

Irwin Shaw was an American novelist, screenwriter, playwright, and short story writer. He was born on February 27, 1913 in New York, New York and died May 16, 1984 in Davos, Switzerland. His original name was Irwin Gilbert Shamforoff. He lived in Switzerland and France. He studied at the Brooklyn College and graduated in 1934 with a B.A. He began his career by writing the scripts of Andy Gump and Dick Tracy radio shows. His first novel was The Young Lions in 1948 and it was his most successful as well. Then, it became into a film in 1958. He wrote his first play, Bury the Dead, for a 1935 contest; though it lost, the play appeared on Broadway in 1936 and he gained his first recognition with it. It was the first of twelve produced professionally. He wrote the first of many screenplays, The Big Game, in 1936. Throughout the later 1930's, magazines such as The New Yorker and Esquire published short stories of his. He was a veteran of World War II and many of his works involved political issues. He depicted life in the US as a conflict against the moral sickness he viewed in modern American society.

A book that had an influence from his war experience and view of society was Voices of a Summer Day in 1965. The story was about the history of man named Benjamin Federov. The novel starts with him going to his son's baseball game. Moments throughout the game, he has flashbacks of his own life. The early flashbacks go back to his childhood and the later flashbacks progress through the years of his life after childhood. For example, his first flashback was of himself at camp and of himself working during his teenage years later in the story. After the baseball game, he went home and then took a walk on the beach. He then went back home and had dinner with his family. During all those events, he continues to have flashbacks until they coincide with the present. He remembers his whole life up to the present in less than twenty-four

hours because his day started with the baseball game in the afternoon and ended with dinner at night. Overall, he recounted his memories and lessons that he had learned from life and others that he had encountered: parents, brother, friends, strangers, etc. While he recounted his tale, he also told of historical events such as,

“Cohn’s uncle got the tickets for Bye, Bye, Bonnie for August 23rd. The plans had been made in advance and nobody had bothered to find out that on the same day, to men called Sacco and Vanzetti were to be excuted in Charlestown State Prison.” (p.26-7)

In addition, he told of other people’s stories to give information about his own memories.

The theme of the story, based on the author’s views, would be to describe the life of an average person as a first generation born to an immigrant during that era and comment on the injustices of that time. To start the novel, Shaw told about the former life of the father of the main character. It helped as a lead into the injustices of the son and as a foreshadowing of further complications. An example of that was when he said,

“Israel Federov, Louis and Benjamin’s father, had come from Russia at the age of six, one of a family that eventually numbered eight children. He had grown up amongst the usual terrors and sweated labor on New York’s East side...” (p.14)

The father’s age at that time is younger than Benjamin’s age in the flashback but it left the same effect of being inexperienced. In the history of the main character, he described morality, religious prejudice, racial prejudice, occupational discrimination, other injustices to prove that people as a whole still have a lot to learn about equality.

The main character of the novel was Benjamin Federov. He came from a upper lower class family and lived in the middle class later. He had a father, mother, and a brother as family and had numerous relationships with women. He was married once and

had two children in wedlock. He was well built, strong, tall, and athletic. He had a college education and served his country in World War II. In his early years, he thought, "...he [Benjamin] was going to be promiscuous and probably perverse and, for a long time and perhaps forever, incapable of fidelity," (p.62). That attitude lead him to have many empty relationships with women. Yet, as he grew older, his attitude changed when he thought, "If she [his future wife] comes out of this, Federov swore, I will never do anything to hurt her again. Never."(p.172) Hence, it ended his desire for many women.

The setting of the novel was mainly the park where his son played his baseball game for that evening, the beach near his house, and his house. The story takes place someday in September of the year 1964 from the afternoon until the evening. The weather was hot and bright. There was a feeling of lethargy and despair as summer was ending. As the sun diminished into the horizon, a feeling of tranquility appeared when the ocean became calm, it grew darker, and there was a slight breeze.

The style of the novel was a series of flashbacks triggered by moments in the present. The flashbacks were in chronological order and spanned from his childhood to the present day. The flashbacks included his family, friends, acquaintances, but most importantly the lessons he learned, the history of the time, and his personality. In using this style, Shaw was able to describe injustices as time progressed. Also, it gives the story a realistic feel because he tried to imitate the thought pattern of a person rather than having one long or a series of long flashbacks.

Shaw did not only write about social travesties but also about self-contentment as in The Top of the Hill in 1979. The main character had an oppressive childhood because of his mother's protective nature. He was treated as a meek child and was not allowed to

participate in sports except for skiing on a small hill belonging to his school. He deceived his mother increasingly as so he could participate in other sports. Skiing had become an expression of himself and his anger towards his mother. That expression led him to be more athletic. Later, his mother died and he derived joy from physical danger such as parachuting, surfing, hang gliding, free falling, and extreme skiing on difficult runs. He then met a woman though and fell in love with her. They got married, they were content for about a month, and then a tragedy happened that changed everything. He took her to the airfield where he did free falling with friends. They were to do a four-person star but an accident happened. A person hit another person's parachute and both died from the blow. From that day, they grew apart until they lived in different places but were still married. He moved from New York to Green Hollow, Vermont. He had worked there in his youth and he felt as if he could exert himself and be in an atmosphere of simplicity. After having a new friend nearly die, he gave up dangerous sports so he could regain his wife. He had learned, through a sudden enlightenment, that he wanted to spend his life with her and he did not want his life to become prematurely short from unnecessary risks. His actions were,

“He saw that Williams and the other men he was going to jump with were already talking in a little group out on the runway where the plane was standing. He reached back for his jump suit and boot, and let them drop onto the back seat.” (p.344)

