Boekverslag Engels Doctor Fischer of Geneva or The bomb party door Graham Greene

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Auteur: Graham Greene
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Vak: Engels

Taak: Doctor Fischer of Geneva (The Bomb Party)

Chapter 1:

Already in the first paragraph the story-teller gives us a hint about the coming tragedy. How?

He says he “loved her”. So he either doesn’t love her anymore or she’s dead.

Give a description of the main characters as they are introduced here.

The General. He’s a Devisionnaire and native Swiss.
An American actress with blue hair named Mrs. Montgomery.
A film actor named Richard Deane who’s an alcoholic.
Doctor Fischer, who’s excruciatingly cruel and immensely rich.
Anna-Luise, his daughter. A caring, warm-hearted, young woman.
The main character, Alfred, who lost his hand and is 30 years older.
A tax-adviser: Belmont.
An attorney at law. Mr Kips

Also on p.11 we get a hint creating suspense about a tragic event in the future. Where?

He can’t think of her without getting tears in his eyes.

Quote the sentence on p.15 that makes it clear to us.

“They are the closest and the clearest memories which I have, clearer even than those of the day when Anna-Luise died.”
What type of point-of-view does the author apply in the novel?

Auctorial story-teller.

How did Mr. Jones and Anna-Luise first meet?

He went to the toilet, left his newspaper at his seat. Anna-Luise sat down on the opposite chair. And when he came back, instead of leaving, they talked.

Which incident illustrates Anna-Luise kind character?

She didn’t want to let Mr. Jones pay for her sandwich.

7) Why does it give her pain when Jones refers to her father as the Fischer?

Because it refers to the well known, insensitive person her father is with his abominable parties.

Chapter 2:

Why were they really a very old-fashioned couple?

They had constructed love long before the love making.

Why does Jones feel guilty about Anna-Luise?

Perhaps it was a crime in her father’s eyes to induce her.

Explain how the author tells us she was ‘touched for the very first time’ (cfr. Madonna)

‘, so that her blood was smeared on my legs and my stomach,’ (She was bleeding because she had just lost her virginity.)

Chapter 3:

Why did Jones feel he should have gone to the tradesmen’s entrance? (p.19)

He considered himself to be part of the working class. This was all far too capricious for him. The luxury, the grandness and servant where a bit too overwhelming. He felt out of place.

What is meant with ‘he resembled the continental way of writing that number’ (p.21)

There are two ways of writing the number seven. “7” is the English way. But when a horizontal line is
placed across the oblique line, one comes close to the continental way of writing the number. Because the man with the white jacket bent his arm at his side, he unintentionally impersonated the numeral seven. Or at least, the continental way of writing the number.

Describe the first two Toads we meet in this chapter.

Mrs Montgomery, a somewhat self-involved person. Then again, aren’t they all? She lives in her own little world and is surprised and confused by anything that doesn’t quite fit in. Eg. Jones. She feels responsible for everything (or at least wants to give the impression that she has responsibilities) because she is the only woman Dr Fischer invites nowadays. Therefore she is the hostess, at least, from her point of view. He also encountered Mr Kips. Not much is to be said about this character, he hardly says or does anything at this point. He does however have an appointment (unlike Mrs Montgomery) and is thus was able to accommodate him. It is only later on in the story that we shall observe the true character of Mr Kips and how he tries to gloss accepting the last ‘present’ Dr Fischer will ever give. Perhaps the best description of the toads is that they have no character at all, no spine, no backbone as they say. Nothing. Someone who stands for nothing will fall for anything. The story affirms this quotation with great ease.

Chapter 4:

Question 14 is missing. Intermission

Observation (unrelated to question 14 and hopefully my credits on this assignment, I just needed some space to insert this random remark ;-) : Notwithstanding the complete and utter validity of the use of Mr. Webber (when restricting ourselves to the American use of the language). They taught me that I should only use Mr Webber (and that in fact, anything else, would be wrong. This is supported by the use of these abbreviations in the book). Perhaps you could discuss this ‘point’(pun intended) with your college. And when you have both reached a consensus, I would appreciate clarity on the matter.

What is your first impression of Dr. Fischer?

