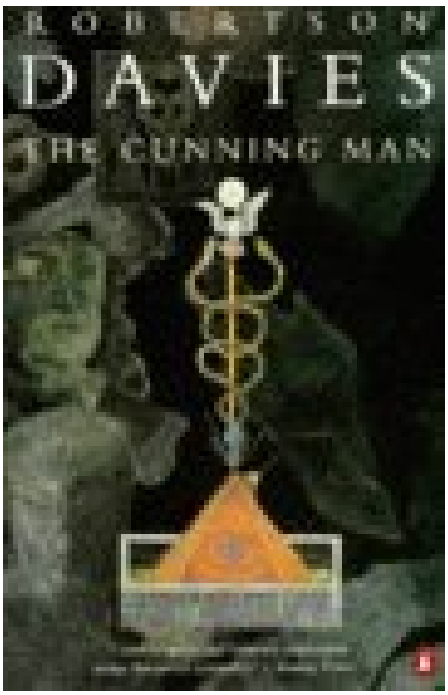

The Cunning Man

Robertson Davies

The Cunning Man

Robertson Davies

The Cunning Man Robertson Davies

"Should I have taken the false teeth?" This is what Dr. Jonathan Hullah, a former police surgeon, thinks after he watches Father Hobbes die in front of the High Altar at Toronto's St. Aidan's on the morning of Good Friday. How did the good father die? We do not learn the answer until the last pages of this "Case Book" of a man's rich and highly observant life. But we learn much more about many things, and especially about Dr. Hullah. From an early age, Jonathan Hullah developed "a high degree of cunning" in concealing what his true nature might be. And so he kept himself on the outside, watching, noticing, and sniffing, most often in the company of those who bore watching. Among them, flamboyant, mystical curate Charlie Iredale; outrageous banker Darcy Dwyer; cynical, quixotic professor Brocky Gilmartin, whose son Conor, also Hullah's godson, makes a fateful and too brief appearance in Robertson Davies's last novel, Murther & Walking Spirits. Hullah also lives in close proximity to Pansy Freake Todhunter, an etcher in Toronto. Indeed he becomes privy to her intimate letters to British sculptor Barbara Hepworth. It is "Chips," as she is called, who writes Dame Barbara: "The doctor is a bit of a puzzle. Long and cornery and quiet and looks like a horse with a secret sorrow." As the Cunning Man takes us through his own long and ardent life of theatre, art, and music, varied adventures in the Canadian Army during World War II, and the secrets of a doctor's consulting room, his preoccupation is not with sorrow but with the comedic canvas of life. Just as Dr. Hullah practices a type of psychosomatic medicine "by which I attempt to bring about changes in the disease syndromes through language," so does Robertson Davies intertwine language and story, as perhaps never before, to offer us profound truths about being human.

The Cunning Man Details

Date	:	Published 1996 by Penguin Group (first published September 1st 1994)
ISBN	:	9780140243437
Author	:	Robertson Davies
Format	:	Paperback
Genre	:	Fiction, Cultural, Canada, Literary Fiction, Literature, Canadian Literature

From Reader Review The Cunning Man for online ebook

Doreen says

Robertson Davies is one of my favorite authors because he writes intelligent, kind novels that navigate the weird and wonderful world of human life with a precision that is often sharp but never cruel. The Cunning Man continues in this tradition, and for 400 pages does a wonderful job of melding the grounded with the fantastic. And the language! Mr Davies almost haphazardly throws in elegant phrases that lesser writers would labor towards, setting them in places of pride among the many duller words, a care Mr Davies does not need as the entirety of his prose gleams. The voice of the narrative is so convincing that you forget you're reading a work of fiction. The Cunning Man comes across as the autobiography of someone you'd really like to know even better.

The only problem I had with the book, and a fairly major one, is that the ending is so terribly abrupt. I had so many questions, especially, about Esme. I discovered later that The Cunning Man was meant to be the second book in a projected Toronto Trilogy, which explained the abruptness somewhat. Mr Davies' death before the completion of the trilogy is a great loss to the world of letters.

