatedly downplayed the importance of his VC, clearly enjoys the prestige that comes with it. He is happy that his medal is more prestigious than Percy's, and competitively makes a show of kissing Leola in front of him.

That night there is a bonfire, and an effigy of a German soldier is hung and burned. Dunstan watches in horror as the kind, patriotic people of his hometown descend to a level of barbarism that Dunstan has only seen in the war. Dunstan creeps away, not wanting to stay until the end of this cruel and symbolic ritual.

Dunstan once again bears witness to the hellish, devilish impulses of mankind. This is something he will only come to terms with after he meets his own devil, in the form of Liesl.

8. The next day Dunstan goes to get his hair cut, and finds Milo Papple is the barber. Milo updates him on town gossip, mentioning that no one ever thought Leola would end up with him—she was always plainly in love with Percy. He tells him about how his parents died—how his mother busily nursed everyone who was sick until her husband died, and then she seemed to give up. He also says that Amasa Dempster had died of the flu, but that Mary had survived. However Paul had run away with the circus just before Amasa died, unable to take the teasing from children who called his mother a whore. This seemed to drive Mary over the edge—she was truly mad when she was taken away to go live with her aunt. Dunstan leaves Deptford two days later, though he says he could never wholly leave it "in spirit."

Dunstan hears a more detailed account of the fates of his parents and the Dempsters. His mother remained competent and productive until she lost her husband. Amasa is also dead (we can imagine Dunstan is not sorry to hear this), but Mary and Paul were spared—though it is not likely Paul will ever be seen again, and his fate is unknown. Paul's disappearance, in Milo's opinion, drives Mary truly insane. This is a grim end to Mary's unfortunate existence in Deptford; and Dunstan feels largely responsible for this misfortune. Perhaps his enduring guilt is part of the reason he feels he can never really leave Deptford.

PART 3: "MY FOOL-SAINT"

1. In 1919 Dunstan enters the University of Toronto as a history student. He decides to study history because, as a soldier, he was being used as a pawn in plans he did not understand by powers he did not recognize. He hopes history will give him a better understanding of the world's affairs.

Dunstan studies history because he feels it might help him to understand the war better. This fits into a larger trend in this novel: where history (when employed a certain way) is shown to be able to help us understand tragedy, irrationality, and humanity itself.

While Dunstan cuts a rather dull figure as a university student, Percy is exactly the opposite—he has changed his name from "Percy Boyd" to "Boy," which suits him well. He is a strapping young man with a growing fortune who is well-liked by everyone he meets.

Boy has grown into a "successful" man—the novel will continue to track this kind of success, and will ask the reader whether things like popularity, wealth, and attractiveness (all held in high esteem in western postwar cultures) are as desirable as they seem.

Boy worships the Prince of Wales, believing him to be the ideal man, and endeavors to look and act just like him. Boy thinks he is, like the Prince, fated for great things. He knows he wants to be richer than his father someday, and is making good progress in achieving that goal. Boy's father, meanwhile, has noticed Boy's increasing wealth and resents him for it.

Interestingly, Boy's reverence for royalty is something we have already seen Dunstan reject. Where Dunstan's meeting with the king convinces him that a royal title is more or less meaningless, just a role that someone *had to fill, Boy worships and emulates the Prince, believing him to be the perfect model of successful manhood.*

Dunstan says he must admit that he is indebted to Boy for his financial advice. Boy manages his investments and makes Dunstan into a financially very comfortable man. Dunstan notes that he might have been able to help Boy with his spiritual life, but that Boy only sees the world in terms of external things. Boy embodies the Jazz age and the postwar period perfectly—Dunstan says that Boy is always "the quintessence of something someone else has recognized and defined."

Boy sees the world as it manifests externally—this means he is interested in and talented with things like money, business, popularity, and trends. Already we have the sense that Boy is too *external—that his inner life, his spiritual life, will suffer (if it is not suffering already) from his obsession with exterior "success."*

Boy, though he is engaged to Leola, carries on affairs with multiple women, having come out of the war with a diverse and insatiable sexual appetite. He considers himself very fond of Leola, but supposes he is not in love with her. This angers Dunstan—he does not want Leola, but it irritates him that Boy has her. He often yearns for Diana, even though he knows he would be very unhappy if he were married to her.

Boy and Dunstan both struggle psychologically with love and relationships—albeit in very different ways. Boy's sexual appetite is insatiable, and he seemingly cannot make himself be faithful. Dunstan, conversely, is neurotically lonely—jealous of Boy, and pining for Diana, though he knows he doesn't really love either of the women he's fretting about.

2. Once Dunstan earns his Masters in History from university, he gets a job teaching at Colborne College (over which the Headmaster now rules.) Dunstan goes into teaching so that he may live a certain kind of life, that he may be free to travel and explore his passions. He chooses a boys' school because he has "never wanted to teach girls."

Dunstan becomes a history teacher—an unglamorous position in some people's eyes, but a position that will enable Dunstan to lead the life he wants to lead—which makes it in fact a very desirable job. It is also possible he turns to teaching because he is still stuck, emotionally and intellectually, on the problem of his own boyhood, and teaching boys is a way for him to feed that obsession.

He knows that from the school's point of view, his life has been "odd and dry." He is a good teacher, serving his students well without ever getting too attached to them. Many suspect that Dunstan—a single man working at a boys' school, is homosexual, but Dunstan is clear that he doesn't like boys, he simply sees himself in them. Though teaching was his professional life, he has a larger life outside of it—and it is about this life that he wishes to tell the Headmaster, so that someone will "know the truth" about him and "do him justice."

Dunstan is again emphasizing what he has already come to know intimately: that people are complicated, and are often more than they seem to be. Though Dunstan is assumed to be a boring, "odd" and perhaps homosexual teacher, he reveals to the headmaster that teaching is just one facet of his life, that he sees himself in the children he teaches, and that despite appearances his life has been complex, rich, and exciting.

Dunstan mentions that he has had a series of casual and rather dispassionate lovers, but that he never emotionally connects with any of them. He says it will be many years before he rediscovers love.

Partially by way of refuting claims that he is homosexual, Dunstan clarifies that he has been sleeping with women, but that none of these relationships are emotionally fulfilling—in fact, Dunstan must learn how to love someone, and it will be many years before he does.

3. Dunstan is Boy's best man at his wedding. Leola is a radiant bride and Boy a fetching groom, who grows more powerful in life and business by the minute, it seems. Boy and Leola have planned their honeymoon in Europe, where Dunstan is also traveling for the summer. On the ship, Dunstan is horrified to see that Boy and Leola are riding on the same voyage, in first class. Boy comes down to talk to him, rambling about all the fine people up in first class, including a priest from a popular new church in New York who is especially impressive. He also laments that Leola is not as worldly as she ought to be. Dunstan later wonders if this popular new preacher knew the Bible as well as he, Dunstan, did.

Dunstan must endure a humiliating interaction with Boy on the boat, who brags to him about all of the cultured, interesting people who are in first class with him and his new bride. Tellingly, Boy admires the preacher not for the validity of his ideas, but for his "newness" and "popularity." Dunstan, who easily sees through such performances, knows that he is likely better versed in scripture than this priest (though he is not wealthy enough to be riding in first class).

Dunstan and the Stauntons part ways when the ship docks. Dunstan goes back to the battlefields, hoping to get a sense of the landscape where he was wounded, but does not recognize anything. He asks around about the statue of the Madonna, but has no luck locating it.

Dunstan goes to Europe in part to investigate his own personal history, and discovers that the landscape has nothing to tell him. Dunstan will spend much of the novel learning that history (for him) is a kind of internal narrative. External fixtures have little to tell us about our personal histories.