When he ‘informs’ Jones that he may sit down, my impression was that he was a busy man. Later on, after his smirk (‘I though you probably wanted to speak to me’ ‘How could that be?’ he asked) I evaluated him to be someone who considers himself to be above the average person. Not only this, because most of us (about half of the population should) do, but he also seems considers himself above the small elite, above entire human race as it were. This would include a social and empathic detachment which is later confirmed when he feels the information could have been disclosed ‘more easily in writing. It would have saved you a journey to Geneva.’ He indeed does make it sound socially distant as Jones himself stated shortly after his remark. He is even relieved to be rid of any nuisance she may or may not have represented and all accountability had hereby been relinquished on his side. My actual opinion shall be given when I am asked for a deep and psychological insight (Overall question number 4).

In this chapter Dr. Fischer is twice referred to as “God”. Quote the sentences.
‘You make him sound like Our Father in Heaven – his will be done on earth as it is in Heaven’

‘Thank God for that’
‘Thank Doctor Fischer,’ I said, ‘or is it the same thing?’

Is he concerned about other people? Explain your answer.

He shows no concern, whatsoever towards other people. Not even his own flesh and blood. They only thing that will seem to concern him is the greedy behavior of the mankind.

Which element of a future party is mentioned here?

The porridge.

Chapter 5:

Provide a suitable title for this chapter.

The invitation

Who was present at the wedding besides the marrying couple?

A witness, whom he had brought from the office.
Mr Belmont. He was the harbinger of the impending doom. (Bringing the invitation)

Observe the invitation Jones gets. How personal is it?

It’s not very personal. It’s rather formal. He had however taken the time to fill in the printed card, but I suppose for such a small and private occasion it would be more troublesome not to do this. Nor does he personally deliver the invitation himself. And one cannot defend his actions by saying it could be worse and that he could have sent it by mail.

Again a biblical reference is made in relation with Dr. Fischer. Quote.

‘So you’ll let him take you into a high place and show you all the kingdoms of the world.’ ‘I’m not Christ, and he’s not Satan, and I thought we’d agreed he was God Almighty, although I suppose to the damned God Almighty looks very like Satan.’

Quote another hint of impending disaster.

‘What a fuss about nothing, but I was wrong, quite wrong.’
Chapter 6:

Why does Mrs. Montgomery call him Mr. Smith? How does this reveal her opinion of him?

The name Jones and the name Smith are the most common names imaginable. This man is stereotyped to death. First by Greene in actually naming his character Mr Jones, now painstakingly harsh by Mrs Montgomery who seems to make no difference in the working class and feels she is not the least bit required to actually learn someone’s name.

What does Mrs. Montgomery want Jones to do?

To come and point out four objects which he would like to possess (if he were extravagant enough to buy them). In other words, she’d like him to pick out presents for the party.

Note p.36: (Jones) “I thought I knew what Mrs. Montgomery was after”
How does he systematically try to find out if he has guessed right?

He contemplates. Discerns her reactions and whatever she says or does, he tries to manipulate the conversation so that he may discover what he wishes to know. Talking about presents as if she were trying to them pick out for the guests, but in reality they were both referring to the presents Dr Fischer had distributed earlier or would ever consider dispensing himself.

On which two occasions does Jones actually give suggestions for future parties? (after reading the complete novel this will become completely clear)
The cheques. This idea is actually used.
Ridiculing her, he also suggested a pigskin photograph frame.

Chapter 7:

What do we learn from the marriage of Dr Fischer and his wife? Was she loyal to him? Did he love her? Explain your answer.

That Dr Fischer’s pride carried much more weight than his love. If there was any love left on his side. His wife stayed loyal, she did not love the person she shared listening to music with. This person did love her, but she did not betray him. Dr Fischer did however make her feel like she had betrayed him. He said he forgave her, as if there were something to forgive. He made her feel guilty. He did not love her, if he did, that love had now disappeared for it had made him vulnerable. His pride did not let him love, not the way he should have. They say nobody has ever loved the way the wanted to be loved nor perfect. A bruised ego, however, should not turn a total lack of affection into the destruction of one you once loved and at no point wanted to cause you harm.

Which relationship did she have with this other man?
She just listened to music together. They didn’t have sex. He may have wanted to, but she didn’t. It wasn’t a question of faithfulness. Even if it were, she still would have done nothing wrong.

