

charles by shirley jackson analysis

Charles by Shirley Jackson: A Deep Dive Analysis of Psychological Horror and Childhood Innocence

Introduction:

Shirley Jackson's chilling short story, "Charles," isn't your typical children's tale. Beneath its deceptively simple narrative lies a potent exploration of parental anxieties, the blurred lines between reality and imagination, and the unsettling power of childhood perception. This comprehensive analysis delves into the story's unsettling ambiguities, exploring its psychological horror, thematic depth, and enduring relevance. We'll dissect the narrative structure, character development, and symbolic language, ultimately providing a nuanced understanding of what makes "Charles" such a disturbingly captivating read. Prepare to uncover the unsettling truth behind this seemingly innocuous tale.

I. Unpacking the Unreliable Narrator: Laurie's Perspective

The story's power hinges on its unreliable narrator: Laurie, a young boy whose perspective shapes our understanding of Charles. Laurie's innocence isn't a shield against the story's darkness; it's a magnifying glass, amplifying the unsettling aspects of Charles's behavior and Laurie's own growing unease. His childish descriptions, often laced with exaggeration and misunderstanding, create a sense of mounting dread for the reader. We, like Laurie's parents, are initially inclined to dismiss his accounts as typical childhood mischief. However, as the story progresses, the cumulative effect of Laurie's seemingly innocent reports reveals a more sinister reality. The ambiguity surrounding Charles's actual existence forces us to question the nature of reality itself as perceived through a child's eyes. The constant shifting of blame and the eventual reveal heighten the story's disturbing psychological impact. Is Charles a real manifestation of Laurie's inner turmoil, a product of his imagination, or something far more sinister? This question remains unanswered, fueling the story's unsettling power.

II. The Symbolism of Charles: A Manifestation of Inner Turmoil

Charles functions as a powerful symbol within the narrative. He embodies everything Laurie's parents fear: misbehavior, rebellion, and the untamed aspects of childhood. His actions mirror the frustrations and anxieties that Laurie himself is experiencing but lacks the emotional vocabulary to articulate. Charles's escalating acts of violence and defiance can be interpreted as a projection of Laurie's own repressed aggression and burgeoning sense of independence. The character of Charles becomes a scapegoat, a convenient conduit for Laurie's own developing anxieties and desires to break free from parental expectations. The ambiguity surrounding Charles's physical existence allows Jackson to explore the complexities of childhood psychology and the ways in which children cope with internal conflicts. Is Charles a manifestation of Laurie's own id, a representation of the darker impulses that he cannot fully comprehend? This open-ended interpretation makes Charles a profoundly unsettling and psychologically rich character.

III. Parental Anxiety and the Failure of Communication

Laurie's parents, while well-meaning, represent a form of societal expectation that fails to adequately address the complexities of childhood behavior. Their attempts to understand Laurie's experiences are hampered by their own limitations, their own anxieties, and their inability to truly connect with their son's emotional world. They dismiss his reports, focusing on superficial behavior rather than trying to comprehend the underlying emotions. Their repeated failures to understand Laurie's experiences highlight the challenges of parenthood and the difficulty of bridging the communication gap between adults and children. The story subtly criticizes a parental approach that often prioritizes societal norms over genuine understanding of the child's emotional landscape. The parents' attempts to control and correct Laurie's behavior ultimately exacerbate his inner struggles and reinforce the disturbing narrative of Charles's escalating transgressions.

IV. The Unsettling Climax and Resolution:

The story's climax is both unsettling and ambiguous. The revelation that Laurie is Charles throws the entire narrative into disarray. It's a moment of horrifying self-realization, not just for Laurie, but for the reader as well. The ambiguity remains, leaving the reader to question the true nature of Charles's existence and the extent to which Laurie was aware of his own behavior. This ambiguous ending leaves a lasting impression, highlighting the complexities of childhood behavior and the lingering anxieties surrounding understanding the true nature of a child's internal world. The unresolved questions about Laurie's behavior and the truth about Charles underscore the lasting impact of the narrative's central theme: the frightening potential within the seemingly innocent.