His search for the Madonna leads him to travel around studying many examples of Renaissance art. He develops an enthusiasm for the subject, and tours Europe learning more and more about art and religion. He notes that the Presbyterianism of his childhood insulated him against faith, and that now he is rediscovering his love and enthusiasm for religious studies.

However, Dunstan's search is not a total wash—he happens to discover (in fact "rediscover") a love for religious studies, something from which his Presbyterianism paradoxically "insulated" him. The distinction between religion—a set of ordered rituals and defined ways of thought—and faith—belief in the miraculous—is making itself clear.

He learns quickly, and soon becomes interested in the stories of saints, and embarks on a kind of amateur career in hagiology (the study of the lives of saints). These stories again remind him of *Arabian Nights*, and he says that in saints he has found a happiness that will "endure."

Though Dunstan cannot find passion in his relationships, he has been able to find it in his study of sainthood. The stories of saints are "true" to Dunstan in the way many other mythologies strike him as "true"—they teach him something real about himself and the world.

5. Back at school, Dunstan's teaching duties keep him busy. Boy is also beginning a kind of career in education, only he is educating his wife. He has proven himself to be a brilliant businessman, and is trying to make Leola into the kind of wife a wealthy businessman should have—elegant, educated, and refined. The Jazz age has ended, and now Boy thinks it is time to settle down and be "Young Marrieds" together. Within a year their son David is born.

Boy, forever interested in conforming externally to trends and cultural expectations as a way to attain success, wants to make Leola into the sort of worldly women he sees or believes other wealthy men have. Boy has an idea of what his life should look like, and believes he can only be successful if he achieves a very specific kind of appearance.

5. Boy's father never visits, in part because Boy has converted to Anglicanism, and Dr. Staunton refuses to see him on religious grounds. Similarly, Boy worries about Dunstan and his interest in saints—Dunstan cannot seem to stop talking about them. Boy points out that Saints are okay for Catholics, but that Protestants should be more "evolved" than that. Dunstan responds by talking about saints even more, just to irritate Boy. Boy tells him he should stop teaching and make something of himself, but Dunstan knows he is not ambitious like Boy—he does not want to be in charge of people. He is happy to let fate handle his life.

Boy's conversion to Anglicanism is—yet again—discussed in terms of external effect. His father won't see him because of it. We hear nothing of Boy's internal motivations. What's more, Boy "worries" about Dunstan's interest in saints because such an interest doesn't "fit" with Protestantism. Boy and Dunstan bicker as though they are still children. Boy thinks Dunstan has failed to make something of himself, but Dunstan does not subscribe to Boy's definition of success, and believes Fate is pushing his life in the direction it should go.

And it does: one day the head of a Mission in Toronto is brought into school to talk to the boys about charity: his name is Joel Surgeoner, and he makes a speech about the redemptive powers of God. During this speech, he calls out Dunstan for appearing skeptical. Dunstan should perhaps feel embarrassed but he does not—for he recognizes Joel as the tramp who slept with Mary many years ago.

Another extraordinary coincidence occurs in Dunstan's life, once again bringing him back to Mary Dempster. Joel has come a long way—the last time Dunstan saw him he was a lawless tramp having sex with Mary Dempster—now he is a man of God giving lectures about redemption.

Dunstan goes to the Mission that very night. He confronts Joel about his speech and about his accusation levied at Dunstan. Joel admits that it's simply a trick—it makes he audience think he can see everything, and their faith in him might increase their faith in God, so he does it.

Joel interestingly admits to incorporating a kind of magic trick into his sermons. He believes such tricks have the power to increase our belief and faith in God, and so he has no qualms with using them.

Dunstan eventually tells Joel they have met before, and asks him about that might with Mary. Joel explains he was in a miserable state, and was being asked to perform sexual favors for other tramps in return for food. On a particularly dejected night, he came across Mary Dempster, and tried to have his way with her. She asked him why he was being so rough, and this made him cry. She comforted him and said she wanted to help. He told her he still wanted her and she agreed. The next day when he was run out of town, he felt he had been delivered. He says Mary had been a blessed saint, and that their encounter had been a miracle.

We are finally told about the nature of Mary Dempster's first miracle: she redeemed Joel in his darkest moment by treating him gently, by giving him what he asked for. Dunstan is not the only person who considers Mary to be a saint, and this corroboration from Joel likely increases Dunstan's conviction. Joel's account also re-frames the incident: recall that as a child, Dunstan considers this act an act of madness. Joel makes it clear that it is an act of miraculous kindness—an act of redemption.

Dunstan goes back to Deptford to ask about Mary's whereabouts. Milo tells him she's living with her aunt, Bertha Shanklin, in Weston. Then Dunstan goes to see the Catholic priest, Father Regan, to ask about Mary's potential sainthood. He tells him he thinks he may have found a saint, but Father Regan thinks this is ludicrous. He tells Dunstan that a fool-saint is someone who seems full of holiness but is too much a fool and his life comes to nothing, because virtue tainted with madness is not virtue at all. Dunstan goes back to Toronto knowing that Father Regan has made good points, but nevertheless decides to go to Weston a couple of weeks later.

Though Father Regan finds it strange that a protestant is concerning himself with Saints, his argument against Mary Dempster's sainthood is more complicated than others we've seen. He suggests that, though Mary may indeed be virtuous, her virtue is "tainted" with madness.. Though Dunstan acknowledges that Father Regan may have a point, he goes to see Mary Dempster anyway—perhaps because of guilt; but perhaps he also remembers that he used to assume everything he didn't understand was the result of madness—and this drives him to keep investigating his fool-saint.

8. Mary Dempster is now 40 but looks younger than her age. Bertha is a small old woman with gentle manners. Bertha tells him that Mary is in no real condition to have visitors, but Dunstan wins her over with his kind words about Mary and her influence on his life. Bertha tells him that Mary remembers little of her life is Deptford, only that she had been tied up and that Paul had disappeared. She remembers Amasa praying to God about Mary ruining his life—she remembers that Amasa died praying.

Mary Dempster barely recalls her time in Deptford, but what she does recall is telling: the absence of her son, her imprisonment in the house. It seems she has no memory of Dunstan—even though his memories of her have shaped his entire life. She also recalls Amasa's prayers, which cast her as a burden. It is fitting that Amasa—who lived praying (or who prays instead of living)—died praying as well.

8. The following spring, in 1929, Dunstan gets a call from Boy, who tells him to sell certain stocks immediately. When the market crashes, Dunstan's small fortune is spared, and he owes this success completely to Boy. But Dunstan can hardly think of money, as he is too preoccupied with his upcoming summer travels through Europe. He is particularly interested in a little-studied bearded female saint called "Uncumber." He has some ideas about Uncumber's history, and her existence in various religious accounts.

Dunstan admits in his personal history that Boy saved him from financial ruin. Just like all people, Boy is more complex than he seems. Though he is undoubtedly a selfish, competitive man, he takes responsibility for Dunstan's finances and watches out for him. Though Dunstan is grateful, he can hardly be bothered to think about money—he is more interested in uncovering new and interesting histories.

Dunstan hunts for traces of Uncumber in remote villages across Europe. In one small town his visit corresponds with the visit of a circus. Dunstan recognizes the man performing card tricks in the circus as Paul Dempster. Dunstan recognizes his dexterous hands immediately. After the show, he approaches Paul, who has grown into a man and speaks several languages fluently. Paul's stage name is Faustus Legrand. He is not keen to speak with Dunstan, but slowly Dunstan wins him over, as well as the rest of the crew, by buying several rounds of drinks for all of them at a local pub.

