

as though you'd suddenly swallowed a bright piece of the afternoon sun
as if they had said to each other: 'You too?'
the dark table seemed to melt into the dusky light

Find some examples in the story. What do they describe?

- 25 The style of speaking of the middle-class characters – particularly the men – is often 'elliptical', that is, words are left out which are not essential to the meaning. For example, when Harry arrives home and runs up the stairs, he shouts *Hullo, you people. Down in five minutes. (I'll be down in five minutes.)* Can you find more examples of this?
- 26 At this period, it was fashionable in a certain group of people to use French words and phrases in conversation. Notice Bertha's use of *Entendu* when she speaks to Harry on the phone. Are there any other examples in the story?
- 27 The narrative changes frequently from Bertha's poetic view of life to the mundane – everyday, boring – reality and the guests' ridiculous comments. This emphasises to us how unrealistic Bertha is, and how much she is fooling herself.
Here is an example:

'For ever – for a moment? And did Miss Fulton murmur: 'Yes, just that.'
Or did Bertha dream it?
Then the light was snapped on and Face made the coffee...'

Find some more examples of this juxtaposition⁵⁶ – the immediate comparison – between Bertha's thoughts and the 'real' world.

- 28 Look at the passage beginning *While he looked it up she turned her head towards the hall.* [page 65]. How do you think Bertha feels?
How does the author communicate the shock of her discovery?

Guidance to the above literary terms, answer keys to all the exercises and activities, plus a wealth of other reading-practice material, can be found on the student's section of the Macmillan Readers website at:
www.macmillanenglish.com/readers.

56 placing or describing things together so that you can see how they are different

A Shocking Accident

by Graham Greene

About the author

Graham Greene was born in 1904 in Hertfordshire, England. As a boy, he attended Berkhamsted School where his father was headmaster. He later went to Oxford University where he published many poems and stories. In his early 20s he converted to Catholicism. Catholicism and inner conflict are important themes in books such as *The Power and the Glory* which is about a persecuted priest in Mexico.

Greene married when he was young and had two children. He separated from his wife in 1948 but they never divorced. He was reluctant to discuss his private life with journalists and it was only after he died that the public learned more about his personal life from his official biographer. He had many affairs, but his companion for many years until his death was Yvonne Cloetta.

Greene's first novel, *The Man Within*, was published in 1929. He was a prolific¹ writer. As well as novels, Greene also wrote travelogues such as *Journey Without Maps*, plays for stage and television, screenplays and short stories.

Throughout his life, Greene travelled widely and his books are set in a wide range of countries where his characters struggle with personal moral choices in turbulent² political settings. Greene admitted that he actively looked for adventure in areas of war and conflict.

Many of his books have been made into films, including *Brighton Rock*, *The Honorary Consul*, *The End of the Affair*, *The Quiet American* and *The Human Factor*. His most famous film is *The Third Man* for which he wrote the screenplay. Set in Vienna after the Second World War, it has many of the characteristics of Greene's writing: a background of conflict involving different countries, alienated characters, intrigue and preoccupation with moral choices.

Graham Greene was a friend of the British spy Kim Philby and some have suggested that Greene himself was a spy during his time in Africa where he worked for the British government. He sometimes

1 producing a lot of something

2 uncontrolled, suddenly and violently changing

joked about his Intelligence³ activities, which he said were trivial⁴. This attitude can be seen in his book *Our Man in Havana*, in which the hero tries to sell a design for a vacuum cleaner as a deadly secret weapon.

Greene always refused to define himself politically. Although his books sometimes reflect anti-Americanism (*The Quiet American*), and he had some sympathy for left-wing regimes, he always denied having any definite political sympathies. Above all, he was a supporter of oppressed people everywhere and a clear-eyed observer of human behaviour in extreme situations.

In his later years, Greene lived in Antibes, in the south of France and continued to write prolifically. In 1990, he moved to Switzerland to be nearer to his daughter. He died in Vevey, Switzerland, in 1991, at the age of eighty-six.