What is meant with the death of a thousand cuts (p.40)

He continuously drags her down in a spiral of guilt. Not just once, but once she has come to terms with what she believed was her own fault, she is ‘forgiven’ and so on.

In this chapter we find an explanation for Fischer’s hate of humanity. When did it start?

They explain that Anna-Luise suspects that Mr Kips’ clerk really pricked him to the heart and he never recovered from the prick. Of course, that means he has heart. And if he indeed at this point begins to hate and despise people. He did not do so before. He did have some faith in humanity before this.

Why did Fischer have to humiliate Mr Kips? How did he go about it?

Because Mr Kips had seen Dr Fischer when Dr Fischer was vulnerable. He made comic scoffing Mr Kips and made sure it was widely known. Money is a powerful tool.

“Oh, I’ll have fun with all of them in time, he told me. What is this statement a prediction of? (after reading the complete novel)

With his money he could manipulate and embarrass anyone. But he preferred to have an actual reason to loath someone, namely their greed. After discovering that pride (which was his greatest ‘value’) did not stand in their way of greed, he resorted to other means. Fear.

Chapter 8:

In this chapter the image of an island is used. What exactly is meant with it?

Happiness is intangible like the islands in the Pacific Ocean you hear about. An island is reported, again and again, surely it must exist. But he can’t define it, he can’t grasp it. Nonetheless, he’s confident it exists. Yet, how quickly it fades in obscurity.

What do they see in a bookshop?

A new edition of Mr Kips. (Comic book)

On which two occasions does the subject of skiing emerge?

They bought a pair of skis.
When they talk about children. She’ll drop the pill after the skiing, she doesn’t want to be pregnant in plaster.

Explain that even though the couple says that Fischer cannot affect them in any way, he has already caused a negative influence on their marriage.

They couldn’t avoid the thought of Dr Fischer’s party any longer.

**Chapter 9:**

Note how Fischer systematically humiliates all the people present at the party. (Even two people who are absent are humiliated.)

Deane can only speak English and his attempt to speak French is pathetic. Later he is also described as a sex object, not an actor.

The prizes are not for intelligence, Dr Fischer noted, or else the Divisionnaire would never win anything. Mr Kips in search of a dollar becomes a conversational topic for a moment.

Madame Faverjon, who is not with us anymore, was the greediest and to him, nothing more than a study. He couldn’t stand her and made sure this was well known by saying it in the bluntest way possible.

Monsieur Groseli died of cancer. If Dr Fischer had known, he would never have invited him. He wants his guests to entertain him for much longer. In other words, he too, was nothing more than a study case and in no way is looked upon as an actual human being.

What are the rules which the toads have to obey to receive the precious gifts?

They have to do what Dr Fischer tells them to. They’re not allowed to contradict him.

What is the reason according to Dr. Fischer for Jones’ presence at the party?

He is here as an observer rather than as a guest, but of course, as he is his son-in-law, he may imagine he has great expectations. Expectations too are a form of wealth.

**Chapter 10:**

What were the presents at the party?

Mrs Montgomery had a fine emerald set in platinum with a kind of diamond crown above it as far as could be seen. The men received eighteen-carat gold watches – quartz watches with computers and all the works. Except Richard Deane. He had that photograph of himself in a pigskin frame which I saw in the shop.

Where do we get another reference towards Anna-Luise’s death?
When she dies, his promise not to attend the parties anymore would die with her. Love will cease to be happiness and will become a sense of intolerable loss.

**Chapter 11:**

In an ironical way Jones talks about death (p.66). Why is it so ironical?

He naturally assumes that he will either die first, or they will die together. So there will be no suffering for him. He sees it as a distant event. One which could not harm him either way and if it did he would simply die with her, together. No suffering. Death wasn’t a serious topic to either of them (because they think they’ll be together forever). And the fact that they’re discussing this in the setting of skiing (which fate will pick as the setting of her actual demise) does add to irony.

What is the meaning of the dream (p.67) ? What does Jones learn from this dream that will be confirmed later on in this chapter by Steiner? How does Anna-Luise feel about it? Why do you think this small fact is so important to Jones?