Sheri-lee says

I think I 'really liked' this book more at the beginning. The last quarter is more in the 'like' category. But Davies is still an interesting and engaging read. In discussion with a fellow Davies-enjoyer, the idea of why people enjoy him so much was discussed. It was argued that his writing was always a reflection of something he enjoyed himself; books written for the love of the process and the ideas within them which is transparent to the reader and is what makes his books so enjoyable. We do well to express our joy with others in the gifts we are given and out of those expressions joy is spread. But, and here's the big but, that argument comes with the exclusion of this, Davies' last book published before his death. It has a different tone, one of writing not for himself, but for his reader; a good bye; a leaving of something personal to fans.

A couple of quotes which ring a truth in this with me:

"I tried to find out what irony really is, and discovered that some ancient writer on poetry had spoken of 'Ironia, which we call the drye mock,' and I cannot think of a better term for it: the drye mock. Not sarcasm which is like vinegar, or cynicism, which is so often the voice of disappointed idealism, but a delicate casting of a cool and illuminating light on life, and thus an enlargement. The ironist is not bitter, he does not seek to undercut everthing that seems worthy or serious, he scorns the cheap scoring-off of the wisecracker. He stands, so to speak, somewhat at one side, observes and speaks with a moderation which is occasionally embellished with a flash of controlled exaggeration. He speaks from a certain depth, and thus he is not of the same nature as the wit, who so often speaks from the tongue and no deeper. The wit's desire is to be funny; the ironist is only funny as a secondary achievement."

"...it is only now that my experience strikes home, and I understand that the love in literature and the love in life are one, and that the intelligent reader must bring his own experience to supplement the experience of the novel he holds in his hand. Romance, a true devotion, and simple bodily lust are all part of the same plum pudding, and there is so much more to the pudding than the delicious savour that arises from it. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and it is only when we have eaten several mouthfuls that we begin to

understand. If a book cannot stand up to this test, how good is it?"

And especially his closing paragraph (SPOILER ALERT):
"No, this is the Great Theatre of Life. Admission is free but the taxation is mortal. you come when you can, and leave when you must. The show is continuous. Good-night."

Thank you Mr.Davies for sharing of yourself with us.

Lisette says

I started this book for my book club, which members had highly recommended it, knowing that it was a mystery. In the very beginning there is a death and hints that it will be investigated but this is never addressed again until the very end of the book. The middle of the book is a look back at the lives of the main character and some of its friends.

While the book was enjoyable it is a very slow reading book. I believe it was written int the late 40's early 50's and the writing style reflects that. There are many funny instances but also many references to books, authors and current events of the time (it takes place in Canada) that were lost to me. The author does touch many modern themes, religion, homosexuality, birth control and sex in general in a frank manner that was refreshing especially for a book written that many years ago.

If you want to read it I would not discourage you, it was very enjoyable but it is a book that makes you slow down, so plan on plenty of time to finish it.

Michele says

"A monstrosity of pomposity," "a vainglorious volume of verbiage," "a niggling novel of nugacity." If I were a character in this book, that would be my assessment. Yes, this book is chock-full of great words, but perhaps a lesson from E.B. White is called for here: "Don't be tempted by a twenty-dollar word when a ten-center is handy." While I love a book that requires me to read with a dictionary, this one had me several times saying "The Heck You Mean?" For example, the word "Laodicean"....had me reaching for my dictionary yet again, getting a bit cranky... and "Darn-it....its a great word, means exactly and only what he needed it to (indifference to religion or politics) and why did I not already know that? Well, I do now thanks to Mr. Davies.
I had a like-love-hate relationship with this book, with my rating traveling between 2-4 stars. It gets four stars for his fabulous ending when our main character (the quirky doctor Jon Hullah who fancies himself a "cunning man" in his self-appreciated ability to diagnose people in a way that others cannot) evaluates his life (the book really is his life story) and wonders if it was all "loss and downhill journey." As he is pondering this, he receives a wrong-call from someone who thought they had dialed up the theater. He ends his book with his answer: "No, this is the Great Theater of Life. Admission is free but taxation is mortal. You come when you can, and leave when you must. The show is continuous. Good night." This is even more poignant considering this was Davies' last book and he died the year after it was published. What a great last line!