V. The Enduring Relevance of "Charles"

"Charles" continues to resonate with readers because it taps into universal anxieties surrounding childhood, parenting, and the hidden complexities of human behavior. Its unsettling ambiguity forces readers to confront their own preconceived notions about childhood innocence and the potential for darkness within even the most seemingly well-behaved children. The story serves as a cautionary tale, urging readers to examine their own assumptions about childhood behavior and the importance of empathetic communication and understanding. Its enduring power lies in its ability to unsettle and provoke thought, leaving a lingering unease long after the final sentence is read. The story's enduring appeal is its ability to leave the reader pondering the complexities of human nature and the blurry lines between reality and perception.

Detailed Outline:

Title: Charles by Shirley Jackson: A Deep Dive Analysis

Introduction: Hook, overview of the analysis, and the story's key themes.

Chapter 1: Unreliable Narrator: Examining Laurie's perspective and the ambiguity it creates.

Chapter 2: Symbolism of Charles: Analyzing Charles as a symbol of inner turmoil and societal anxieties.

Chapter 3: Parental Anxiety and Communication: Exploring the parents' role and the failure of communication.

Chapter 4: Climax and Resolution: Analyzing the unsettling reveal and the story's ambiguous ending.

Chapter 5: Enduring Relevance: Discussing the story's lasting impact and its continued relevance.

Conclusion: Summarizing key findings and the overall significance of the analysis.

(Each Chapter would then be expanded upon, as detailed above in the article body.)

FAQs:

1. Is Charles a real person? The story deliberately leaves this ambiguous, prompting readers to question the nature of reality and perception.
1. What is the main theme of "Charles"? The story explores parental anxieties, the complexities of childhood behavior, and the blurred lines between reality and imagination.
1. What is the significance of the unreliable narrator? Laurie's perspective shapes our understanding of events and heightens the story's unsettling nature.
1. How does Charles function as a symbol? He represents repressed aggression, societal anxieties about childhood behavior, and the untamed aspects of the human psyche.
1. What is the role of the parents in the story? Their inability to fully understand Laurie's experiences highlights communication breakdowns within families.
1. What is the impact of the story's ambiguous ending? The unresolved questions linger, prompting further reflection on the themes of the story.
1. What type of literary genre is "Charles"? It's often categorized as psychological horror, with elements of dark humor and satire.
1. What makes "Charles" a significant work of literature? Its enduring relevance stems from its exploration of universal anxieties surrounding childhood and human behavior.
1. How does the story use irony? The irony lies in the eventual revelation that Laurie is Charles, subverting expectations and creating a shocking twist.

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charles by shirley jackson analysis: *A Study Guide for Shirley Jackson's "Charles"* Gale, Cengage Learning,

charles by shirley jackson analysis: *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* Shirley Jackson, 1967-10 THE STORY: The home of the Blackwoods near a Vermont village is a lonely, ominous abode, and Constance, the young mistress of the place, can't go out of the house without being insulted and stoned by the villagers. They have also composed a nasty s

charles by shirley jackson analysis: *Teenage Wasteland* Anne Tyler, 2020-09-29 First appearing in the pages of Seventeen Magazine, "Teenage Wasteland" has become one of Anne Tyler's most widely beloved short stories—an affecting and masterful portrait of a life interrupted and a family come undone. Daisy Coble had been a good mother, and so she was ashamed to find out from Donny's teacher that he had been misbehaving. He was noisy, lazy, disruptive, and he was caught smoking. At night, she lay awake wondering where she had gone wrong, and how she could have failed as a parent. Unsure of herself, Daisy follows the advice of professionals, and hires Donny a tutor with some unusual ideas to set the boy straight. But, has the gap between them grown too wide to bridge? A Vintage Short.

charles by shirley jackson analysis: *Charles* Shirley Jackson, 2000 Shirley Jackson [RL 6 IL 7-10] A boy's kindergarten career surprises his parents. Themes: change; perception versus reality. 24 pages. Tale Blazers.