That he is a very lonely man, alone in his house, with no friends. And without his (this also relates to Jones) beloved one, he will leave everything he thought he was behind him and start again with a set of new faces. And bitter look on life. Jones feels this could happen to him too one day.

In a shop they meet someone that has been mentioned before. Who is he? How does he react when he sees Anna-Luise? Why does he call her Anna?

He thinks he's looking at Anna-Luise her mother. He’s the ‘he’ her mother talked about. The man she listened to music with.

**Chapter 12:**

Which of two story-elements in this chapter could make the reader speculate about the meaning of the title ‘The Bomb Party’?

Mr Kips brings a letter to the attention of Mr Jones which involves armament. Souls, which would survive the decay of human flesh or half of the chapter and would play an important role if something were to happen with our corporal vessels which in turn disintegrate after the use of an explosive devise.

Who does the couple meet at Saint Maurice? What is the occasion?

It’s the mass of Christmas Eve.

**Chapter 13:**
Analyse this chapter to make clear how the author builds up the tension very gradually. (it starts with numeral 13: bad luck)

Safety in numbers (Chapter 13) is mentioned in a completely different context. But the reader makes associations, be it conscious or unconscious. Constantly we read small hints towards the dramatic such as ‘I though this is the moment of death. But I felt no emotion. I recalled once reading how in battle when men are hit, they never feel the hurt till later.’ He reads things like these which increasingly build up and when he looks up and turns to real life he sees things going wrong.

‘There’s one customer you’ll never see again,’ I told him back, and I threw a fiftycentime peeve on the table which fell on the floor. Then I waited by the door to see if he would pick it up. He did and I felt ashamed Why do you think Jones felt ashamed? Refer to an earlier passage in the novel about insulting a waiter (Page?)

P48: We are too little to be humiliated. It’s like when a man tries to humiliate a waiter – he only humiliates himself.

He knows he did this know. And with the sole intention of feeling better about himself because he could harm another human being. Which backfired, of course?

Chapter 14:

How does Jones want to commit suicide? Why doesn’t it work?

He wants to drink a whisky with twenty tablets of aspirin.
Two poisons can counteract each other.

Who calls him and why?

Mrs Montgomery invites him in the name of Dr Fischer.

Chapter 15:

Explain the reason why Jones finally decides to comply with Fischer’s request to come and see him.

He wanted to humiliate Fischer. He wanted him to suffer as he was suffering.

Why didn’t Dr. Fischer come to Anna-Luise’s funeral? Explain.

She reminded him too much of his wife.

Why has Dr. Fischer called upon Jones to come? (two reasons)
Explain why he couldn’t bear to come to the funeral and that Jones is better than the Toads. Announcing Jones that the trust is his.

What will be special about the Final Party?

It will be a serious party. An extreme one, one in which he will hand out cheques. The final test of greed.

Explain how we can tell that Jones has not yet given up the thought of suicide.

He’s still thinking about ways to kill himself (without harming others). He keeps mentioning means to kill himself.

Chapter 16:

The catastrophe. Why does Doctor Fischer organize this final party?

He always told the toads that one day there would be the last and most exciting party of all. With his daughter gone, he no longer has the heart to carry on.

Why has he invited Jones for the second time?

The final party wouldn’t be complete without him.

What makes the Toads’ initial arguments against accepting a cheque from Dr. Fischer disappear?

They see no difference between accepting caviare or a cheque. (Devisionnaire’s words after the arguments of Dr Fischer)

Explain p.123: ‘No, no, please Dean. I told you before – not anti-clockwise.’

On P.119 he said: Where did you get your education? Clockwise! He inserts a distracting topic into the conversation (modestly insulting Deane once more). I doubt there’s a deeper meaning such as: One must do things clockwise, chronologically, in time. Not a moment sooner. In order.

Who pulls the last cracker? Why?

Jones, he pulls all the remaining crackers and takes the last cracker away from the Devisionnaire who had stayed so long to confront himself with his childhood dream of military heroism but was crushed under the heavy weight of fear. Jones now pulls the cracker out of greed for death and finds himself to be fooled for the cracked contains no lethal explosion.

Jones could have spoiled Fischer’s plan. Explain why this wasn’t the case.
He had proven his point. The greed had manifested made evident.