The book is full of philosophical discussions amongst the characters (and they are a colorful lot!) which

gives us food for thought on the topics of religion, sin, morality, and what makes people do what they do. I was at times absolutely repulsed and disgusted by the words this man wrote, but there were many more parts that were thought-provoking and down-right funny. The book begins with a well-loved priest falling over dead during communion on Good Friday. The story then provides us with a much closer look at this particular parish. At one point, the archbishop feels the need to come and straighten things out and during his admonition, each and every person is getting quite put-off and irritated (one lady when recounting this lecture to a friend ends with "So up yours Archbishop") In any case, the only person who appeared happy during the archbishop's speech was the beloved Father Hobbes himself - who was happily nodding away and "probably thinking of something else." This may not seem funny to many, but to me it spoke volumes about the irony of church hierarchy. (Those at the bottom are likely far more pious than those at the top!)

I have so much more to say, but I am told my reviews are rather wordy. I have to get this in though - a great quote in this book is found when our Dr. Hullah is describing the art of deconstructing a book ("a new way of looking at books that comes from France" he says). There is no meaning in the actual text of the book, but only in the "virtual text" that comes from the readers in their search for meaning. (he then tells his associate that it is not really for her and other ordinary readers, it is only for the elite - the ordinary reader is irrelevant he says.) "It isn't what the book says, its what you say about what the book says that's important"
It is little jewels like this that gave me the most enjoyment from this book.

Justin Morgan says

This was my first foray into Robertson Davies, and I chose his final book to begin with. From the first few pages I was hooked, a mysterious death at the altar rail of an eccentric high church Anglican priest witnessed by a motley ensemble of characters the reader gets to know over the next 470 pages. What's not to love? However, the book loses steam half way through albeit not in an unreadable way. There are lots of amazing observations and highly quotable turns of phrase, but there is also a bit of a lack of heart. I never fell in love with the narrator, although I found him extremely witty and charming. Likewise, I found most of the characters just a touch from being adequately developed, (which with 470 pages is a bit of a shock.) For instance, the narrator's childhood friend is described near the end of the book as the most incredible man he has ever known, yet I would guess that most readers would be baffled as to why. Overall, the book was thoroughly enjoyable, the first half being almost a sort of cross between Evelyn Waugh and Wallace Stegner, but I finished, feeling like my soda had gone flat. The narrator's voice is also very WASPy (which can be very good or not) and while he was supposed to be an unconventional but highly successful medical doctor, all I could hear was the aged voice of a once precocious English major. This review sounds a little too harsh to me, but if it means anything, I've picked up his next to last novel, Murther and Walking Spirits, and am excited to jump into it. His style and subject matter make up for whatever technical (and maybe emotional) failings there were in this novel.

Wendell says

I’ve been an avid, even proselytic fan of Robertson Davies for more than 20 years, and was delighted to discover that this novel (his last) had somehow slipped by me and that there was still more Davies to read. Sadly, *The Cunning Man* is a let-down—a book that demonstrates, more than anything, an act of literary onomatopoeia: a novel about an elderly man contemplating a life’s worth of memories and trying to position himself philosophically and existentially as he nears the end of his own story, written by an elderly writer

contemplating a life’s worth of memories and trying to position himself etc. The book opens with typical Davies dash, a hook that nonetheless begins to falter after less than 50 pages and which ultimately fizzles out like a Fourth of July sparkler. There’s another flash at the very end of the book; in between, there’s a long and only intermittently interesting series of anecdotes about characters you never get to know well and who are essentially collections of idiosyncrasies and peculiarities upon which the narrator can comment and, against which, measure himself. Framing an entire novel as a prolonged flashback (spurred in this case by the unwieldy device of a newspaper interview) has its hazards, not the least of which is that the reader essentially knows, going in, that all the characters he’s about to meet are dead, disposed of, or immaterial before the narrator even gets warmed up. Like all prolonged reminiscences, that is, the story tends to evoke more passion in the storyteller than in the audience. Here and there, too, Davies allows his protagonist (himself, it seems clear) to wax on to the point of rivaling Polonius: reflections, opinions about life and love, advice, great wisdom (over) generously shared. *The Cunning Man* thus becomes, sadly, more tedious than not, an unsatisfying coda to the life of great and resourceful writer.