Another startling—and perhaps fated—coincidence. Dunstan's hunt for a little-known saint leads him to a little-known town, and here he finally finds the long-lost Paul Dempster. Paul has made a living out of his talent for magic and illusion. Though Dunstan is thrilled to see Paul, Paul is not so pleased to se Dunstan—perhaps a testament to the pain of his childhood in Deptford—and only submits to conversation because Dunstan makes a show of winning over the rest of the crew.

The bearded lady of the circus takes a special liking to Dunstan after he tells her about the saint Uncumber. She confides in him that the circus master, Le Solitaire, had likely carried on a sexual relationship with Paul when he was a boy, and that now he can't stand to be apart from him. Dunstan finally asks Paul if he may tell Mary that he is alive and well; Paul says he does not mean to see her, so telling her of his whereabouts will do no good. He explains that he was told over and over that his birth drove his mother mad, and that he does not wish to revisit the sadness of his past. The next morning, when Dunstan rises to continue his search for Uncumber, he notices that his pocketbook has been stolen, and guesses that Paul is the culprit.

A kind of dark shadow is cast over Paul's success—his life has not been as charmed as perhaps Dunstan has imagined. We then discover that Paul blames his mother for his miserable childhood. Of course, we already know that Dunstan feels he deserves the blame for Paul's misfortune, and no doubt he feels his guilt resurface in this moment. What's more, Paul uses his talents to steal from Dunstan—he is a "cheat;" he has learned to use his magical skills dishonestly, just as Amasa feared he would. This is another blow to Dunstan conscience: has he degraded Paul's character?

PART 4: "GYGES AND KING CANDAULES"

1. Boy makes a fortune off of the Great Depression because he is in the sugar business, and men down on their luck need sweetness. His company, Alpha, has a solid reputation and Boy is admired by the public for his altruism and sensible business practices. Boy begins to see Dunstan more frequently, as Dunstan is the only one he feels he can talk to about his trouble with Leola. Boy has built a kind of relationship with the Prince of Wales, and receives a Christmas card from him every winter. Leola has not grown any more refined, though Boy has tried to teach her bridge, golf, tennis as well as an appreciation of good music and theater. She does not absorb this teaching, though, and to Boy's dismay remains a small-town woman.

Boy's success continues to grow, in that his fortune and popularity continue to grow. His marriage, on the other hand, is suffering. Boy does not believe Leola is measuring up to him and his new, impressive life. Boy has tried in vain to change her into someone who fits into his self-conception better. But it isn't working, and Boy makes a habit of venting to Dunstan, who doesn't seem to question why he is serving Boy in this way. He is happy to be what others need him to be.

Though Dunstan acts as Boy's confidante, he has no interest in involving himself in the troubles of Boy's marriage—he simply finds their lives entertaining and enjoys being a friend of the family. However, in late 1927, Dunstan is involved in a terrible fight between them. Boy, knowing that Dunstan has been working in the photo lab at school, gives him some pictures to develop. Among them are several nude photos of Leola. Dunstan is furious but he is not sure why—perhaps because Boy is dangling Leola in front of him deliberately. Dunstan does not respond however—he simply develops the pictures for Boy and waits to see what will happen.

Dunstan is not helping Boy out of a genuine sense of friendship or duty. There is not really even a true friendship between himself and Boy. He simply finds Boy and his family drama interesting and entertaining. However he cannot stay so distant for very long—soon Boy awkwardly involves him in this drama by surprising him with naked photos of his wife. This is evidence that Dunstan has very little control in his relationships, and is being used as a kind of pawn by Boy.

The next time he goes to their house for dinner, Boy asks what he thought of the photos. Dunstan denies looking at them, and Boy insists on showing the pictures to him in front of Leola. Leola is mortified but Boy cruelly continues, making her wait and watch as he shows the photos to Dunstan one by one.

Boy's behavior becomes even crueler, as he subjects both Dunstan and Leola to humiliation. Boy seems incapable of stopping and Dunstan seems incapable of speaking up and asking Boy to stop. Boy seems to be aggressively lashing out at his wife, here, for failing to live up to his expectations of her. Instead of appreciating her for who she is, he is angry at her for not being who he wants.

Dunstan asks Boy if he has ever heard the story of Gyges and Candaules, and Boy says he hasn't. Dunstan tells him King Candaules was so proud of his wife's beauty he asked his friend Gyges to look upon her naked. In one version of the story, the queen fell in love with Gyges and they together stole the throne from the king. In the other, Gyges kills Candaules. Boy supposes Dunstan will do neither of these things, and Dunstan agrees. But he does think the story stirred something in Boy, for he believes that that night Boy and Leola conceived their second child. Dunstan thinks Boy loves Leola in a complicated way, and he knows Leola loves Boy, and that nothing he might do will ever change that.

Dunstan, in a characteristic fashion, conceptualizes this moment in terms of a myth he's heard. He implicitly compares himself to Gyges, however in reality he is unlike Gyges. Gyges responds to the affront with action, with human engagement. But Dunstan only responds by telling a story—and the story doesn't drive him to action, but it does drive Boy to action. It stirs something in him, and Boy and Leola conceive a second child. Dunstan simply resigns himself to thinking about Boy and his wife's relationship (instead of pursuing relationships himself.)

2. Every two weeks Dunstan makes the journey to Weston to visit with Bertha and Mrs. Dempster. Dunstan can never stay very long, because Bertha believes long visits are taxing for Mary. Sometimes Bertha's lawyer, Orpheus Wettenhall, also visits while Dunstan is there. "Orph," as he is known, is a dedicated hunter, and often brings meat to Bertha as a gift. He is cheerful and considerate, and Dunstan likes him a great deal.

Dunstan remains faithful to his visits with Mary, getting to know her aunt and her aunt's lawyer. Notably these visits are short. Dunstan's almost singular human connection, though regularly scheduled, is kept brief. Orph will prove to be another example of someone who is more complicated than he seems on the outside.

Dunstan begins these visits in 1928 and keeps them until 1932, when Bertha dies of pneumonia. Orph sends him a letter asking him to the funeral and saying they must talk after. Dunstan has been named as Bertha's executor, and has also been named as Mary Dempster's public guardian. Orph is sadder than Dunstan is used to seeing him, and mentions he doesn't know how things will be for him without Bertha in his life.

Still, fate seems to take over yet again, and the situation becomes more complicated. Dunstan is suddenly charged with caring for Mary, just like he was as a boy. What's more, Orph begins to reveal a different side of himself, and makes an ominous comment about what his life amounts to now that Bertha is dead.

Dunstan's spirits rise in the aftermath of Bertha's death, and he attributes this happiness to a relief of his own guilt. He had thought that the loss of his leg had atoned for his guilt, but now realizes that he has still felt the weight of his childhood actions all this time, and that guardianship of Mary is a more appropriate way to atone. He also begins to think earnestly again about Mary's sainthood: she has performed three miracles: the reclamation of the tramp, bringing Willie back from the dead, and appearing to him on the battlefield. He is intrigued by the idea of getting to know his saint even better, and believes he might be able to make a contribution to the "psychology of religion."

Dunstan is happy to be officially the guardian of Mary Dempster as he feels it is yet another way he might be able to atone for his wrongdoing so long ago. He engages in an odd kind of economical thinking: his leg was a kind of exchange for his sin, but his guardianship of Mary is worth even more than his leg, and this makes him happy. He also begins to invest in the idea of Mary's sainthood even more vigorously. He incorporates Mary into his personal interests, and is excited by the prospect of contributing meaningfully to academic discourse.