About the story

A Shocking Accident was published in 1967 in the collection of stories *May We Borrow Your Husband?*. It was later made into a film which won an Oscar for Best Short Film in 1983.

Background information

The British education system

In the story, Jerome, the main character, attends a 'preparatory' or 'prep' school. This is an independent school for children aged between 7 or 8, and 11 or 13, and is often a boarding school where the pupils live.

In these schools, students are often divided into groups. Each group has its own teams and activities. The groups are called 'houses', and each one has its own master, a teacher who manages the students and events in the house. Jerome's housemaster is Mr Wordsworth.

In the second part of the story, Jerome is older and he attends a 'public school', which in the UK is, traditionally a single-sex boarding school, most of which were established in the 18th or 19th centuries.

³ information collected about the secret plans and activities of a foreign government, enemy etc

⁴ not very interesting, serious or valuable

Writers

Greene often wrote about his travels in some of the world's most remote and troubled places. In contrast, Jerome's father is a writer who seems to travel mainly in Mediterranean countries. His books are given unadventurous titles, such as *Sunshine and Shade*, *Rambles in the Balearics*, and *Nooks and Crannies* – suggesting, perhaps, that Jerome's father does not take risks. This makes the way he dies even more 'shocking'.

We learn that often, 'after an author's death', people write to the *Times Literary Supplement* expressing an interest in personal letters and stories about the writer's life. Greene tells us that most of these 'biographies' are never written and suggests that perhaps some of the more scandalous details are used as 'blackmail, that is – by threatening to reveal damaging information about someone. It is quite possible that Greene himself saw some examples of this type of behaviour.

Summary

It may help you to know something about what happens in the story before you read it. Don't worry, this summary does not tell you how the story ends!

Jerome, a young boy at a boarding school in England, is called one day to his housemaster's study. The housemaster tells him that his father, a travel writer, has died in Naples, Italy, as the result of a pig falling on him from a balcony.

As Jerome grows up, his father's death becomes a source of embarrassment to him. He mentally prepares different ways of telling the story in case anyone is interested in the future in writing his father's biography.

Jerome becomes engaged to Sally, a doctor's daughter. He realises that she will find out about his father's death when she meets his aunt, with whom he has been living. He tries to tell her himself, before the visit takes place, but all his attempts fail. A week before the wedding, Sally meets Jerome's aunt who tells her what happened to his father. Jerome is full of apprehension: what will Sally's reaction be?

Pre-reading exercises

Key vocabulary

This section will help you familiarise yourself with some of the more specific vocabulary used in the story. You may want to use it to help you before you start reading, or as a revision exercise after you have finished the story.

School vocabulary

housemaster a man who is a teacher and is in charge of a 'house' at a public school. A 'house' is one of the groups that students are divided into in some British schools, in order to compete against each other

headmaster a male teacher who is in charge of a school. Today, 'headteacher' is more common

preparatory school (prep school) in the UK, school for children between 7 or 8, and 11 or 13

public school in the UK, an independent boarding school for children between 11 or 13, and 18

break a period of time between lessons when students and teachers can rest, eat or play

trigonometry the part of mathematics that studies how the angles and sides of triangles are related

1 Complete the following sentences with the words in the box above.

- 1 When he was nine, Jerome attended a where, amongst other subjects, he studied
- 2 The owner of the school was also the and was not one of Jerome's teachers.
- 3 One day, during the between two lessons, Jerome was called into the study of his who informed him that his father had died.
- 4 It was not until Jerome was older and began to attend, that he began to find the manner of his father's death embarrassing.

Jerome's father

2 Look at the phrases in the box below, which refer to Jerome's father. Which do you think are 'objective' comments, made by the author? Which are made by Jerome's aunt or refer to Jerome's own feelings?