Isabelle says

Hilarious memoir of a very unorthodox doctor, Dr Hullah, a cunning man since he successfully treats those patients whose cases baffle his colleagues. A holistic healer of sorts, Dr Hullah will share more than his medical MO; we will get acquainted with his family, a highly colorful cast of characters.

---

verbava says

"the cunning man" – ?????-???????, ?????-????????, ????????? ????????? ?????????? ?? ?? ??? ?????? ?????????? ?????, ??? ?? ???? ???? ?????, ???? ?????? ?????????? ?????? ?????? ???? ? ?????, ???? ????? ????????. ??? ??? ??????? ?????????, ????? ?????? ?????????, ?? ????? ????? ??? ????? ???? ?????????????? ?????, ??????????? ???????? ?????? ? ?????????????? ????????? ?? ???? ???? ?????. ????, ? ???? ????? ???, ?????-???????????????, ??????????? ? ????, ?? ???? ? ???? ?????????? ???'?????, ??? ? ???????? ?? ????????? ?????, ????? ???? ???????? ?????? ?? ????? (???? ?? ????'?????? ??????, ??? ??????).
??? ?????????? ?????? ??? ?????, ????????????? ?? ??? ?? ??????, ???, ??????, ??? ???????????. ???? ??? ???????? ?????? ? ????, ??? ?? ????? ????? ??????: ??? ????????????? ???????? (??? ?? ???? ?? ?????? ?????) – ?????????? ???????, ????? ????? ???? ??????????; ??? ??????????? – ???????? ????????, ?? ?????? ?????????? ?????? ?? ????? ? ????, ?????????? ? ?????????? ?????? ? ??????? ?????????? ????????; ??? ????????????? – ???????? ??????? ?????, ???????? ???? ?'???? ?????????? ?? ??????? ??? ????????. ???? ??????? ?????? ??????? ??????? ?????????? ??????, ?? ??? ??????? ???????, ??? ???? ???????????, ?? ?? ?????? ????, ?? ?? ???? ?????????? ???? ??????.
?????? ?????????????, ??? ????????? ?????, ???????????? ?? ???? ? ????????: ?? ????????????? ????? ??? ????? ?????? ????????????????? (??? ?, ???? ???????? ?????????? ? ?????? ???????, ???? ????????), ??? ????????? ??????. ? ?????? ????, ??????? ????? ??????? ???????? ???????????? ?????????, ???? ????? ????? ???, ?? ???? ? ??? ?????????? ?????? ???????? ????????: ??????? ??? ???????, ??????? ??? ??????, ??????? ? ??????, ??????????? ????????, ??????? ??? ????????? ??????? ? ???????? ??????? ??????????, ???? ?, ??????, ?? ???????????? ????????? ?. ? ??????, ??? ???????? ??????? ?????? ???????????? ????????: ??????, ??????, ??????, ???? ??? ?????? ??? ???? ???????????. ????? ????????? ?????, ?? ? ????????? ???????? ??????, – ??? ??? cunning man, ? ??? ???, ?? ??? ?????? ???? ???????? ??????????.

Bob says

The "Cunning Man" is the narrator of this novel, physician Jon Hullah. The title comes from the idea of every village having either a Wise Woman or a Cunning Man--someone with insights into the nature of things who sometimes brings healing or at least perspective.

The book spans the seventy years of Hullah's life from his own encounter with a Wise Woman following his miraculous recovery from scarlet feaver to the autumn of his life as a medical practitioner caring for his long-time friend Charlie Iredale, former vicar of St. Aidan's, the parish church near his clinic and the scene of the dramatic, and suspicious death of Father Ninian Hobbes during the Good Friday Eucharist.