Dunstan's distraction is compounded by a phone call he receives a few days later, during which he is told that Orph has shot himself and that the police want to talk to him. It comes out that Orph had lost a great deal of money in the Depression, but had kept up appearances. The death of Bertha, his best client, had left him without hope and made it impossible for him to go on. The public story is that it had been a simple accident with a gun, but most people know that Orph committed suicide. It also comes out that Orph had been stealing from clients, but the public feels sympathy for him anyway, and agree that Orph had meant to restore the missing funds as soon as he could. Dunstan learns two lessons: "that popularity and good character are not related, and that compassion dulls the mind faster than brandy."

Orph, far from being the happy and well-adjusted man he seemed, had a dark inner secret. He was stealing from clients, suffering financially, and the death of Bertha was a kind of last straw. The public discussion surrounding Orph's death teaches Dunstan more about the nature of popularity, deception, and compassion. People's love for Orph, and their compassion for him in the face of his pain, "dull their minds" in Dunstan's opinion. He rejects this kind of compassion because it seems to him to be irrational or not academic. He neglects to note that—however irrational—compassion is human. At the same time, the town showed no such compassion for Mary Dempster.

Dunstan does not have enough money to put Mary up in a private care facility and has to admit her to a public mental hospital, much to his own displeasure. When he leaves her there, among the dirty inmates and forlorn facilities, he sees in her face the darkness he saw there in Deptford, and feels crueler than he's ever felt. But he has no other options.

It is as though Dunstan is beginning the cycle of guilt all over again. He and Mary are both brought black to a place that is reminiscent of their darkest times in small-town Deptford.

3. During this time, Dunstan becomes involved with the Bollandists, a group of Jesuits who record accounts of saints in the *Acta Sanctorum*, a text they have been working on for many decades. They also publish an annual collection of material under the title *Analecta Bollandiana* or "Bollandist Gleanings" and Dunstan decides to send his work on Uncumber to the *Analecta*. He is delighted to find that his submission is accepted, and what's more he is invited to meet with the Bollandists should he ever be in Europe again.

There is still happiness in Dunstan's life, and he enjoys continued academic success, even getting published in an obscure but highly respected journal. His labor of love in writing about Uncumber brings him even more joy when others can confirm his work is intelligent and insightful. Though his personal life is suffering, his professional life is successful.

Dunstan tells Boy about his impeding publication, and Boy seems pleased to know he has a friend who is a writer, and begins inviting Dunstan to parties and showing him off. Dunstan finds the rest of Boys friends to be dull and ordinary, and finds no pleasure in talking with them.

Boy is excited about this success, because success in externally verifiable ways makes sense to him. Boy treats Dunstan like an asset, to be shown off at parties, Dunstan doesn't enjoy this, but does it anyway, for some reason.

Dunstan goes to visit with the Bollandists for several weeks. He is happy there, but often has moments, bent over dusty books, where he wonders what meaning his life has, and what his place in the world is meant to be. But Dunstan believes fate has pushed him here, and he continues his work.

Dunstan has a sense that his life is incomplete, that he spends too much time with books and not enough time living. But he believes fate is driving him in the right direction, and continues on with his work.

Dunstan becomes friendly with the Jesuits in the society, but notes that real intimacy between members seems to be discouraged. When he leaves the Bollandists for Vienna, he travels with one of the elderly members, Padre Blazon. Padre Blazon is an odd man, farcical in appearance and fond of making long animated speeches. Dunstan finds him entertaining and thinks him good company, and often goes with him to dinner to hear more of what he has to say. Dunstan decides to tell him about Mrs. Dempster and her Sainthood, and Padre Blazon says that if he recognizes her as a saint then she must be a saint.

For the most part, the Bollandists do not provide human connection or friendship, only superficial pleasantries and a kind of uninvolved friendliness. However there is one man who does not conform to this standard—Padre Blazon is one of the first people who actually seriously considers the problem of Mrs. Dempster's sainthood, and suggests an unusual solution: that Mary is a saint if Dustan considers her to be one. Blazon's idea of sainthood points to the possibility of a more fluid idea of religion, one determined by individuals.

Padre Blazon has many atypical beliefs about the nature of religion, chief among them the belief that the teaching of Christ holds no value for an old man—for Christ had died young, and knew nothing of old age. He believes Dunstan should determine who Mary Dempster is in "his own personal world" and that in doing so, he will come to understand her sainthood. He admonishes Dunstan for feeling so guilty and tortured. He tells him to forgive himself "for being a human creature," noting that if he does not, he will end up in the mad house with his saint.

Padre Blazon, in his lifetime of devotion to faith and religion, has come to understand faith as something that is malleable—as something someone must discover and define for himself or herself. He also, unlike Dustan, has an appreciation for human failings, and does not believe Dunstan's guilt is serving him in any real way. He preaches self-understanding and self-forgiveness; things we have already seen Dunstan struggle to understand.

4. Even though Dunstan appreciates Padre Blazon's advice, the visits with Mrs. Dempster continue to weigh on him. Her stay in the hospital has made her dull and dissociative. Every Sunday when he visits she has a hat on, as though she is ready for him to take her away. But Dunstan simply does not have the money to move her, and his life is growing all the busier. He published his first book, called *A Hundred Saints for Travellers*, and it is selling well in five languages. And he is working on his next book, a bigger and more academic work on the history of sainthood.

Mrs. Dempster's life in the hospital is sad and pathetic. Though Dunstan feels guilty, he still doesn't seem to grasp that there is more he can offer her besides tangible things. He boils the problem down to money and time, and his professional life takes him away from her often. He is once again choosing work over interpersonal connection, studiousness over human emotion.

Dunstan's success makes him all the more attractive to Boy, who invites him over even more frequently. Dunstan does his best to be a good guest, allowing Boy to show him off and enduring boring conversation as best he can. Far more interesting to Dunstan is Boy's private life, which has become all about sex. Dunstan wonders what Freud or Jung would have to say about a man like Boy, who incessantly pursues affairs with strange women, and whose thirst for adventurous sex seems unquenchable. Boy also treats his children, David and Caroline, according to their sexes—David must be manly, and Caroline must be sweet. Leola is the one person on whom Boy "spends none of his sexual force." She is hopelessly in love with him, but he finds her boring.

Dunstan's success is now the kind Boy can completely respect and understand. It seems an interest in Saints is okay so long as you have published work in the field; so long as you have achieved some level of notoriety. Boy's psychological irregularities are mentioned yet again: he seems to possess a pathological need for sex, and Dunstan tries to understand him in terms of the work of Freud or Jung (notably avoiding drawing conclusions of his own.) Poor Leola has been completely left behind by her husband, who simply thinks too little of her to care about her anymore. Yet she continues to love him.

Dunstan thinks Boy's desire for sex sounds exhausting, and he is glad he possesses no similar inclinations. He also notes that Boy seems to possess an unconscious sexuality that Dunstan calls "Corporation Homosexuality." Boy likes to pick a younger man at work to be his protégé, and court him, caringly mentoring him until he disappoints Boy in some way or ceases to be receptive to him. Though Dunstan knows Boy sees these relationships as being purely about business, Dunstan perceives a sexual element in them that Boy does not recognize.

Dunstan, with no sex life (or love life) of his own to speak of, spends time picking apart Boy's psychological impulses. He believes Boy has a kind of erotic desire to mentor young men, a desire that is also characterized by a kind of insatiability and constant turnover. Dunstan may be right about this—but his rumination on the topic ironically reveals his own psychological issues regarding sex: he would rather intellectualize it than pursue it himself.