- a) *a restless widowed author*
- b) *a large sad man in an unsuitable dark suit posed in Capri*
- c) *... my brother was a great traveller*
- d) *Jerome's father had not been a very distinguished writer*
- e) *He felt a longing to protect his memory, and uncertain whether this quiet love of his would survive ...*
- f) *He wrote so tenderly about his travels. He would have had a great future.*

- 1 Which adjective tells you that Jerome's mother is dead?
- 2 Why do you think the suit is described as 'unsuitable'?
- 3 Which phrase tells us that Jerome's father was not a very well-known writer?
- 4 Which words suggest that Jerome's father was not content (happy)?
- 5 Which phrase do you think describes a photograph?

Main themes

Before you read the story, you may want to think about some of its main themes. The questions will help you think about the story as you're reading it for the first time. There is more discussion of the main themes in the *Literary analysis* section after the story.

Father-and-son relationships

It is interesting to see how Jerome's attitude to his father changes as he grows older. As a young boy, he idolises and romanticises him, imagining that he leads an exciting and dangerous life as an agent for the British Secret Service. He is sure that his death has been the result of a gun fight.

Later, at public school, he is teased by the other boys when they learn how Jerome's father died. By now, he knows his father was a

travel writer rather than a secret agent. He accepts this, however, and cherishes the memory of his father and wants to keep it alive.

As a young man, he feels sympathy and *quiet love* for his father. It is essential to him that the girl he loves understands his feelings.

Reactions to death

Different cultures react to death in different ways. It is not rational that death from a falling pig should cause amusement. Nevertheless⁵, in the story, most people who are not related to the person involved, find something comical in the event. Convention⁶ tells us that we should receive news of a death with sympathy and seriousness but the housemaster, Jerome's schoolmates, and strangers, find it difficult to react in the conventional way. Because the cause of death is so unusual and unexpected, it makes people react in unusual and unexpected ways.



A Shocking Accident

by Graham Greene

Jerome was called into his housemaster's room in the break between the second and the third class on a Thursday morning. He had no fear of trouble, for he was a warden – the name that the proprietor and headmaster of a rather expensive preparatory school had chosen to give to approved, reliable boys in the lower forms (from a warden one became a guardian and finally before leaving, it was hoped for Marlborough or Rugby⁷, a crusader⁸). The housemaster, Mr Wordsworth, sat behind his desk with an appearance of perplexity⁹ and **apprehension**. Jerome had the odd impression when he entered that he was a cause of fear.

'Sit down, Jerome,' Mr Wordsworth said. 'All going well with the trigonometry?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I've had a telephone call, Jerome. From your aunt. I'm afraid I have bad news for you.'

'Yes, sir?'

'Your father has had an accident.'

'Oh.'

Mr Wordsworth looked at him with some surprise. 'A serious accident.'

'Yes, sir?'

Jerome worshipped his father: the verb is exact. As man re-creates God, so Jerome re-created his father – from a restless widowed author into a mysterious adventurer who travelled in far places – Nice, Beirut, Majorca, even the Canaries. The time had arrived about his eighth birthday when Jerome believed

5 despite a fact or idea that you have just mentioned: used as a way of showing how a sentence, phrase, or word is related to what has already been said

6 a way of behaving that is generally accepted as being normal or right

7 two prestigious independent schools, called 'public' schools in the UK

8 someone who works hard for a long time to achieve something that they believe is morally right

9 confused feeling because you cannot understand something; usually used as an adjective, *perplexed*

that his father either ‘ran guns’¹⁰ or was a member of the British Secret Service. Now it occurred to him that his father might have been wounded in a ‘hail of machine-gun bullets’¹¹.

Mr Wordsworth played with the ruler on his desk. He seemed at a loss how to continue. He said, ‘You know your father was in Naples?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Your aunt heard from the hospital today.’

‘Oh.’

Mr Wordsworth said with desperation, ‘It was a street accident.’

‘Yes, sir?’ It seemed quite likely to Jerome that they would call it a street accident. The police of course had fired first; his father would not take human life except as a last resort.

‘I’m afraid your father was very seriously hurt indeed.’

‘Oh.’

‘In fact, Jerome, he died yesterday. Quite without pain.’

‘Did they shoot him through the heart?’