charles by shirley jackson analysis: *Let Me Tell You* Shirley Jackson, 2015-08-04 NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY NPR • From the renowned author of "The Lottery" and *The Haunting of Hill House*, a spectacular volume of previously unpublished and uncollected stories, essays, and other writings. Features "Family Treasures," nominated for the Edgar Award for Best Short Story Shirley Jackson is one of the most important American writers of the last hundred years. Since her death in 1965, her place in the landscape of twentieth-century fiction has grown only more exalted. As we approach the centenary of her birth comes this astonishing compilation of fifty-six pieces—more than forty of which have never been published before. Two of Jackson's children co-edited this volume, culling through the vast archives of their mother's papers at the Library of Congress, selecting only the very best for inclusion. *Let Me Tell You* brings together the deliciously eerie short stories Jackson is best known for, along with frank, inspiring lectures on writing; comic essays about her large, boisterous family; and whimsical drawings. Jackson's landscape here is most frequently domestic: dinner parties and bridge, household budgets and homeward-bound commutes, children's games and neighborly gossip. But this familiar setting is also her most subversive: She wields humor, terror, and the uncanny to explore the real challenges of marriage, parenting, and community—the pressure of social norms, the veins of distrust in love, the constant lack of time and space. For the first time, this collection showcases Shirley Jackson's radically different modes of writing side by side. Together they show her to be a magnificent storyteller, a sharp, sly humorist, and a powerful feminist. This volume includes a Foreword by the celebrated literary critic and Jackson biographer Ruth Franklin. Praise for *Let Me Tell You* "Stunning."—O: The Oprah Magazine "Let us now—at last—celebrate dangerous women writers: how cheering to see justice done with [this collection of] Shirley Jackson's heretofore unpublished works—uniquely unsettling stories and ruthlessly barbed essays on domestic life."—Vanity Fair "Feels like an uncanny dollhouse: Everything perfectly rendered, but something deliciously not quite right."—NPR "There are . . . times in reading [Jackson's] accounts of desperate women in their thirties slowly going crazy that she seems an American Jean Rhys, other times when she rivals even

Flannery O'Connor in her cool depictions of inhumanity and insidious cruelty, and still others when she matches Philip K. Dick at his most hallucinatory. At her best, though, she's just incomparable."—The Washington Post "Offers insights into the vagaries of [Jackson's] mind, which was ruminant and generous, accommodating such diverse figures as Dr. Seuss and Samuel Richardson."—The New York Times Book Review "The best pieces clutch your throat, gently at first, and then with growing strength. . . . The whole collection has a timelessness."—The Boston Globe "[Jackson's] writing, both fiction and nonfiction, has such enduring power—she brings out the darkness in life, the poltergeists shut into everyone's basement, and offers them up, bringing wit and even joy to the examination."—USA Today "The closest we can get to sitting down and having a conversation with . . . one of the most original voices of her generation."—The Huffington Post

charles by shirley jackson analysis: *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life* Ruth Franklin, 2016-09-27 Winner • National Book Critics Circle Award (Biography) Winner • Edgar Award (Critical/Biographical) Winner • Bram Stoker Award (Nonfiction) A New York Times Notable Book A Washington Post Notable Nonfiction Pick of the Year Named one of the Best Books of the Year by Entertainment Weekly, NPR, TIME, Boston Globe, NYLON, San Francisco Chronicle, Seattle Times, Kirkus Reviews, and Booklist In this "thoughtful and persuasive" biography, award-winning biographer Ruth Franklin establishes Shirley Jackson as a "serious and accomplished literary artist" (Charles McGrath, New York Times Book Review). Instantly heralded for its "masterful" and "thrilling" portrayal (Boston Globe), Shirley Jackson reveals the tumultuous life and inner darkness of the literary genius behind such classics as "The Lottery" and *The Haunting of Hill House*. In this "remarkable act of reclamation" (Neil Gaiman), Ruth Franklin envisions Jackson as "belonging to the great tradition of Hawthorne, Poe and James" (New York Times Book Review) and demonstrates how her unique contribution to the canon "so uncannily channeled women's nightmares and contradictions that it is 'nothing less than the secret history of American women of her era' " (Washington Post). Franklin investigates the "interplay between the life, the work, and the times with real skill and insight, making this fine book a real contribution not only to biography, but to mid-20th-century women's history" (Chicago Tribune). "Wisely rescu[ing] Shirley Jackson from any semblance of obscurity" (Lena Dunham), Franklin's invigorating portrait stands as the definitive biography of a generational avatar and an American literary genius.