On Christmas, Leola discovers a note in Boy's coat pocket from one of his mistresses. She is distraught and confronts him, but Boy is unapologetic and storms out. Dunstan goes upstairs to check on Leola, and finds her on the bed in a revealing nightgown. She asks Dunstan to kiss her, and he does, but soon recovers himself and tells Leola she should get some sleep. She cries and screams that he has stopped loving her. As Dunstan walks out the door he notes to himself that he hasn't loved her for over a decade.

Boy's indiscretions are finally revealed to his wife, and she resorts to attempting to seduce Dunstan. Yet again Dunstan is a kind of pawn in someone else's relationship—the reader is reminded that he chose or accepted this role instead of pursuing a relationship of his own. He hasn't loved Leola in years, and his friendship with Boy is insincere. Why does he submit himself to this kind of treatment? At the same time, Leola continued to believe Dunstan did love her, and her scream when she finds out he doesn't suggests that her belief in his love allowed her to psychologically withstand the pain of her husband's terrible treatment of her.

The next day, Dunstan receives a note at school telling him he must call the Staunton's number at once. Dunstan calls, and hears that Leola has tried to kill herself by slitting her wrists in the bath. She left a note addressed to Dunstan, saying she has always loved him. Dunstan is furious at her because had she been successful she would have implicated him in her suicide. He disposes of the note and they never speak of it. They try to reach Boy at his business address in Montreal but cannot find him. The children suffer more than anyone during this whole ordeal—David becomes an introvert and Caroline becomes a rebellious and angry young child.

Dunstan cares so little for Leola, in fact, that her attempted suicide makes him angry rather than upset, as it might implicate him in the affairs of other people. Boy is unavailable, though this is perhaps not any different than he has been for quite some time. The children—who are notably not often mentioned in this novel—suffer greatly. They will have to carry on the weight of their family's dysfunction the rest of their lives, much like Dunstan and Boy have themselves.

PART 5: "LIESL"

Dunstan passes quickly over WWII. Boy is made even richer and more famous by this war. In 1942, Leola dies. She had grown more and more listless as Boy's fame grew, eventually falling ill of pneumonia. Dunstan noticed that Leola took to leaving her windows open, and believes she did so to accelerate her own death. Dunstan informs Boy and the children of Leola's death. Boy is more or less unfazed, Caroline screams and cries, but David simply says his mother is better off. Dunstan feels for him and takes special care of him at school (as he attends the school where Dunstan teaches).

Leola's death seems to come as a surprise to no one. Dunstan casually notes that Leola likely took steps to end her own life. Boy is predictably unconcerned about his wife. Caroline is the only one who seems to have what we might consider a typical or "normal" reaction to the death of her mother: she cries and becomes upset. Dunstan seems to have more sympathy, however, for David, whose cold, intellectual approach to the issue probably reminds Dunstan of himself.

Dunstan feels bad for Leola, but his caring for her had been a "matter of duty." Everyone in Deptford mourns the end of a "great romance" between Boy and Leola. But things move on fairly quickly. The Headmaster of Colborne College leaves his post, and Dunstan is appointed. But in 1947, Boy, who is on the board, tells him he must step down—he was a fine headmaster in wartime, but now there is peace, and he is too "queer" to be left in charge. The Headmaster needs a wife.

Dunstan refers to his "duty" to Leola—but the reader must wonder why Dunstan would feel he had a duty to her? That the town believes Boy and Leola's marriage was a "great romance" is grimly comical, but also a commentary on the idea of roles and mythology. Their "great romance" is akin to Dunstan's status as a "hero." Everyone quickly moves on, and Dunstan's isolation and loneliness costs him a job. Boy doesn't like how Dunstan's life may appear to others.

Boy says he hopes Dunstan will stay on as a teacher, and Dunstan agrees, but demands a six month leave so that he can do some extended travelling through Latin and South America. Boy agrees, and appoints the current Headmaster—to whom this letter is addressed.

It turns out Dunstan is not even bothered by the loss—we get the sense yet again that he was doing something simply because he'd been asked, not because he wanted to. His belief in fate leads him to simply take what comes.

2. A few months later, Dunstan is in Mexico, touring old churches and learning more about the existence of Saints there. He begins working on a prologue to a discussion of the nature of faith—he wonders why people yearn for marvels that defy verifiable facts, and whether or not marvels are brought about by desire for them, or whether the "marvelous is indeed an aspect of the real." Dunstan concludes during his time in Mexico that "faith is a psychological reality."

Dunstan continues to think about the nature of faith, and whether or not faith and religion is something owned by the individual, with a different meaning for everybody. His conclusion that faith is an "intellectual reality" suggests that he believes that if faith, God, and religion "exist" in a person's psyche, that is enough to say that they are "real."

One day, Dunstan finds an advertisement for a magic show, and, since he has never lost his love of magic, decides to attend. The magician's name is Magnus Eisengrim, and though other magic shows had become comical or farcical, his is dripping with a serious kind of poetic drama that Dunstan greatly admires. He is even more pleased to discover that the Magician is none other than Paul Dempster.

Yet another marvelous coincidence: Paul Dempster crosses Dunstan's path yet again. He is no longer a small-time carnival magician performing tricks. He is now a successful artist with his own show, a show that betrays a sense of drama and poetry that Dunstan respects.

After the show Dunstan goes backstage in search of Paul but is told that Magnus Eisengrim takes no visitors. He is about to give up when a hideously ugly woman asks him if he is Dunstable Ramsay, and says that Eisengrim would like to speak with him. Dunstan is introduced to Paul and his beautiful assistant, Faustina. Paul seems very uneasy at his being there, and Dunstan thinks he should go, but is surprised when Paul asks him to lunch the next day. That night, as Dunstan is counting his money, he notices that an amount slightly greater than the amount stolen from him in Europe has been added to his billfold.

Paul is still weary of Dunstan. He is not nearly as excited, it seems, about this chance meeting as Dunstan is. Yet the fact that Paul gives back what he has stolen is deeply significant: his illusions are no longer cheats or a gambles. Magic has become a noble thing in his life. It seems to have helped him become a less sinful person, contrary to Amasa's beliefs. Magic is redemptive just as faith is.

3. The hideous woman's name is Liesl, and she attends lunch the next day. Dunstan discovers she is not so bad as she looks, and is really quite intelligent. Paul describes the sprit of his show to Dunstan—he doesn't want to inspire fear or laughter, but rather wonder. He believes people need to marvel at something in these times, and he wants to be that marvel. He then reveals that Liesl has chosen Dunstan to write the mythical autobiography of Magnus Eisengrim. She has read his work on saints, and believes he will be perfect for the job.

Liesl is unlike any woman Dunstan has ever met or talked to. For one, she is in no way physically attractive. Mrs. Dempster, Leola, and Diana were, if not great beauties, at least not ugly. What's more she is well-read and intelligent. In these ways she defies almost everything Dunstan knows (or thinks he knows) about womanhood. What's more, she appears to have interests that are similar to his own.

Dunstan is impressed by Liesl's knowledge of hagiography (the study and writing of the lives of saints), and has to try hard to conceal how flattered he is. He asks about compensation and Liesl tells him they are willing to pay a generous yet reasonable price. Dunstan is fifty years old now—and at his age cannot afford to turn down an adventure, so he agrees.

Though Dunstan is flattered by Liesl's praise he does not wish to show it—though it would certainly humanize him if he did so. Dunstan accepts the position in part because he realizes he is growing older. Perhaps he fears he has not lived a full enough life.

4. He is questioning himself a month later, when he has grown utterly sick of Eisengrim and his crew. He especially hates Liesl, but their mysterious work appeals to his loneliness and he cannot back out. They sometimes seek his opinion on the show, and Dunstan suggests a new act called the Brazen Head, where a head would be "levitated" above the audience and speak truths about their lives and futures (this was accomplished by way of stage girls sneaking peaks at and stealing personal items from people in the audience, to provide information about their lives). The illusion is a success and grows wildly popular.