‘I beg your pardon. What did you say, Jerome?’

‘Did they shoot him through the heart?’

‘Nobody shot him, Jerome. A pig fell on him.’ An inexplicable¹² convulsion took place in the nerves of Mr Wordsworth’s face; it really looked for a moment as though he were going to laugh. He closed his eyes, composed his features and said rapidly as though it were necessary to expel the story as rapidly as possible. ‘Your father was walking along a street in Naples when a pig fell on him. A shocking accident. Apparently in the poorer quarters of Naples they keep pigs on their balconies. This one was on the fifth floor. It had grown too fat. The balcony broke. The pig fell on your father.’

Mr Wordsworth left his desk rapidly and went to the window, turning his back on Jerome. He shook a little with emotion.

Jerome said, ‘What happened to the pig?’

10 *gun running* is taking guns into a country secretly and illegally

11 a large number of bullets that come at you quickly and with force

12 impossible to explain

This was not **callousness** on the part of Jerome, as it was interpreted by Mr Wordsworth to his colleagues (he even discussed with them whether, perhaps, Jerome was yet fitted¹³ to be a warden). Jerome was only attempting to visualize the strange scene to get the details right. Nor was Jerome a boy who cried; he was a boy who **brooded**, and it never occurred to him at his preparatory school that the circumstances of his father’s death were comic – they were still part of the mystery of life. It was later, in his first term at his public school, when he told the story to his best friend, that he began to realize how it affected others. Naturally after that disclosure he was known, rather unreasonably, as Pig.

Unfortunately his aunt had no sense of humour. There was an enlarged snapshot¹⁴ of his father on the piano; a large sad man in an unsuitable dark suit posed in Capri with an umbrella (to guard him against sunstroke), the Faraglione rocks forming the background. By the age of sixteen Jerome was well aware that the portrait looked more like the author of *Sunshine and Shade* and *Rambles in the Balearics* than an agent of the Secret Service. All the same he loved the memory of his father: he still possessed an album fitted with picture-postcards (the stamps had been soaked off long ago for his other collection), and it pained him when his aunt embarked¹⁵ with strangers on the story of his father’s death.

‘A shocking accident,’ she would begin, and the stranger would compose his or her features into the correct shape for interest and **commiseration**. Both reactions, of course, were false, but it was terrible for Jerome to see how suddenly, midway in her **rambling discourse**, the interest would become genuine. ‘I can’t think how such things can be allowed in a **civilized** country,’ his aunt would say. ‘I suppose one has to regard Italy as civilized. One is prepared for all kinds of things abroad, of course, and my brother was a great traveller. He always carried a

13 right, suitable (in modern English, we usually say *to be fit to do/be something*)

14 a photograph taken without the use of professional equipment

15 to start on a new project or activity; here, to begin to tell the story of his father’s death

water-filter with him. It was far less expensive, you know, than buying all those bottles of mineral water. My brother always said that his filter paid for his dinner wine. You can see from that what a careful man he was, but who could possibly have expected when he was walking along the Via Dottore Manuele Panucci on his way to the Hydrographic Museum¹⁶ that a pig would fall on him? That was the moment when the interest became genuine.

Jerome's father had not been a very **distinguished** writer, but the time always seems to come, after an author's death, when somebody thinks it worth his while to write a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement*¹⁷ announcing the preparation of a biography and asking to see any letters or documents or receive any **anecdotes** from friends of the dead man. Most of the biographies, of course, never appear – one wonders whether the whole thing may not be an obscure form of **blackmail** and whether many a potential writer of a biography or thesis finds the means in this way to finish his education at Kansas or Nottingham¹⁸. Jerome, however, as a chartered accountant¹⁹, lived far from the literary world. He did not realize how small the menace²⁰ really was, or that the danger period for someone of his father's **obscurity** had long passed. Sometimes he rehearsed the method of recounting his father's death so as to reduce the comic element to its smallest dimensions – it would be of no use to refuse information, for in that case the biographer would undoubtedly visit his aunt who was living to a great old age with no sign of **flagging**.