Again we read a comparison of Fischer with God Almighty. Where? Do you remember other occasions on which this comparison was made?

P137 It’s never too late to spit at God Almighty’s face. Throughout the book constant references are made, I will go into detail later on. Chapter 4(question 16) has the earliest reference which are quoted. On various occasions one finds this metaphor.

Which one statement Jones made, really struck Dr. Fischer in his weakest spot?

How you must despise yourself.

The semantic difference between ‘to hate’ and ‘to despise’ plays an important role in understanding Dr. Fischer. Explain. Which character makes this clear to Jones?

He finds himself to be above the world. Despising can only come from great disappointment, Fischer despises himself because he’s disappointed in himself and his despise according to Jones is contagious and spreads so that he despises the entire world. He thinks hate is not contagious. One can hate another and leave it at that. At this point in the scene, Steiner has joined and explains how in the end he pities Fischer.

**Chapter 17:**

Why couldn’t Jones have killed himself on the evening of the Final Party?

The fact that he wrote the narrative tells well enough that, unlike Doctor Fischer, he never found the courage necessary to kill himself; that night he didn’t need courage, for he had a sufficient amount of despair, but since the inquest demonstrated that the revolver had contained only one charge, his despair would not have served him even if Mr Steiner had not taken possession of the weapon.

He didn’t have the courage. Courage is sapped by day-to-day mind-dulling routine, and despair seems in the end to lose its point.

How does Jones state that what he had experienced only strengthened his agnosticism?

‘Only if I had believed in a God could I have dreamt that the two of us would ever have that jour le plus long. It was as though my small half-belief had somehow shriveled with the sight of Doctor Fischer’s body. Evil was as dead as a god and why should goodness have more immortality than evil?

**Overall Questions:**

What is the general theme of this novel? (The theme in a novel = ‘What is it about?’)
Human greed.

Find three motives in this novel. (A motive in a novel can be compared with a refrain in a piece of music)

Also about hate (despise), compassion (forgiveness) and salvation (death became irrelevant in the end)

Is there a morality Graham Green wants to teach his readers? Explain your answer.

Graham Greene is somewhat known for his sense of political ambivalence. Even though he may have considered himself to be a leftist, even a Marxist, he was always quite skeptical towards communism. So his accusation versus capitalism and the greed it brings is slightly out of place.

He’s talking about human virtues here, he himself, was a slave of ambiguity on the matter. When in Liberia, Greene sympathized with the Liberians against their exploiters, though he paid his own carriers less than the government wage of a shilling a way because he ‘could not afford more’ (Source: Adamson, Judith. Graham Greene: The Dangerous Edge. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1990).

True as it may be, he never claimed to be a hero. He doesn’t want to make heroes out of us either. He simply paints the picture as he sees it. And does not prescribe how we should or should not live (this form hypocrisy might be too much for him).

Greene’s obvious upbringing as a Catholic shines through with his obsession of man’s burden of sin. Not so much the act as the guilt after the act, and the impotence that fails to hinder repetition (Source: Pryce-Jones, David. Graham Greene. London: Oliver and Boyd Ltd, 1963).

The question he asks here is: What ideological disguises will greed take in order to become accepted in a world vaguely hold together by ideas of virtue and morality as we see it today. What decides which virtues are valid at a certain time and changes the meaning of virtues?

If we agree that virtues are part of the superstructure, i.e. the cultural, political, religious and philosophical aspects of a society, then the perception of virtue, along with the rest of superstructure, move and change according to the economic base: “With the change of economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed’ (Source Marx and Engels Social Being and Social Consciousness 31).

Therefore, according to this dialectical view of history, the virtues of a capitalistic society will be different from those of ancient Greece. This determines the set of morality which is applied.

Analyse Doctor Fischer’s character psychologically. Why does he do what he’s doing?

To quote the ending of my first relevant answer on the matter (first impression): ‘He is even relieved to be rid of any nuisance she may or may not have represented and all accountability had hereby been relinquished on his side.’