charles by shirley jackson analysis: *In the Night Wood* Dale Bailey, 2018 American Charles Hayden came to England to forget the past. Failed father, failed husband, and failed scholar, Charles hopes to put his life back together with a biography of Caedmon Hollow, the long-dead author of a legendary Victorian children's book, *In the Night Wood*. But soon after settling into Hollow's remote Yorkshire home, Charles learns that the past isn't dead.

charles by shirley jackson analysis: *Off to School* Catriona MacGregor, Shirley Jackson, 2001 Lots to learn, friends to see. I'm off to school - come with me! * Sharing a story or rhyme for only 10 minutes each day helps your child to enjoy practising her reading. * Books 1-8 of Read with Ladybird will help children who are just starting to learn to read. * You can be confident that practising at home with Read with Ladybird will support work done at school.

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cutthroat that students are driven to suicide and depression because of a B. With a compelling mix of fast-paced narrative and fascinating investigative journalism, *The Overachievers* aims both to calm the admissions frenzy and to expose its escalating dangers.

charles by shirley jackson analysis: One Ordinary Day, with Peanuts Shirley Jackson, 1990 Present's Shirley Jackson's classic short story about an altruistic man and his mean-spirited wife.

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charles by shirley jackson analysis: Hills Like White Elephants Ernest Hemingway, 2023-01-01 A couple's future hangs in the balance as they wait for a train in a Spanish café in this short story by a Nobel and Pulitzer Prize-winning author. At a small café in rural Spain, a man and woman have a conversation while they wait for their train to Madrid. The subtle, casual nature of their talk masks a more complicated situation that could endanger the future of their relationship. First published in the 1927 collection *Men Without Women*, "Hills Like White Elephants" exemplifies Ernest Hemingway's style of spare, tight prose that continues to win readers over to this day.

charles by shirley jackson analysis: The Most Dangerous Game Richard Connell, 2023-02-23 Sanger Rainsford is a big-game hunter, who finds himself washed up on an island owned by the eccentric General Zaroff. Zaroff, a big-game hunter himself, has heard of Rainsford's abilities with a gun and organises a hunt. However, they're not after animals - they're after people. When he protests, Rainsford the hunter becomes Rainsford the hunted. Sharing similarities with *The Hunger Games*, starring Jennifer Lawrence, this is the story that created the template for pitting man against man. Born in New York, Richard Connell (1893 - 1949) went on to become an acclaimed author, screenwriter, and journalist. He is best remembered for the gripping novel *The Most Dangerous Game* and for receiving an Oscar nomination for the screenplay *Meet John Doe*.

charles by shirley jackson analysis: Raising Demons Shirley Jackson, 2015-05-05 In the uproarious sequel to *Life Among the Savages*, the author of *The Haunting of Hill House* confronts the most vexing demons yet: her children In the long out-of-print sequel to *Life Among the Savages*, Jackson's four children have grown from savages into full-fledged demons. After bursting the seams of their first house, Jackson's clan moves into a larger home. Of course, the chaos simply moves with them. A confrontation with the IRS, Little League, trumpet lessons, and enough clutter to bury her alive—Jackson spins them all into an indelible reminder that every bit as thrilling as a murderous family in a haunted house is a happy family in a new home.

charles by shirley jackson analysis: Logical Reasoning Bradley Harris Dowden, 1993 This book is designed to engage students' interest and promote their writing abilities while teaching

them to think critically and creatively. Dowden takes an activist stance on critical thinking, asking students to create and revise arguments rather than simply recognizing and criticizing them. His book emphasizes inductive reasoning and the analysis of individual claims in the beginning, leaving deductive arguments for consideration later in the course.