It seemed to Jerome that there were two possible methods – the first led gently up to the accident, so that by the time it was described the listener was so well prepared that the death came really as an anti-climax. The chief danger of laughter in such a story was surprise. When he rehearsed this method Jerome began boringly enough.

¹⁶ hydrographic refers to the science of the study of water

¹⁷ *The Times* is a British newspaper and *The Times Literary Supplement* publishes book reviews and articles about authors

¹⁸ refer to the universities of Kansas (USA) and Nottingham (UK)

¹⁹ an accountant is someone whose job is to prepare financial records for a company or person; *chartered* means that they have passed a professional examination

²⁰ someone or something that is dangerous and likely to cause you harm

'You know Naples and those high tenement²¹ buildings? Someone once told me that the Neapolitan always feels at home in New York just as the man from Turin feels at home in London because the river runs in much the same way in both cities. Where was I? Oh, yes. Naples, of course. You'd be surprised in the poorer quarters²² what things they keep on the balconies of those sky-scraping tenements – not washing, you know, or bedding, but things like livestock, chickens or even pigs. Of course the pigs get no exercise whatever and fatten all the quicker.' He could imagine how his hearer's eyes would have **glazed** by this time. 'I've no idea, have you, how heavy a pig can be, but these old buildings are all badly in need of repair. A balcony on the fifth floor gave way under one of those pigs. It struck the third floor balcony on its way down and sort of **ricocheted** into the street. My father was on the way to the Hydrographic Museum when the pig hit him. Coming from that height and that angle it broke his neck.' This was really a **masterly** attempt to make an **intrinsically** interesting subject boring.

The other method Jerome rehearsed had the virtue of brevity.

'My father was killed by a pig.'

'Really? In India?'

'No, in Italy.'

'How interesting. I never realized there was pig-sticking²³ in Italy. Was your father keen on polo²⁴?'

In course of time, neither too early nor too late, rather as though, in his capacity as a chartered accountant, Jerome had studied the statistics and taken the average, he became engaged to be married: to a pleasant fresh-faced girl of twenty-five whose father was a doctor in Pinner. Her name was Sally, her favourite author was still Hugh Walpole²⁵, and she had adored babies ever since she had been given a doll at the age of five which moved its eyes and made water. Their relationship was contented

²¹ *unusual, old-fashioned*: a large building in a city, containing several flats/apartments

²² part or area of a town or city

²³ to chase and kill pigs with a sharply pointed stick

²⁴ a game played on horseback with a long pole and a ball

²⁵ a popular, early 20th-century novelist who wrote family sagas

rather than exciting, as **became** the love-affair of a chartered accountant; it would never have done if it had interfered with the figures.

One thought worried Jerome, however. Now that within a year he might himself become a father, his love for the dead man increased; he realized what affection had gone into the picture-postcards. He felt a longing to protect his memory, and uncertain whether this quiet love of his would survive if Sally were so insensitive as to laugh when she heard the story of his father's death. Inevitably she would hear it when Jerome brought her to dinner with his aunt. Several times he tried to tell her himself, as she was naturally anxious to know all she could that concerned him.

'You were very small when your father died?'

'Just nine.'

'Poor little boy,' she said.

'I was at school. They broke the news to me.'

'Did you take it very hard?'

'I can't remember.'

'You never told me how it happened.'

'It was very sudden. A street accident.'

'You'll never drive fast, will you, Jemmy?' (She had begun to call him 'Jemmy'.) It was too late then to try the second method – the one he thought of as the pig-sticking one.

They were going to marry quietly in a registry-office²⁶ and have their honeymoon²⁷ at Torquay. He avoided taking her to see his aunt until a week before the wedding, but then the night came, and he could not have told himself whether his apprehension was more for his father's memory or the security of his own love.

The moment came all too soon. 'Is that Jemmy's father?' Sally asked, picking up the portrait of the man with the umbrella.

'Yes, dear. How did you guess?'