It is, however, my personal opinion, that even here, with the right attitude, one might spot a fragment of compassionate and benevolent behavior; he wishes to remain aloof. Perhaps he is doing this because he wishes she does not see him as a human being or at least not her father anymore. This way, he can conduct his experiment without confusing his daughter by letting her try and figure out his complex and perhaps (from his point of view) even morally wrong motives.
Later on, I was asked to quote the following:
‘So you’ll let him take you into a high place and show you all the kingdoms of the world.’ ‘I’m not Christ, and he’s not Satan, and I thought we’d agreed he was God Almighty, although I suppose to the damned God Almighty looks very like Satan.’

One could say, we are all damned, the human race. All of us. ‘Oh, all right. Go and be damned.’ was the reply Anna-Luise uttered. So, one should behold her as an angel instead of being a part of our despicable race. All the cruelty Doctor Fischer wishes to exercise on us is made possible because of the human greed. Because of the character of the damned.

Furthermore, his daughter stated (in reference to music): ‘there was no doubt at all of that hatred.’ Therefore, there is doubt about all the other hatred. How he despised mankind is to be explained by his disappointment in it. First he thought there was good in them, but all that grief, made him cruel and he wanted to see how far he could go. How far, people actually would go. This would explain it from a psychological point of view.

Others of course, disagree and say that he is simply the personification of capitalism. That there is little or no personality involved. ‘Why is was she had no idea, but it was as if music taunted him with failure to understand it, with his stupidity. Stupid? The man who had invented Dentophil Bouquet and founded a fortune of many million francs stupid?’

This could support the previously stated claim and immediately define capitalism to be something completely alienated from human romanticism and its aspects (such as music). And call it stupid, for the only argument it has to defy this is that he made money(and how..), a poor reason to confute stupidity. And it has no real value either, except in a capitalistic society and system.

When a conversation (Chapter 12) about which toad does or does not have a soul takes place. It is said that he does have a soul, just a damned one. Therefore, one could argue that we are indeed talking about an actual human being here, but he is suffering a great deal. Yet he does not forgive, because he considers it to be a Christian term. So, not even the dead are forgiven.

When he explains the semantics between love and despise. Despise comes from a great disappointment. Most people are incapable of great expectations, he claims. Therefore, he implies that he himself did have great expectations and these were shattered. He now despises the human race and punishes them only by their own hand, their own greed.

Just like God, he allows them to have free will. He simply hands them the options. No man or woman is forced to do anything he or she does not like. He just wants to see how right he is. When he sees he cannot prove himself wrong, he kills himself. Something he could not have done before, because he could not do it to his daughter. The latter might be a naïve approach, but saying she was (in some way) the only thing keeping him from giving his ‘Final Party’ is by no means a lie. His obsession with hate and discontent upon all human life is basically all the depth there is to him. An obsession cultivated by his pride.
He says nobody will ever be able to despise him. Except himself.

Give your own critical evaluation of this novel (and also of the way we studied it).

The length of this story is exceeded by its depth in my opinion which of course, is a good thing. You read less and you learn more. Yet, Greene does not seem to know what he’s trying to teach us. He hasn’t though himself anything yet. Nothing he can stand by. His personality and view on life is divided in the characters. The two main characters that is. Both Jones and Fischer are his point of view, or how he would like to see the world. He can’t give us a moral lesson because he does not know what the lesson is. He can only observe and try to engender conclusions. He is unable to teach us anything new, because the only dogmatism he can form is that ‘everybody wants something’.

You can’t put it any simpler than that, but you can’t complicate the matter. As soon as you go deeper into it or try to specify, one finds himself in the center of the ambiguity which marks Greene. The semantics of greed also come into play when one tries to form an actual, practical given from the book. Greed for money, death, love (God) and what about Anna-Luise? Was she greedy too? In my humble opinion, there is nothing in this book with actual (new) content.

Human nature was already known to me, as it is to most. As I have made quite clear before Greene does not know what he want. He does not know which point he wants to make. And content wise, he has made no real point at all. Except one, which has little or nothing to do with the story, but this line is a rather eloquent manifestation of an incrimination which I find myself to fully agree with:

Courage is sapped by day-to-day mind-dulling routine, and despair seems in the end to lose its point.

This does not only apply to courage, but to a lot of things. Other than that, it is my personal evaluation that the novel gives you no steadiness whatsoever. And therefore has little more than an entertaining value to me.