charles by shirley jackson analysis: *The Witch* Shirley Jackson, 2014-03-06 A terrifying short story from Shirley Jackson, the master of the macabre tale. Shirley Jackson's chilling tales of creeping unease and random cruelty have the power to unsettle and terrify unlike any other. When her story *The Lottery* was first published in *The New Yorker* in 1948, readers were so horrified they sent her hate mail. It became known as one of the greatest short stories ever written. Have you read her yet? 'Shirley Jackson's stories are among the most terrifying ever written' Donna Tartt 'An amazing writer ... if you haven't read any of her short stories ... you have missed out on something marvellous' Neil Gaiman 'Her stories are stunning, timeless - as relevant and terrifying now as when they were first published ... 'The Lottery' is so much an icon in the history of the American short story that one could argue it has moved from the canon of American twentieth-century fiction directly into the American psyche, our collective unconscious' A. M. Homes Shirley Jackson was born in California in 1916. When her short story *The Lottery* was first published in *The New Yorker* in 1948, readers were so horrified they sent her hate mail; it has since become one of the greatest American stories of all time. Her first novel, *The Road Through the Wall*, was published in the same year and was followed by five more: *Hangsamen*, *The Bird's Nest*, *The Sundial*, *The Haunting of Hill House* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, widely seen as her masterpiece. Shirley Jackson died in her sleep at the age of 48.

charles by shirley jackson analysis: An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge Ambrose Bierce, 2018-08-20 Classic Books Library presents this brand new edition of the short story, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (1890) by Ambrose Bierce. In this text Bierce creatively uses both structure and content to explore the concept of time, from present to past, and reflecting its transitional and illusive qualities. The story is one of Bierce's most popular and acclaimed works, alongside "The Devil's Dictionary" (1911). Bierce (1842-c. 1914) was an American writer, journalist and Civil War veteran associated with the realism literary movement. His writing is noted for its cynical, brooding tones and structural precision.

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charles by shirley jackson analysis: The Summer People Shirley Jackson, 1970

charles by shirley jackson analysis: *The Towers of Trebizond* Rose Macaulay, 1956
Serio-comic novel about English eccentrics who travel in Turkey.

charles by shirley jackson analysis: **Foster, You're Dead** Philip K. Dick, 2013-02-01 This early work by Philip K. Dick was originally published in 1955 and we are now republishing it with a brand new introductory biography. 'Foster, You're Dead' is a short story about a man who refuses to buy a bomb shelter during a war with the Soviet Union. Philip Kindred Dick was born on December 16 1928, in Chicago, Illinois. Dick and his family moved to the Bay Area of San Francisco when he was young, and later on to Washington DC following his parents divorce. Dick attended Elementary school and then a Quaker school before the family moved back to California. It was around this time that Dick began to take an active interest in the science fiction genre, reading his first magazine 'Stirring Science Stories', at age twelve. Dick married five times between 1959 and 1973, and had three children. He sold his first story in 1951 and from that point on he wrote full-time, selling his first novel in 1955. In addition to 44 published novels, Dick wrote an estimated 121 short stories, most of which appeared in science fiction magazines during his lifetime. In addition to 44 published

novels, Dick wrote an estimated 121 short stories, most of which appeared in science fiction magazines during his lifetime. After his death, many of his stories made the transition to the big screen, with blockbuster films such as Blade Runner, Total Recall and Minority Report being based on his works.

charles by shirley jackson analysis: Dark Tales Shirley Jackson, 2017-10-10 For the first time in one volume, a collection of Shirley Jackson's scariest stories, with a foreword by PEN/Hemingway Award winner Ottessa Moshfegh After the publication of her short story "The Lottery" in the New Yorker in 1948 received an unprecedented amount of attention, Shirley Jackson was quickly established as a master horror storyteller. This collection of classic and newly reprinted stories provides readers with more of her unsettling, dark tales, including the "The Possibility of Evil" and "The Summer People." In these deliciously dark stories, the daily commute turns into a nightmarish game of hide and seek, the loving wife hides homicidal thoughts and the concerned citizen might just be an infamous serial killer. In the haunting world of Shirley Jackson, nothing is as it seems and nowhere is safe, from the city streets to the crumbling country pile, and from the small-town apartment to the dark, dark woods. There's something sinister in suburbia. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

charles by shirley jackson analysis: Shirley Jackson's American Gothic Darryl Hattenhauer, 2012-02-01 Best known for her short story The Lottery and her novel The Haunting of Hill House, Shirley Jackson produced a body of work that is more varied and complex than critics have realized. In fact, as Darryl Hattenhauer argues here, Jackson was one of the few writers to anticipate the transition from modernism to postmodernism, and therefore ranks among the most significant writers of her time. The first comprehensive study of all of Jackson's fiction, Shirley Jackson's American Gothic offers readers the chance not only to rediscover her work, but also to see how and why a major American writer was passed over for inclusion in the canon of American literature.