'He has Jemmy's eyes and brow, hasn't he?'

'Has Jerome lent you his books?'

'No.'

'I will give you a set for your wedding. He wrote so tenderly about his travels. My own favourite is *Nooks and Crannies*²⁸. He would have had a great future. It made that shocking accident all the worse.'

'Yes?'

Jerome longed²⁹ to leave the room and not see that loved face crinkle with irresistible amusement.

'I had so many letters from his readers after the pig fell on him.' She had never been so **abrupt** before.

And then the miracle happened. Sally did not laugh. Sally sat with open eyes of horror while his aunt told her the story, and at the end, 'How horrible,' Sally said. 'It makes you think, doesn't it? Happening like that. Out of a clear sky.'

Jerome's heart sang with joy. It was as though she had **appeased** his fear for ever. In the taxi going home he kissed her with more passion than he had ever shown and she returned it. There were babies in her pale blue pupils, babies that rolled their eyes and made water.

'A week today,' Jerome said, and she squeezed his hand. 'Penny for your thoughts³⁰, my darling.'

'I was wondering,' Sally said, 'what happened to the poor pig?'

'They almost certainly had it for dinner,' Jerome said happily and kissed the dear child again.

28 every part of a place

29 wanted very much

30 *spoken*: used for asking someone what they are thinking about

Post-reading exercises

Understanding the story

- 1 Use these questions to help you check that you have understood the story.

Part 1

- 1 Is Jerome afraid when he is called into the housemaster's room? Why/why not?
- 2 Who has telephoned the school? Why?
- 3 What are Jerome's feelings for his father? What does he think his father does?
- 4 How does Jerome imagine that his father has died?
- 5 How does Mr Wordsworth react when he tells Jerome how his father died? Greene writes that the housemaster *shook with emotion*. What kind of emotion do you think Wordsworth is feeling?

Part 2

- 6 Does Jerome show a lot of emotion when he hears about his father's death?
- 7 When does Jerome realise that other people find his father's death comical?
- 8 Why has Jerome got so many postcards? Does he remember his father with love?
- 9 Why is it *terrible* for Jerome to listen to his aunt telling other people about his father's death?
- 10 Is it likely that anyone in the literary world will ask Jerome for details about his father's life? Why/why not?
- 11 Is Jerome aware of his father's position in the literary world?
- 12 How many explanations of his father's death has Jerome prepared for other people? Are the explanations very different?
- 13 How would you describe the relationship between Jerome and Sally?
- 14 What is Jerome afraid of with regard to³¹ Sally and his father?
- 15 Why does Jerome long to leave the room when Sally is talking to his aunt?
- 16 What is the *miracle* and why does Jerome's heart sing with joy?
- 17 Does the story have a happy ending?

31 phrase 'with regard to': concerning/about/relating to

Language study

Grammar

The use of *one*

The use of the indefinite personal pronoun *one* is used to talk about people in general, including the speaker. It is quite formal and often creates distance. If used a lot it can make the speaker sound pompous³². The more informal pronoun *you* can usually be used instead.

- 1 Look at the examples from the text, in the box below.

- a) ... from a warden *one* became a guardian ...
b) I suppose *one* has to regard Italy as civilized ...
c) *One* is prepared for all kinds of things abroad, of course ...
d) ... *one* wonders whether the whole thing may not be an obscure form of blackmail ...

- 1 Which sentences are spoken by Jerome's aunt?
 - 2 Who does *one* refer to in the first sentence?
 - 3 Who *wonders* in the last sentence?
- 2 Rewrite these sentences in a more formal way, using the pronoun *one*. We have done the first one for you, as an example.
- 1 You never know when something terrible might happen to you.
One never knows when something terrible might happen to one.
 - 2 You should never have your suits made by amateurs.
 - 3 You should always give yourself plenty of time to get to the airport.
 - 4 I don't think you should ever drink wine with your oysters.
 - 5 If you want to see wonderful buildings you must go to Italy.
 - 6 Your opinions are only important if they coincide with his.