Dunstan is unhappy in his new job, though he is having success. Interestingly, our narrator-historian devises an illusion regarding the telling of fortunes, the bridging of the past and future. It is unclear why Dunstan hates Liesl—her only flaw seems to be her ugliness and her unfamiliarity. Perhaps Dunstan hates her because he cannot understand her. And in fact, coming to know Liesl, and what she stands for, will be one of the most important events in Dunstan's life.

Dunstan enjoys working on these illusions, but believes it is destroying his character. In returning to a childhood passion, he is also returning to the immodesty, deceitfulness, and egotism of childhood. He begins to boast and lie, and knows deep down that something terrible is wrong with Dunstan Ramsay. He knows this because of two things: he has become indiscreet in his gossip, and he has fallen in love with Faustina.

Dunstan believes that as an adult he has cultivated a noble and honorable character, and is frightened by the fact that he now displays immodesty and egotism. He tells secrets and has fallen in love. But of course the reader knows that these are natural human realities, and that no life is lived completely free of these vices—nor should it be.

Dunstan finds himself telling secrets of his life to Liesl, who has a way of drawing information out of him even though he is not in the least bit fond of her. He tells her everything about the Dempsters, about the miracles, and about Paul's childhood. He begs of her the next day to keep his secrets, and she refuses to make this promise. He tries again and again, and she refuses him, saying he is too old to still believe in secrets. She lashes out at him, saying he has spent all his love on one person, Mrs. Dempster, and that is why he despises Liesl, and why he is alone. She says it is not too late for him to enjoy a few years of "normal humanity."

Suddenly and for the first time the reader is offered insight into Dunstan's character that does not come from Dunstan himself. Liesl offers Dunstan another interpretation of his life's history: that he has obsessively let Mrs. Dempster replace all love and human connection in his life, and that he despises Liesl because he does not know how to love someone who brings out the humanity and irrationality in him,

Though this weighs heavily on Dunstan's mind, the issue of his love for Faustina is even more painful. He knows it is impossible for them for be together, but pines after her anyway, watching her backstage and thinking of her every night. He imagines taking her home with him to Canada, and showing her off in the halls of the school. One day she greets him, calling him "St. Dunstan" and he is ecstatic. Though Faustina is Eisengrim's mistress, he doubts there is any real love there. He begins to wonder if there is real potential for a relationship with Faustina. This lasts only a day, until Dunstan passes by her dressing room and is horrified to see Liesl and Faustina naked and pleasuring one another. Dunstan says he has never "known such a collapse of spirit even in the worst of the war."

Dunstan's love for Faustina, though painful, is distant. It is as though he loves her in part because she is inaccessible, because she is a symbol and a "role". When he imagines the two of them together, he does not imagine sexual or emotional intimacy, but rather showing Faustina off in the hallways of his workplace. He believes the only obstacle to this rather dull future is the potential relationship between Liesl and Paul. However, as ever, the truth is far more complicated than it seems: Dunstan sees Liesl and Faustina together, and melodramatically tells us his "spirit" is wounded more in this moment than it ever was during the war.

Late that night, Dunstan answers a knock at his bedroom door and it is Liesl. She sits on his bed and asks him to sit with her, telling him she knows he is upset about seeing her with Faustina. She tells him he is like a little boy, and that his "bottled up feelings have burst their bottle and splashed glass and acid everywhere." Dunstan tells her not to bully him. She explains that Faustina is a physical creature, and that he simply can't understand such a person. She becomes even more condescending, telling him that he treats life as though it is a "spectator sport," and that had he loved Faustina he would have showed her that love physically.

Liesl once again gives us a sorely needed second perspective on Dunstan's life. She notes that he has not progressed past childhood, that he has rejected human emotion and physical connection, preferring to intellectualize life and study it from afar. Liesl's criticisms should strike the reader as deeply accurate: Dunstan has spent his life observing but not participating in marriage, love, strife, vice—the whole cast of irrational—but vital—human behaviors.

To Dunstan's astonishment, Liesl suggests they sleep together. She is stronger than him, and tries to wrestle him down on the bed. He bests her, and breaks her nose in the process. She flees from the room. Later that night she comes back, telling him he is stronger than he looks, and offering a little smile. She explains to him she merely wanted to show him he is human; that she has heard the story of his life, and has noticed he refuses to act human. Because he has failed to live his life, he has poured his soul out to her, the first truly intelligent woman he has ever met.

Liesl and Dunstan become violent after Liesl suggests they sleep together. Dunstan is repulsed and though she is stronger than him he manages to fight her off. Though this interaction is strange and perhaps unnerving, it is notably one of the few truly emotional exchanges Dunstan has ever had. Liesl simply wants to give Dunstan permission to be human, to acknowledge and love his human soul and engage with other human souls.

She suggests that Dunstan should "get to know his own personal devil," and that the "twice born" know how to embrace the irrational. She tells him he is fifth business, and explains the meaning of the phrase: the role in a drama that is neither hero, villain, nor confidant, but is still crucial to the unfolding of the plot. The fifth business is a lonely role, but a crucial one, and a "good line of work." After this long talk, Dunstan and Liesl have sex, with what Dunstan describes as a "healing tenderness."

As Liesl continues to explain herself, she seems less and less sinister. She explains to Dunstan his role in his life, his history, his drama and mythology: he is fifth business. He must learn however, how to be fifth business and still be human, and embrace the irrational in himself and others. Dunstan should think of himself as twice born—a religious and psychological concept that suggests someone can live more than one life, and have more than one simple identity.

PART 6: "THE SOIRÉE OF ILLUSIONS"

1. Dunstan enjoys writing *the Autobiography of Magnus Eisengrim*, because there is no obligation to be "historically correct" or consider evidence. He fills the text with "romance and marvels" but also includes notes of eroticism and sadism, and it sells "like hot cakes." He writes the book a few days after his encounter with Liesl. Shortly after that, Eisengrim and his crew leave to tour the rest of South America and Europe. Dunstan gives Faustina an expensive necklace as a parting gift, and she kisses him. He also makes Paul promise to contribute to the care of his mother—Paul reluctantly agrees, though he maintains her reputation destroyed his childhood.

Dunstan's encounter with Liesl—in which he learns to take together the rational and irrational, angelic and devilish, marvelous and degraded—seems to help him achieve a kind of breakthrough in his writing. He writes a text that appeals to readers' humanity. Dunstan seems as though he is in some ways a new man—he shows his affection for Faustina, he finds a solution to the problem of Mary's hospital bills, and most of all seems to find a real kind of faith and happiness.

Dunstan is able to transfer Mrs. Dempster to a private care facility. His happiness and relief at being able to do so lead him to make an impulsive decision—he tells Mrs. Dempster that he has found Paul. However, this news pushes her deeper into insanity—she does not understand why Paul is not with her, and how Paul could be an adult, for in her mind he is permanently a little boy. She concludes that Dunstan and the hospital are conspiring against her to keep her away from her son, and she has to be kept in restraints. The nurses tell Dunstan it is probably best if she doesn't see him for a while.

It is, unfortunately, short-lived. Dunstan makes the well-intentioned mistake of telling Mary about her son, and she is not mentally or emotionally equipped to deal with the information. Dunstan is once again thrown out of Mrs. Dempster's life—just as he was in Deptford. History repeats itself.