charles by shirley jackson analysis: True Grit Charles Portis, 2010-11-05 #1 New York Times bestseller "An epic and a legend" —Washington Post "Quite simply, an American masterpiece." —Boston Globe "The dialogue in True Grit is exquisite." —David Mamet "Charles Portis had a wonderful talent—original, quirky, exciting." —Larry McMurtry Charles Portis has long been acclaimed as one of America's most enduring and incomparable literary voices, and his novels have left an indelible mark on the American canon. True Grit, his most famous novel, was first published in 1968, and has garnered critical acclaim as well as enthusiastic praise from countless passionate fans for more than fifty years. This story of danger and adventure in the old west became the basis for two award-winning films, the first starring John Wayne, in his only Oscar-winning role, as Marshall Rooster Cogburn, and the widely praised remake by the Coen brothers, starring Jeff Bridges. True Grit tells the story of Mattie Ross, who is just fourteen when the coward Tom Chaney shoots her father in Fort Smith, Arkansas, and robs him of his life, his horse, and \$150 cash. Filled with an unwavering urge to avenge her father's blood, Mattie finds and, after some tenacious finagling, enlists one-eyed Rooster Cogburn, the meanest available US Marshal, as her partner in pursuit, and they head off into Indian Territory after the killer. True Grit is essential reading. Not just a classic Western, but an undeniable classic of American literature as eccentric, cool, funny, and unflinching as Mattie Ross herself. For fans of either the John Wayne classic or the more recent Coen brothers' movie, it's a chance to relive the story of Mattie and Rooster and experience their story as it was originally told. For fans of taut, funny storytelling, it will be a joy to experience in its original form. This edition includes an afterword by bestselling author Donna Tartt (The Secret History and The Goldfinch) and a reading group guide.

charles by shirley jackson analysis: The Swimmer ,

charles by shirley jackson analysis: Dreyer's English Benjamin Dreyer, 2019-01-29 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • A sharp, funny grammar guide they'll actually want to read, from Random House's longtime copy chief and one of Twitter's leading language gurus NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY O: The Oprah Magazine • Paste • Shelf Awareness "Essential (and delightful!)"—People We all write, all the time: books, blogs, emails. Lots and lots of emails. And we all want to write better. Benjamin Dreyer is here to help. As Random House's copy chief, Dreyer has upheld the standards of the legendary publisher for more than two decades. He is beloved by authors and editors alike—not to mention his followers on social media—for deconstructing the English language with playful erudition. Now he distills everything he has learned from the myriad books he has copyedited and overseen into a useful guide not just for writers but for everyone who wants to put their best prose foot forward. As authoritative as it is amusing, Dreyer's English offers lessons on punctuation, from the underloved semicolon to the enigmatic en dash; the rules and nonrules of grammar, including why it's OK to begin a sentence with "And" or "But" and to confidently split an infinitive; and why it's best to avoid the doldrums of the Wan Intensifiers and Throat Clearers, including "very," "rather," "of course," and the dreaded "actually." Dreyer will let you know whether "alright" is all right (sometimes) and even help you brush up on your spelling—though, as he notes, "The problem with mnemonic devices is that I can never remember them." And yes: "Only godless savages eschew the series comma." Chockful of advice, insider wisdom, and fun facts, this book will prove to be invaluable to everyone who wants to shore up their writing skills, mandatory for people who spend their time editing and shaping other people's prose, and—perhaps best of all—an utter treat for anyone who simply revels in language. Praise for Dreyer's English "Playful, smart, self-conscious, and personal . . . One encounters wisdom and good sense on nearly every page of Dreyer's English."—The Wall Street Journal "Destined to become a classic."—The Millions "Dreyer can help you . . . with tips on punctuation and spelling. . . . Even better: He'll entertain you while he's at it."—Newsday

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