32 someone who is pompous thinks they are very important and speaks or behaves in a very serious and formal way

The use of the passive

3 Greene often uses the passive voice which makes the text sound more formal. Look at these examples from the text in the box below, and consider the following questions:

- How is the passive used in each sentence?
- What effect does this have?

... from a warden one became a guardian and finally before leaving, it was hoped for Marlborough or Rugby, a crusader.

Naturally, after that disclosure he was known, rather unreasonably, as Pig.

... she had adored babies ever since she had been given a doll at the age of five which moved its eyes and made water.

4 Rewrite the following sentences using the passive voice. We have done the first one for you, as an example.

- The housemaster called Jerome into his office.
Jerome was called into the housemaster's office.
- He learned that a pig had struck his father and killed him.
- He removed the stamps from the postcards and made them into a collection.
- Some people thought the story of Jerome's father's death rather amusing.
- Jerome's career did not upset his marriage plans in any way.
- The author hopes that Sally and Jerome will live happily ever after.

Vocabulary to create comic effect

Greene achieves a comic effect by using formal, sometimes pompous language, which contrasts with the events or circumstances being described. Consider the language used by Jerome's aunt when she is talking about Italy and other countries. She uses *one* to refer to herself, creating a distance between herself and Italy, very formally asserting that she and the British are – of course – *civilized* – this is without question. However, all other countries are potentially *uncivilized*:

I can't think how such things can be allowed in a civilized country,' his aunt would say. 'I suppose one has to regard Italy as civilized. One is prepared for all kinds of things abroad, of course ...

The comedy arises from the fact that she is clearly making unreasonable generalisations about Italy and other countries, whilst it is not clear whether she has actually travelled 'abroad' at all.

5 Rewrite the following sentences from the story in a simpler, less formal way.

- An inexplicable convulsion took place in the nerves of Mr. Wordsworth's face.*
- ...it pained him when his aunt embarked with strangers on the story of his father's death.*
- Sometimes he rehearsed the method of recounting his father's death so as to reduce the comic element to its smallest dimensions.*

Literary analysis

Plot

- What is the *shocking accident* in the story? How do most people feel when they hear about it? How do you think *you* would react?
- How old is Jerome when his father dies? Do you think this affects Jerome's reactions?
- How old is Jerome when the story finishes? How has the manner of his father's death affected him during his life?
- How many accounts are there in the story of Jerome's father's death? Think about Mr Wordsworth, Jerome, and his aunt.
- How are the accounts of the death different? Who finds it difficult to tell the story? Who finds it easier? Why?
- How do you think Jerome would have felt if Sally had laughed at his aunt's story? Would the story have ended differently?
- This story was made into a short film. What changes do you think were made? Think about characters, setting and plot.

Character

- 8 How would you describe Jerome's father? How does he change in Jerome's eyes as the boy grows older?
- 9 What kind of person is Jerome? Do you think he is like his father?
- 10 How would you describe Jerome's aunt? What does she think of her brother? Give evidence for your answer.
- 11 What kind of person is Sally? Do you think she and Jerome are suited to each other?
- 12 Do you think the type of schooling that Jerome receives affects his character or attitudes? How?

Narration

- 13 What do you think Greene's attitude is to his characters? Do you think he identifies with some characters more than others? If so, which?
- 14 Do you think Greene is a sympathetic narrator or a cynical observer of human nature?
- 15 Why do you think Greene makes Jerome a chartered accountant and Sally a doctor's daughter who *adored babies*? How do these details contrast with the main event at the centre of the story?
- 16 Do you think Greene succeeds in making us feel sympathy towards Jerome? How?

Atmosphere

- 17 How would you describe the atmosphere of the story? Are any of the following adjectives appropriate?

amusing bizarre absurd sad cynical well-observed
true-to-life unrealistic

Can you think of any more adjectives?

- 18 Are people's reactions to the pig incident understandable? Why/why not?
- 19 Is the story believable or is it exaggerated? Explain your answer.