2. Dunstan is depressed by the fact that his own stupidity is to blame for Mrs. Dempster's renewed misery. In the midst of this loss, Boy marries a woman who does not approve of Dunstan. Boy has become interested in a career in politics, and though he does not fair well at first, he wins over a small percentage of the population—among this percentage is Denyse Hornick, a powerful and influential woman who, like Boy, makes the world work for her. Denyse works to help Boy win the Lieutenant Governorship of Ontario.

Dunstan is prevented form seeing Mary, and on top of that, his only other "friend" has married a woman who does not approve of Dunstan. Perhaps we could see this as fate uprooting Dunstan's old roots. He has been reborn, after all, and it seems life has changes in store for him. Boy has finally found a woman who measures up to him, and should not need to vent to Dunstan anymore.

Though Denyse seems masculine to Boy in her professional dealings, she is feminine in her love for him, and they are married rather soon after they meet. Caroline and David dislike her, and Dunstan comforts them.

Denyse is like a perfect combination of young businessman and loving woman. She satisfies Boy's need for femininity as well as his "Corporate Homosexuality."

3. Denyse has a strong dislike for Dunstan and his odd enthusiasm for religion and saints. She finds interests of this sort repulsive, and Dunstan is no longer invited into their home. Boy smoothes things over by occasionally asking Dunstan to lunch with him at his club. During one of these lunches, Boy defends Denyse's "rationalism" and tells Dunstan he has become an atheist. Dunstan tells him he is not surprised: Boy worshipped himself as god, and found himself disappointed. He calls atheism "psychological suicide."

It is revealed that Denyse dislikes Dunstan because she finds his interest in faith, religion, and sainthood to be silly and frivolous. Boy calls this "rationalism." However, Dunstan sees Denyse and Boy's newfound atheism to be precisely the opposite: it is "psychological suicide"—by which he seems to mean the willful prioritization of empty "successes" such as Boy's beyond the pursuit or believe in the miraculous—and suicide is perhaps the most irrational act one could commit.

To Dunstan's surprise, Boy crumples under this criticism and reveals that he has been severely unhappy, even in the face of all of his success. He tells Dunstan he sometimes wishes he could get in his car and drive away from everything. Dunstan calls this a "mythological wish," and tells Boy that eventually he will learn how to be old, but that it will take time and effort. Boy looks at him hatefully and calls him a lunatic. Eventually conversation becomes pleasant again.

Boy finally admits that his life, though flashy, glamorous, and successful, has not been fulfilling. Dunstan tries to help him by giving him advice about the place of myth and self-realization in a happy life, but Boy rejects this help, calling Dunstan a lunatic. Dunstan could have helped Boy with his spiritual success just as Boy helped Dunstan with his finances, but Boy is unwilling to receive such help.

4. A year after Boy and Denyse are married, Mrs. Dempster dies. Dunstan thinks his disclosure of Paul's existence broke her in some way, and led to her death. Dunstan visits on her deathbed—she asks him if he is Dunstable Ramsay, and he tells her he is—she remarks that last she was aware, Dunstable was a young boy. After this she lies quietly until she dies.

Mrs. Dempster dies, and Dunstan blames himself even for this final (and inevitable) tragedy. That Mrs. Dempster doesn't remember any of the events with Dunstan, while for Dunstan they were the central defining aspects of his life. This is Dunstan's personal "religion." Mrs. Dempster may be a saint for him, but he isn't anything to her.

That night Dunstan weeps for the first time since his mother beat him because of the missing egg. The next day he arranges for Mrs. Dempster's body to be cremated. Before she is sent away, he prays over her body for forgiveness. He knows he has tried to do his best, but that he has not been loving enough in his dealings with her. Dunstan is alone in the crematory chapel as her body is cremated—for no one else knew her.

Dunstan has not cried since he was a boy and his mother showed him that people are often not what they seem. He still feels guilty, but he is expressing his emotions, he is acting like a feeling, caring human being—this was Liesl's wish for him, and it appears to be coming true.

5. The following summer, Dunstan goes to Europe hoping to speak to the Bollandists about the success of his latest book, and hopes they will pay him compliments. They do, and what's more Dunstan hears news that makes him even happier: Padre Blazon is still alive in a hospital in Vienna. He goes to see him immediately.

Dunstan, who we have seen typically likes to deny his want for and appreciation of flattery, goes to Europe admittedly to seek out praise from the Bollandists. This impulse—in addition to being psychologically self-aware and human—also gives him the opportunity to see Padre Blazon again.

Padre Blazon is delighted to see Dunstan, and asks him quickly about his fool-saint. Dunstan recalls Father Regan is the only person whom he has heard use that phrase before, and mentions this to Padre Blazon. Padre says he does not use the phrase in the same way as others, and asks Dunstan to repeat the story of Mary Dempster to him.

Padre Blazon is a true friend and clearly cares about Dunstan. He uses the phrase "fool saint" just as Father Regan did—but, as is typical with him, the religion of others has no effect on his personal religions: certain definitions, Padre Blazon believes, should be left up to the individual.

After he listens to the story, Padre Blazon is tired, and Dunstan goes home for the night, returning in the morning. Padre Blazon tells him he has thought about his fool-saint. He admits few others could ever be convinced of Mary Dempster's sainthood, but that it should be enough for Dunstan that his saint illuminated his own life.

Padre Blazon tells us what we perhaps already knew—that Mary Dempster, though her sainthood could never be peddled as a widely agreed-upon fact, was a saint for Dunstan. We could say her sainthood is, to use Dunstan's phrase, "a psychological reality." And Padre Blazon's point is that this is enough, to have a personal saint who illuminated just your own life. Public recognition of that saint is unnecessary.

He then changes the subject, and asks Dunstan if he has met the Devil yet. Dunstan tells him briefly about his encounter with Liesl. Padre Blazon is thrilled to hear it, and agrees that a relationship with the Devil is good for one's character—he supposed Jesus himself learned much from the Devil. Before Dunstan leaves, he tells Padre Blazon that God has not taught him how to be old yet. Padre Blazon responds that he *has* found God in his old age, and that he is happy.

Liesl is then incorporated into Dunstan's personal mythology. She is his "devil"—and Padre Blazon's (unusual but heartening) opinion is that a relationship with the devil, so long as it does not involve personal compromise or a "Faustian" bargain (Faustina's name is called to mind) is a beneficial thing, that one must come to terms with one's devils rather than avoid or repress them.

Dunstan leaves to tour other places in Europe. In Salzburg, he recognizes the Madonna that he saw on the battlefield. The face is not Mary Dempster's face, but the hair did resemble Mrs. Dempster's. Dunstan does not get a photo or postcard of the statue—nevertheless, he knows, "she is mine forever."

That Dunstan does not feel he needs to take a photograph of the statue shows that Dunstan is content to accept his own lived reality as "truth"—he doesn't need photographic—public—proof. The Madonna is "his forever."

6. Boy Staunton is found dead in his Cadillac in 1968, which had been driven into the Toronto Harbor at high speeds. A stone—pinkish granite the size of an egg—had been mysteriously found in his mouth. The press had a field day: was Boy murdered? Was it suicide? His funeral is a solemn affair. Denyse makes it as close to a state funeral as possible. Denyse grimly asks Dunstan to write "the official life"—she wants an account of Boy's earlier years and supposes Dunstan is the only man who will be able to provide such an account.

Suddenly we learn that Boy dies under mysterious circumstances. Denyse, though she dislikes Dunstan, still asks him to do her the considerable favor of writing Boy's official life. She is essentially asking him to consider being a spectator of Boy's life even after his death. Dunstan has been a spectator his whole life, so perhaps she assumes he will accept this job as he has accepted so many others.

But Dunstan has a heart attack three days later, and decides afterwards that he will no longer do things he does not want to do. Plus, recent events have taught Dunstan about the variability of truth, and he believes that writing such a thing as an "official life" is impossible.