The theme of the book was to recount the journey of a man searching for happiness with his life. The main character did not know whether he gained more joy from sports or from his wife. He found sports important because he found the adrenaline to be living. In addition, he did not mind dying because he felt oppressed by his mother

when he was young and thought it to be a release. He continued that reasoning as he grew up but he did not foresee being married. The first sign of conflict between his marriage and sports were his wife's actions the next Saturday after the tragedy. Her actions were, "...he said and went over and kissed her. She moved her head quickly so that he just brushed her cheek." (p.45)

There were three main characters: Michael Storrs Jr., Tracy Storrs, Andreas Heggener. Michael was soul searching, Tracy was his wife, and Andreas was Michael's friend and the inspiration for his change in life. Michael was fat, clumsy, and melancholy but became strong, athletic, and sly. For high school, "He was graduated at the age of seventeen, a handsome, powerful young man, a loner who had won the first prize in mathematics and had been accepted by Harvard, Yale, Columbia and Stanford." (p.22) He attended Stanford for three and a half years and graduated summa cum laude. He then went on to Wharton School of Business. He earned a pilot's license, had his driving license revoked for speeding, experimented with many sports, and his desire for women grew. He was six feet tall and weighed 180 pounds. His job was management consultant and through his job he met Tracy. Tracy was a family friend he met at his mother's funeral. She was a designer for patterns for fabrics, wallpaper, and other textiles. She divorced once to Albert Richards. She had a mother, father, and two younger sisters. Andreas was an Austrian immigrant and was well off financially. He had a wife and lived in Green Hallow Vermont. He owns a hotel there and lives in a mansion. He is dying of tuberculosis.

The setting was New York and it gave a sense of being fast paced. It is a city of skyscraper and business. It made the mood seem oppressive from the grandeur and

tiresome from the rapidness. There was no time for rest and for happiness. Michael's leaving New York to Vermont was a symbol of his journey to find his happiness. In Vermont, the air is clear and open with the backdrop of snowy mountains and a quaint town. In addition, he was returning to a place that he had known so it gave a sense of coming home.

Shaw wrote this novel with a traumatic childhood to give predicaments in the future. He then used those predicaments to create a dilemma between choosing the reason he lived life; his wife or his adrenaline. He made the made character travel to search for the answer within himself. Through a series of events, the main character was able to choose and he ended the story on a happy note.

Shaw's only comic novel was entitled Nightwork in 1975. The book was about a man that worked as the night manager of a hotel. During one night, he finds a hundred thousand dollars in hundred dollar bills in a mailing tube that was in the hand of a dead man. He took the money and quit his job. He then went through a series of events to get a passport and left the US for Europe. While leaving the country, he loss his luggage that had his money in it. He had tracked a false lead for a week but accidentally found the person that had the money. A recent acquaintance who had it and they became partners. They invested money in horses, gold, sugar, art, gambling, stocks, and wine. While investing the money, he fell in love with a woman that he had met in the US in Europe and they married. They settled in the US despite his fear of being found by the owner of the money. In fact, someone tracked him, in turn, and he had to return the hundred thousand to the owner. During that time, his partner had died from a gun shot during a

mugging. The story ended with the main character having a nice life but a bit depressed from recent events. He was in the Art Gallery that they had owned together and thought,

“I sat on a bench in the middle of the room, without turning on the lights, thinking of the joyous, dishonest, scarred, cunning man who had died that day, and whom by the terms of the contract we had signed that slushy day in the office of the lawyer in Zurich, now had left me absurdly wealthy. The tears came slowly.” (p. 344)

The theme was to have the main character to find to do with his life. He had been a pilot and he did not know anything else. It resulted in him wandering the country for a new reason to live and becoming a gambler. Through the whole book, he was running from something and it was a story of his travels. Also, through the interaction he had with others, we learned more about him and others.

The main characters of the story were Douglas Grimes and Miles Fabian. Grimes was a pilot for a company that carried passengers to places to ski. He was born in Scranton, Pennsylvania but left it when he was told he had retinoschisis and could not fly an airplane anymore. He settled in New York because there was a bookie he liked and gambled with. He owed money to the bookie so he had to take the job as the night manager of the St. Augustine hotel. He liked to gamble on horses and he lived in a nearly empty apartment before he found the money. He drinks a lot and likes the company of women. He has two brothers but not many friends. One of his friends though was Miles Fabian. He was the person that had his money when Grimes lost his luggage. He was a veteran of World War II and he has a scar across his chest from being a prisoner of war. He travels from opportunity to opportunity and used to make a living barely. He was the investor of the partnership and he made grimes and himself rich.

The setting of the story took place in many place and sometimes at multiple settings at the same time. In General, the settings were the US and Europe. The Us meant the problem and Europe the solution because Grimes was fleeing from the owner of the money in the US and he had to hide in Europe. He constantly moved around in Europe and made it harder for anybody to track him. While in Europe, Grimes visited places that moved at a rapid pace and it gave a urgency feeling to whatever he did.

The story was written to make the reader be aware that Grimes was chased constantly. Either a person or just a shadow chased him in his mind. It made the reader wonder if he was really being chased or not and that made it suspenseful. Also, by incorporating Fabian into the story like he did made the reader wonder if he was going to be an honest person or turn on Grimes later in the story.

In the three books, the main character had been a male and he involved women to aid in the story. The man had personal and he found a solution somehow to his problem. He incorporated his views and opinion on issues sometimes. He incorporated his personal experiences he had and settings he had been to as well.