

Southfield Public Library

Travels With My Aunt by Graham Greene

Discussion questions used at SPL - March 2013

1. What did that opening paragraph of the book tell you about Henry? About Augusta? About Henry's father?
2. This book was written in the late 60's.... do you feel it gives you a sense of the time?
3. When I was reading this book, Henry reminded me a bit of the main character in *The Stranger* by Camus that we read a few months ago... I saw him as an observer of life, as a man who just went along with what he was told. Would you agree with that? There's a line on p 47 where he says he is not a man who is easily influence... would you agree with that?
4. When a character or a narrator is "innocent," as Henry appears to be, what does that add to the book? What does it take away?
5. What do you think of his relationship with his "mother," Agatha? Why didn't she ever talk about his father with him? How did that influence his personality?
6. What did you learn about his father from Augusta?
7. Why do you think Henry agreed to travel with his aunt in the first place? What do you think he was looking for? Was that out of character for him?
8. What does his relationship – or lack of one, really – with Miss Keene tell you about Henry? Was he willing to settle for the least in life? Was he almost paralyzed to take action? Or was he reading things into the letters she sent him? When he was in precarious situations, why did he often think of Miss Keene . . . was she a type of safety net to him? Do you think we all have someone like that in our lives, a type of safe haven?
9. Why did he care about his dahlias so much? Were they a substitute for something? Anything?
10. Why do you think he really didn't have any relationships at all in his life. . . Who was the closest person he had as a "friend". . . the neighbor? The admiral (Miss Keene's father)? Anyone he worked with?
11. What did you think of Wordsworth? He was very much a stereotype in this book, his broken English and all. . . Do you think that was just a product of the age or did Greene do that deliberately? If so, why would he create such a character? What role did he play in the story. . . was he a moral anchor? Comic relief? Demonstration of a deep love?
12. Who was the most honest person in this book?
13. When Aunt Augusta started telling her tales to Henry, what - or who - did you think she was? Did Henry ever get it? When did you figure out their real relationship?
14. When Augusta and Henry were traveling on the Orient Express, what did you think of the conditions of the train? When you think of that mythical name, did it live up to your expectations? Was the train a symbol of the changes in the world as a whole?
15. Why do you think Augusta loved Visconti so? What was their relationship made of?

16. Why do you think Henry went for such a long time not hearing from Augusta? Was it to protect him, in a way? Was it her, not caring? Why did it affect his life so, when he didn't hear from her? P 155
17. Henry was such a proper banker, making sure all his t's were crossed and his l's dotted. Why do you think he was able to become part of the criminal ring his aunt and Visconti created in Paraguay?
18. Earlier in the book, what did you think of his encounters with police? How did he first react to them when they wanted to search the urn with his mother's ashes? What about towards the end, after he had a bit more experience in the world?
19. What do you think Greene was trying to say about aging? About honesty?
20. This was a book "written for the fun of it," according to Greene. . . Did you find it funny? Or was it just a bit sad for you?
21. Who changed the most in the book? Who remained the same?
22. What did you think of Visconti and his continual quest to be on top? Henry wondered why he bothered since he was so old and would soon be dead. . . Did Greene offer an acceptable explanation of that need of Visconti's?
23. Did this book disturb you in any ways? How so? Do you think this was part of Greene's intent?
24. Was it a commentary on life? How we should live it?
25. Why do you think Henry was happy – doing dishonest, illegal things – at the end of the book?
26. What did you think of his postscript, when he said he would be marrying the Chief of Customs young daughter? What did you think of his short but somewhat intense encounter with Tooley, the girl on the train? Was that a foreshadowing of his eventual marriage?
27. On p 214, Aunt Augusta talks about Henry's desire to find Miss Keene and then describes what it would mean, living a life where you can only think about death coming vs living a life where you are happy to be alive on more day... what did you think of that philosophy of hers?

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General discussion questions

- For the person who chose the book – What made you want to read it? What made you pick it for the book club? Did it live up to your expectations?
- How is the book structured? First person? Third person? Flashbacks? Narrative devices? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
- How would you describe the author’s writing style? Concise? Flowery? How is language used in this book? Read aloud a passage that really struck you. How does that passage relate to the book as a whole?
- How effective is the author’s use of plot twists? Were you able to predict certain things before they happened? Did the author keep you guessing until the end?
- Did the book hold your interest?
- How important is the setting to the story? Did you feel like you were somewhere else? Did the time setting make a difference in the story? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the setting and time placement?
- Which is stronger in the book – the characters or the plots?
- Would you recommend this book to someone else? Why? And to whom?