Style

- 20 Look again at the first paragraph of the story [page 81] and the beginning of the conversation between Mr Wordsworth and Jerome. Notice how Greene obtains a comic effect by using both long, formal sentences and short, spoken sentences. Find more examples of this kind of narrative in the story.
- 21 Look at the aunt's question [page 84] ending '*... but who could possibly have expected when he was walking along the Via Dottore Manuele Panucci on his way to the Hydrographic Museum that a pig would fall on him?*' What effect do the details of the place have? Can you find other places where unnecessary detail is given? What effect does it have?
- 22 Wordsworth's question, '*All going well with the trigonometry?*' [page 81] is absurd in the circumstances – so inappropriate that it is funny. It shows how difficult Mr Wordsworth finds it to tell Jerome of his father's death, and how uncomfortable he is in this situation. What other questions are there which create a comic effect?
- 23 Culturally, the English are known for their use of understatement. For example, they might say 'It was rather cold' when they really mean 'It was absolutely freezing!' Greene is very 'English' in this respect. Look at these examples of understatement from the story. *Naturally, after that disclosure he was known, rather unreasonably, as Pig. (It was a very unreasonable and cruel nickname.) Jerome's father had not been a very distinguished writer. (He had been a bad writer.)* Can you find any more examples of understatement in the story?
- 24 Greene often uses irony in his writing – a form of humour where the literal meaning is the opposite of the actual meaning, it can sound as though you are being serious, but actually you are being sarcastic. Notice below, how he describes Jerome's profession and how it affects his relationship with Sally.

In course of time, neither too early nor too late, rather as though, in his capacity as a chartered accountant, Jerome had studied the statistics and taken the average, he became engaged to be married.

Their relationship was contented rather than exciting, as became the love affair of a chartered accountant; it would never have done if it had interfered with the figures.

What does the description suggest about Jerome's attitude to love and marriage? What is Greene suggesting about the profession of chartered accountancy and the people who do this job? Could you rewrite this paragraph in a sentence, to expose what Greene is *actually* saying about Jerome? Do you agree with Greene's comments? What other professions tend to be associated with certain characteristics?

Look again at the paragraph [page 81] beginning 'Jerome worshipped his father...' Can you find another example of Greene's irony?

Guidance to the above literary terms, answer keys to all the exercises and activities, plus a wealth of other reading-practice material, can be found on the student's section of the Macmillan Readers website at: www.macmillanenglish.com/readers.

The Jilting of Jane

by H G Wells

About the author

Herbert George Wells is best known today for his 'scientific romances', a genre that we now call 'science fiction'. Books such as *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896), *The War of the Worlds* (1898) and *The First Men on the Moon* (1901) are considered to be classics of the genre¹ and have often been dramatised for radio, TV and the cinema. In one famous episode, in 1938, the US film director and actor Orson Welles announced on the radio that the world was about to be invaded by aliens. He based his report on *The War of the Worlds*, and it was so realistic that it caused panic among US citizens. Orson had intended it as a joke, but later had to apologise to the public and to Wells himself.

Herbert George Wells was born in 1866 in Bromley, Kent in the south of England. He was one of four children. His parents had a shop and his father was a professional cricketer until he broke his leg. The shop was not very successful, money was short, and Wells was sent to a cheap and badly-run² private school. Wells educated himself mostly, and he read widely from the books in the library of Uppark, the large country house where his mother worked, first as a lady's maid and later as housekeeper³.

Aged 14, when his father's business failed, Wells worked as an **apprentice**⁴ to a draper⁵. He described his two years there as 'the most unhappy, hopeless period of my life.' He recorded this period in his book *Kipps* (1905), a vivid⁶ account of the lives of workers in the retail trade.

- 1 a particular style used in cinema, writing or art, which can be recognised by certain features
- 2 not well-managed or organised
- 3 someone whose job it is to clean someone else's house, and sometimes cook their meals
- 4 someone who works for a particular person or company, usually for low pay, to learn the type of work they do
- 5 someone who sells cloth and things made of cloth
- 6 clear and detailed