



Wattle & daub

By Brian Coughlan

A Study Guide for Students

Synopsis

Driven forward by an ear-twisting narrative force, the stories in this debut collection meld and stretch into new directions. Unsettlingly funny/bleak backgrounds inform *Wattle & daub* and introduce singular oddball characters to a coldly unconcerned world. Every page is mined with humor, sympathy, and blistering language that mark Brian Coughlan as a unique fabricator of short tales.

Why Include This Book in the Classroom?

Strange situations deliver a myriad of emotions to the reader, possibly all at once. *Wattle & daub* is a trip into the strange wasteland that is the human mind, making us question life as we know it.

Author Bio

Brian Coughlan lives in Galway, Ireland. *Wattle & daub* is his first collection of short stories.

Study Questions

Section 1: Content

1. The stories in *Wattle & daub* showcase the oddities of every day life. How do these stories relate to you and your daily life? Use a specific example from one story and compare it to your own life.
2. Coughlan created his characters to display disquiet and apprehension. Discuss the author's writing style and how it affects your reading of the pieces.
3. Not all of the stories are written from the same point of view. How does Brian Coughlan use point of view to connect these stories? Consider what role point of view plays in this collection.
4. In several of the stories, the characters do not have what may be considered human names. What is the purpose of this? Compared to a story with human names, did these stories make you feel differently? How so?
5. Several of the stories feature futuristic elements. Identify these stories. Compare and contrast how this futuristic world aligns with our own.

Writing Prompt: Write a one paragraph story from a first person point of view, then write the same story from a third person point of view. Which piece is more effective in its portrayal of the story?

Section 2: Imagery and Themes

1. While the characters differ between stories, they are connected through similar themes. What are the themes that connect these stories?

2. Insects are one common symbol in several of the stories. What do the insects symbolize? Pick one story and discuss how the insects affect you as a reader and how they affect the characters.

3. Discuss how light and dark work together throughout these stories (for example, the imagery of light and dark in "Prologue" and the impact it has on the story).

4. In these stories there are opposing themes, such as light and dark or humor and insanity. Choose one juxtaposition you see within the collection. Provide your own example of a juxtaposition and use it in a paragraph.

5. Religious imagery is found throughout the book. Compare and contrast the religious imagery in two of the stories.

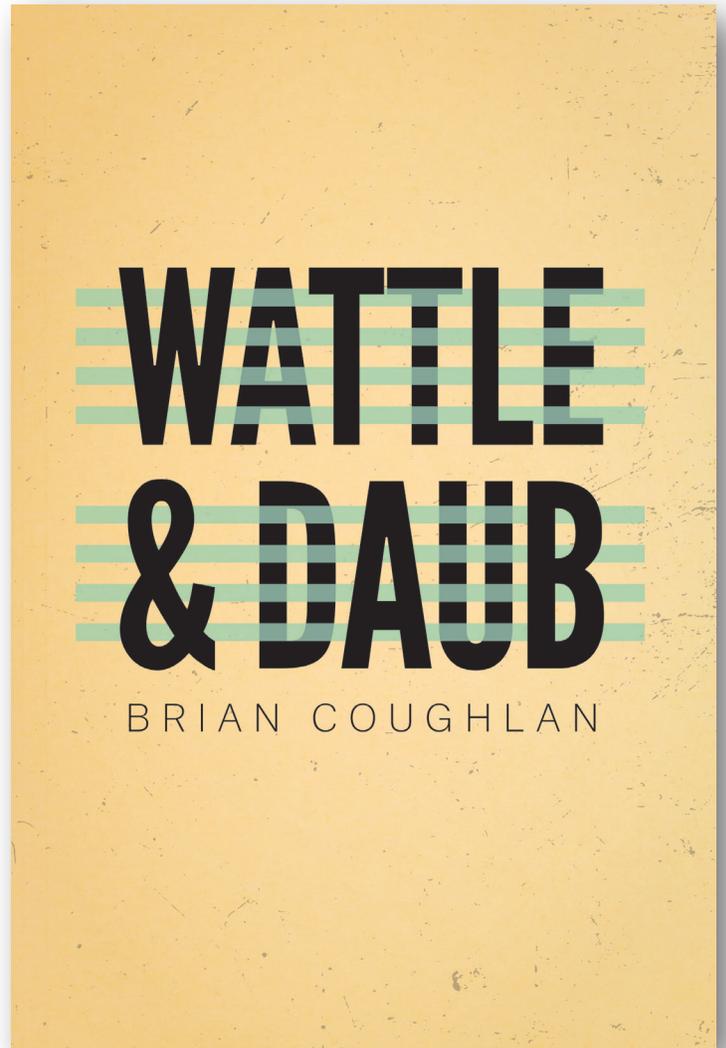
Writing Prompt: Write a 1-2 page short story about an every day occurrence that employs Coughlan's use of dark humor.

Section 3: Overall Thoughts

1. Which story resonated with you most? Why?

2. The author is from Galway, Ireland, and his local dialect comes through in some of the stories (such as bluebottle in "A Nuisance"). How does dialect impact the stories? Could you still easily relate to these stories, even though there is a regional difference?

3. How would you classify this collection? Horror, comedy, dystopian, romance, etc.? Discuss your reasoning for your answer and why Wattle & daub does not fit into the other genres.



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