As Hullah narrates his life, sparked by his godson's wife's Esme, who interviews him for a newspaper piece, he recalls his school days, his friendships with Charlie and Brocky, his developing sense of the healer's art, his observations (and via correspondence theirs of him) of his lesbian neighbors. What results is a narrative on the human condition shaped by the idea of Fate, perhaps the closest someone who never quite believed could get to the sense that our lives are shaped by the mixture of our choices and that which is beyond us in some mysterious way.

Christine Hayton says

As always, Robertson Davies, proves to me why he is one of my favorite authors. Wonderful story and definitely added to my re-read list. Highly recommended.

Mary Ronan Drew says

"Should I have taken the false teeth?"

Not a bad opening sentence for a novel in which all the action is precipitated by the death at the altar on Good Friday of a beloved priest in Toronto's high church Anglican parish of St Aidan's. The narrator, the cunning man of the title, Dr Hullah, has been a police surgeon and he has his suspicions about the sudden death of the old man. But his friend from childhood, Father Charlie Iredale, won't let him beyond the communion rail and the doctor does nothing about it.

The book is a sort of diary, which Dr Hullah calls a case book, in which he reminisces about his youth at school with Father Iredale and Brocky Gilmartin, the man who married the woman Hullah loved. Many other characters weave in and out of the story, including Darcy Dwyer and DeCourcey Parry, the musical director and organist who provide the excuisite music for St Aidan's services, "the ladies," an etcher and a sculptor in whose yard next to the church the doctor has his clinic, and a hypochondriacal patient whose miraculous cure at the grave of Father Hobbes puts in motion unstoppable eddies that affect all of the church and art community.

2011 No 171

Paul Secor says

I'd read a number of Robertson Davies' novels before this one, but *The Cunning Man* is by far my favorite - a magical feat of storytelling told by a narrator who is looking back on a fully lived life.
Mr. Davies provides his own review of his novel with the last paragraphs of the book:

"The telephone rings. My intuition suggests a wrong number. Not that great intuition is needed; a nearby new cinema has been granted a number that is only one digit away from mine, and wrong numbers are common. This is one.
'Can you tell me the time of the last complete show?'
'You have the wrong number.'
'Eh? Isn't that the Odeon?'
I decide to give a Burtonian answer.
'No, this is the great theatre of life. Admission is free but the taxation is mortal. You come when you can. and leave when you must. The show is continuous. Good-night.'"

Lobstergirl says

I gave this almost 100 pages and couldn't get into it. If it had been a 300 page book I might have soldiered on, but it's 469. I am donating it to the book drive for our local Society for the Degradation of Orphans.

Ayla says

A memoir of Dr Jonathan Hullah, The Godfather of ‘Gil’ Gilmartin. This was Davies last book and there was speculation it would have been part of what they are calling the ‘Toronto trilogy ‘.

Hullah is connected to Gils father Brochwel, they were school friends. They even love the same woman Nuala, who he dated but after being away at war, Brochwel married. He kept on an extramarital relationship with her for a while until Brochwel found out about it. So he always believed that Gil might have been his son.

At one point he fancies marrying Gil’s widow Esme. But at a dinner where he hoped to propose , she instead tells him she plans to wed some prominent rich man, and had Jon only Ben 25 years younger she would had been pressed to get him to marry her.

There were some other characters in this story that spoke to one of loss.

The story for me was slow at first, but become more interesting once all the background material was out of the way. I kept looking for how it tied into the first book. Towards the end all the pieces began to weave itself into a very curious story.