We learn that Dunstan will have a life-altering event just after Boy's funeral—an event that will teach him not to accept jobs he doesn't want, and also will teach him about the nature of truth and history.

7. Just Prior to Boy's Death, In 1968, Magnus Eisengrim travels to Canada. He performs at Colborne College, and after the show walks down the hall with Dunstan where they happen to run into Boy, who is delighted to see them. Boy says he has seen the show and Eisengrim says he remembers seeing him in the audience. Boy asks Eisengrim to explain the Brazen Head illusion, but Eisengrim refuses. Boy is humbled, and wants to get drinks with Eisengrim and Dunstan. He tries to endear himself to Eisengrim by making fun of Dunstan, but it doesn't work. The three of them go back to Dunstan's room.

Finally this trio is reunited, even as the novel has ratcheted up the stakes by revealing that both Boy's death and Dunstan's heart attack occur just after this encounter. Boy clearly does not recognize Paul, and ill advisedly tries to win Paul over by teasing Dunstan, by making himself look superior. Boy still traffics in appearances above all. What's more, Boy, who has little appreciation for everything magical, spiritual, or religious, wants immediately to know how Eisengrim pulled off the Brazen head illusion – Boy cares about the "facts" rather than the "lived reality." Eisengrim will reveal no such secrets to Boy, whom we can assume he recognizes, based on his clear memory of Boy sitting in his audience.

Boy tries to make fun of Dunstan's bookish living quarters, but Eisengrim remarks that he likes Dunstan's space, and Boy relents in his teasing. Eisengrim then reveals when Dunstan already knows but Boy does not: that he had previously been known as Paul Dempster. He tells the sad story of his time in the circus, and implies his sexual abuse at the hands of Le Solitaire.

Paul reveals his whole backstory to Boy, wasting no time in explaining away certain misconceptions about his childhood—his life has been difficult, and his current success is certainly not the result of a charmed childhood. Paul's abuse at the hands of his mentor recall Dunstan's idea of Boy's attraction to his own mentees.

He then talks about his childhood in Deptford, and mentions that Boy used to call his mother a whore and taunt him in school. Boy cannot remember doing any such thing, and suggests Paul may be confused. He asks Paul again what his name is. Dunstan interjects and tells him this man is Paul Dempster, and waits for Boy to remember. To his utter shock, Boy can recall no such family ever living in Deptford. Dunstan presses him and realizes he is not lying—Boy has completely erased them from his memory.

Boy harassed Paul as a child—no doubt Paul has carried these cruel words with him for much of his life. Boy, meanwhile, has either repressed the memory of Paul's entire family completely. This scene illustrates the effect that psychological phenomena like trauma and repression can have on a person's sense of historical events. It also makes it clear that of the three people involved in the snowball accident and the events after, only Dunstan had any memory of it. Both Mrs. Dempster and Boy do not. The lived experience of these three characters have been entirely different.

Trying to lighten the mood, Boy asks Paul where he got his stage name. Paul responds that it means "wolf," and notes that while he became a wolf, Boy became a boy. He asks if Boy chose this name because his mother used to call him Pidgy Boy-Boy. Boy demands to know how Paul could know this, and Paul says Dunstan told him once. Dunstan denies this, but he doubts himself—perhaps he did mention it to Paul at some point. Paul tells Dunstan he simply cannot afford to remember a time when he divulged a secret.

Dunstan has always thought himself to be an excellent keeper of secrets (at least until he spilled his life story to Liesl. This conception of himself has in many ways framed the way he conceives of his own childhood—a secretive affair where he kept to himself and shared nothing unnecessary with anyone. But Paul breaks down Dunstan's personal history with his own, emphasizing yet again that history cannot be separated from psychology.

Paul says he remembers everything about Deptford, especially Mrs. Ramsay, whom he believes was the most hardened and cruel of all. Dunstan surprises him by telling him the story of how his mother kept him alive during those first fragile months of his life. Paul is thrown by this, and asks to smoke one of Dunstan's cigars, opening a box on his shelf. Instead of cigars, the box holds Mrs. Dempster's ashes. Paul asks Dunstan why he would keep such a thing in his room.

Now it's Paul's turn to discover his memory does not necessarily contain a completely factual account of his own life. He remembers the Ramsays as being a cruel and hardened family, when in fact Mrs. Ramsay cared more about the well-being of the Dempsters (prior to Mary's indiscretion) than anyone else in Deptford. When the ashes are revealed, it becomes clear that Dunstan's secret will finally get out.

Dunstan tells him guilt is the reason, and discloses the story of the snowball, and his own role in Mary Dempster's misfortune. Boy says Dunstan has made a big deal out of nothing, that the difference between them is that Dunstan broods over insignificant events and Boy forgets them. Dunstan hands him a paperweight, and asks him if this jogs his memory. It is a pinkish stone. Boy says he's seen it a thousand times and it has never reminded him of anything. Dunstan says that this is the stone that Boy enclosed in the snowball that he threw that hit Mary Dempster.

Dunstan finally admits to his role in Paul's premature birth and Mary Dempster's mental impairment. He has carried this guilt with him his entire life, and finally admits it in front of two people directly involved in the accident. Boy, on the other hand, seems incapable of guilt. He can simply forget his wrongdoings or dismiss them as insignificant. Even when presented with physical evidence (the stone that Dunstan has kept all these years) he cannot feel any sense of responsibility.

Boy is fed up—he accuses Dunstan of trying to humiliate him in front of Paul, and says that Dunstan is simply jealous that Leola chose him. Paul interrupts, saying he needs to retire for the night. Boy is suddenly courteous, and asks if he can give Paul a ride. Paul agrees. The next morning, after Dunstan hears of Boy's death, he notices his stone paperweight is gone.

Boy's belief that all this stems from Dunstan's jealousy over Leola again emphasizes Boy's focus on the importance of "having" things, of competing, though it also highlights the profound difference between his and Dunstan's lived experience. The missing paperweight is reminiscent of the money Paul stole from Dunstan, and suggests now that Paul stole that money as revenge for what he remembered as the Ramsay's cruelty, just as he steals the stone now to cap off another, more complete, revenge.

8. The Saturday following Boy's death, Dunstan goes to see Paul's show, now called *The Soirée of Illusions*. During the show, someone asks the Brazen Head "Who Killed Boy Staunton?" and the Brazen Head (voiced by Liesl) responds that he was killed by himself, the woman he knew, the woman he did not know, the man who granted his inmost wish, and by "the inevitable fifth, who was keeper of his conscience and keeper of the stone."

Liesl answer suggests that Boy was killed by himself (he had already in Dunstan's words committed "psychological suicide"). "The woman he knew" and "the woman he did not know" likely refer to the two versions of Mrs. Dempster—the one he knew as a child, and the version of her he forgot about or neglected to notice. Paul granted Boy's "inmost wish" by killing him (since he desired to die) and "the inevitable fifth" is Dunstan, whose inevitable (read: fated) role in the story was crucial to the story's conclusions.

As this happens, Dunstan has his heart attack and falls to the ground. When he wakes in the hospital, he finds a note from Liesl, apologizing for causing his illness, and asking him to come to Switzerland and re-join the crew. "We shall have some high old times before The Five make an end of us all." Dunstan concludes the letter to the headmaster with this note.

Finally we learn of Dunstan's fate—the reader can assume that after composing this letter to the headmaster, Dunstan goes to live out his days with Liesl and Eisengrim, finding his spirituality and humanity to be best served by this odd group, living among faith and magic, creating and sharing lived experience, learning from their devils.

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