Rachel says

"...the most strenuous efforts of the most committed educationalists in the years since my boyhood have been unable to make a school into anything but a school, which is to say a jail with educational opportunities." (p.14)

"I was a lonely child, but I liked loneliness and I like it still. Despite my mother I was a woods child, and what the woods taught me is still at the heart of my life." (p.18)

"I fell in love with beautiful books, and now, as an old man, I have a harem which is by no means trivial." (p.65)

"...belief posits adherance to a creed, and a creed posits belief in a God, a Prime Mover, a Creator, and an Imminent Presence. And that won't wash...it's pretty widely accepted now among the advanced people- the molecular biologists, you know- that the recent investigations into basic organic stuff show clearly that all forms of life come into being by pure chance, through unpredictable mutation, and because of necessity probably rooted in Darwinian selection. And that makes it quite out of the question to posit any Master Plan, or Planner, or scheme of Creation. Simply won't wash." (p.67/68)

"'Belief where there is unquestionable proof would be possible only to someone who had final knowledge of all things. Someone with God's view of history. We have to put up with the knowledge that's open to us during our lifetimes. We can't have knowledge of future things; we only have a scrappy knowledge of past things. You know what the sailor said when he was told that King Solomon was the wisest man the world had ever known, or would ever know?'
'Can't say I do.'
The sailor said, 'If I had Solomon aboard my ship he wouldn't know a jib-boom from a poop lantern.'" (p.68)

"I knew that he prayed a great deal, of course for help in his examinations. But subsequent clinical experience has convinced me that God is not particularly interested in examinations, just as he won;t be dragged into the stock Market, or being a backer in show business." (p.76)

"Their very silences were rhetorical." (p.88)

"To learn to see what is right in front of one's nose; that is the task and a heavy task it is. It demands a certain stillness of spirit, which is not the same thing as dimness of personality, and need not be partnered with a retiring, bland social life." (p.129)

"I cannot think of a better term for it: the drye mock. Not sarcasm, which is like vinegar, or cynicism, which is so often the voice of disappointed idealism, but a delicate casting of a cool and illuminating light on life, and thus an enlargement. The ironist is not bitter, he does not seek to undercut everything that seems worthy or serious, he scorns the cheap scoring-off of the wisecracker." (p.136)

"The drye mock is not for all audiences: sometimes it falls flat." (p.167)

"Very few people can be cured by a doctor they do not like and I have even heard people say that they could not be cured by a man who was obviously stupider than themselves." (p.226)

"Treatment must be intensely personal, and if sometimes it strays into the realm of the mind, there the

physician must follow it. But usually it is in that realm where mind and body mingle- where the mind affects the body and the body the mind, and where untangling the relationship is the Devil's own work,and takes time and appreciation and sympathy- that the hard-driven practicioner and his specialist brother cannot be expected to provide for every patient who knocks on his door." (p.227)

"I settle down in my living-room to read, to listen to music, but always beneath the surface occupation to think about my patients and my work, and I am wrapped in my own sort of happiness, when nothing hurts." (p.238)

"Ceremonial. When I was young I thought, like a real Canadian of the twentieth century, that anything that was too carefully ordered was not 'sincere,' and I accepted sincerity- meaning life stripped of beauty though not wholly of decency- as the greatest of values. Anything goes, so long as it is 'sincere,' however squalid, illiterate, and confused it may seem.
The war cured me of that. I saw the sincerity, the wholehearted acquiescence, of good men fighting for a cause they could not have summed up, for a country of which they knew very little, for 'values' they had never heard seriously questioned. I had seen that sincerity turned to bitterness in the men that had been brought low by 'friendly fire,' and who had nothing to cling to, nothing to show them that there might be something beyond the muddle of belief, or mere acquiescence, with which the best of them had gone to war. They knew no ceremonial that might light their way. Even the worldly splendour of monarchy and patriotism was denied them, because these things had been brought low by 'sincere' thinkers who saw through everything that was not on the flattest levels of mediocrity." (p.248)

"Any enlightenment must come from yourself. It's rooted in the Divine Reality that we find in our minds- mind in the largest definition and not just the calculator inside your head- that recognizes and reflects the Divine Reality in all things." (p.250)

"Old Burton would have described her illness as Maids', Nuns', and Widows' Melancholy, but that would not have been quite accurate. It was not sexual experience alone that she was missing, but something far broader. She exemplified, with clarity, the Revenge of the Unlived Life, the rejection of whatever possibilities had been open to her as a young woman, the abandonment of love or any strong emotion." (p.256)

"Vanity is where they all score high, as I suppose all artists must do. Without vanity how could they survive?" (p.264)

"In the world of art you never know who knows or has known who, and what is personal and what is derivative. That's part of the misery of the lesser artist. People think they copy, whereas they really just think the same way as somebody bigger, but not as effectively." (p.269)

"She says we must curtsy at first meeting. I say for an Englishwoman to curtsy to any Canadian, however highly placed, is against Nature and is indeed a kind of ceremonial sodomy and nothing will make me do it." (p. 276)

"One of the worst basic ills is anger, or resentment, or simple grievance; that one can assume shapes that would astound you. And they all speak through the body, not clearly or obviously, but with a determination that can shadow a life or end a life." (p.283)

"But that's Toronto for you- and Canada, because this country is still pretty much pioneer in its deepest feelings and thinks art is something the women amuse themselves with in the long winter evenings- you know, knitting, tatting, and barbola- while the men drink bootleg hooch in the barn." (p.302)

"Mankind must have something upon which to hang its great Dread, which is Everyman's Fatality." (p.306)

"There is a whole large class of society- called children- to whom mothers are not women, but inescapable appendages, sometimes dear, sometimes not, and never full human beings but supporting players in their own intense drama." (p.309)

"A little self-pity, I have always found, is very agreeable, so long as one keeps it to oneself. Who would pity me, if I didn't? An old man, and apparently without a friend in the world. I was cheered after a consultation with a patient who complained of constant and medically inexplicable indigestion. I did not tell him that I was certain he was married to the cause of his indigestion, but I took some comfort in the fact that I had at least escaped the wretchedness of a bad marriage, patiently endured." (p.346)

"More humanism and less science- that's what medicine needs. But humanism is hard work and a lot of science is just Tinkertoy." (p.356)

"The world had, without my being strongly aware of it, changed its attitude toward sex dramatically, though not, I think, deeply. Homosexuality had become, not the love that dares not speak its name, but the love that never knows when to shut up." (p.364)

"...much of the class system of European and American life right up until the present century, rested upon the distinction between those who dealt habitually with human detritus and those who did not." (p.371)

"That's what happened to music, and arts generally, in Toronto: respectability has descended in a fog of Arts Councils and Foundations and, although things are better on the whole, so far as performance goes, a lot of the elfin glamour of sin-and-improvisation has been dissipated." (p.377)

"The worst artistic tragedy is not to be a failure, but to fall short of the kind of success you have marked as your own." (p.381)

"His attitude seemed to be that of the nineteenth century, when nakedness was not utterly decried, but was cloaked in a terrible high-mindedness. Frequently quoted was a Mrs. Bishop, a celebrated traveller, who said, 'A woman may be naked, yet behave like a lady.' At the tea-table, one presumes. But it was a far, far better thing for the lady never, never to be naked." (p.395)

"Oh, the tyranny of invalids! How they dominate us happy mortals who are still on our feet, able to meet in some measure the demands of life, and who feel no pain- or not very much pain." (p.407)

"I have no faith that the treatment will heal whatever it was that gave rise to the disease. Nor am I such a fool to think that if I could find the root of the misery, the disease would disappear. The disease is the signal, that a life has become hard to bear." (p.408)

"I thought that the real heroism of death was seen in the one who stood by." (p.415)

"Every love affair is a private madness into which nobody else can hope to penetrate." (p.429)

"And here we are, in this excellent restaurant, drinking this very good claret and eating cutlets, and not looking like people with such a peculiar ancestry. That's the Divine Drama. The onward march of evolution. Astonishing, so far as it's gone, but we're probably only in act Two of a five-act tragicomedy. We are probably a mere waystation on the road to something finer than anything we can now conceive." (p.434)

"Was all this nothing to one who had always thought of himself as an intelligent observer of, if not a very active participator in, the life of his time? Decidedly not. Gain, every moment of it. But what remains for autumn and winter?" (p.436)

"...this is the Great Theatre of Life. Admission is free but the taxation is mortal. You come when you can, and leave when you must. The show is continuous. Good-night." (p.437)
