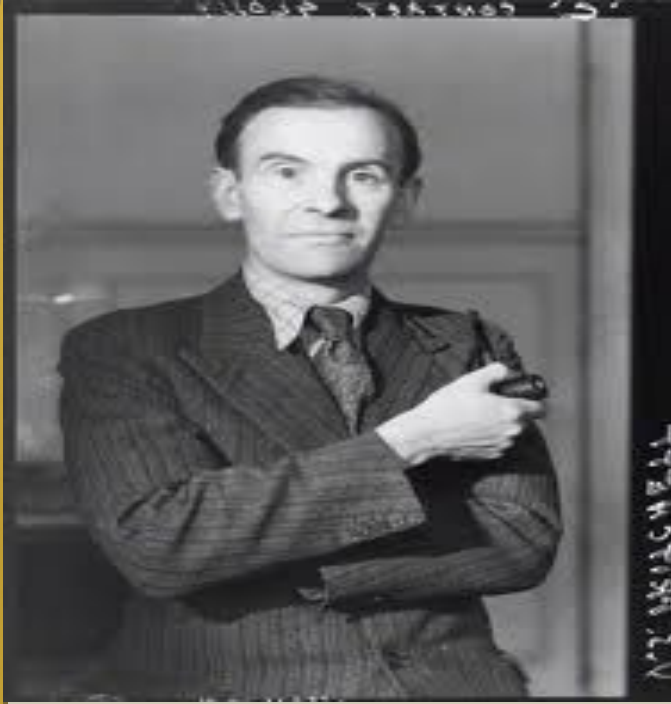




**“SIR VICTOR SAWDON  
PRITCHETT BIOGRAPHY”**

## SIR VICTOR SAWDON PRITCHETT



**Sir Victor Sawdon Pritchett** (16 December 1900 - 20 March 1997), was a British writer and critic. He was particularly known for his short stories, collected in a number of volumes. His most famous nonfiction works are the memoirs *A Cab at the Door* (1968) and *Midnight Oil* (1971), and his many collections of essays on literary biography and criticism.

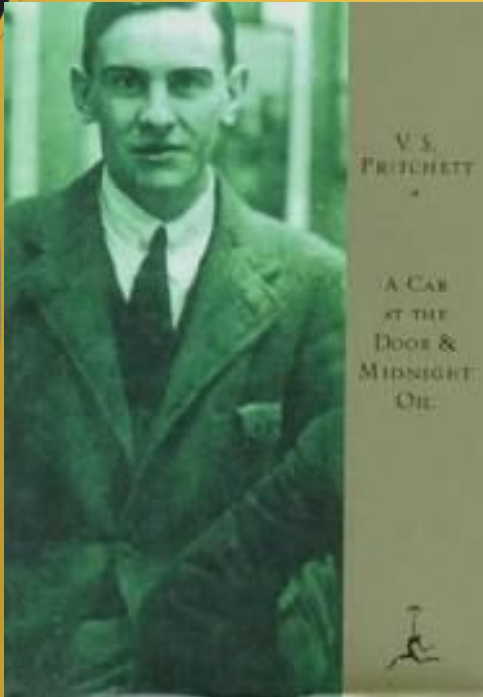


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*If I were to write an account of my education the city of Dublin would have to appear as one of my schoolmasters, a shabby, taunting, careless, half-laughing reactionary. His subject? History, of course. I did in fact have such an Irish master at my London school. His name was Callaghan; he glittered with mocking amusement during school prayers and was famous for his tempers, his personal disasters and his scorn. After reading something I had written, he delighted himself and our class by demonstrating to all of us, and with exact command of language, that I was raving mad. When I first came to Dublin, he was often in my mind.” (from Dublin, 1967)*

# BIOGRAPHY

Victor Sawdon Pritchett was born in [Ipswich](#), [Suffolk](#), the first of four children of Walter Sawdon Pritchett and Beatrice Helena (née Martin). His father, a London businessman in financial difficulties, had come to Ipswich to start a shop selling newspapers and stationery. The business was struggling and the couple was lodging over a toyshop at 41 St Nicholas Street where Pritchett was born on 16 December 1900. Beatrice had expected a girl, whom she planned to name after [the Queen](#). Pritchett never liked his first name, which is why he always styled himself with his initials; even close friends would call him VSP. Pritchett's father was a steady [Christian Scientist](#) and unsteady in all else. Walter and Beatrice had come to Ipswich to be near her sister who had married money and lived in Warrington Road. Within a year Walter was declared bankrupt, the family moved to [Woodford](#), [Essex](#), then to [Derby](#), and he began selling women's clothing and accessories as a travelling salesman. Pritchett was soon sent with his brother Cyril to live with their paternal grandparents in [Sedbergh](#), where the boys attended their first school. Walter's business failures, his casual attitude to credit, and his easy deceit,<sup>14</sup> obliged the family to move frequently. The family was reunited but life was always precarious; they tended to live in London suburbs with members of Beatrice's family. They returned to Ipswich in 1910, living for a year near Cauldwell Hall Road, trying to evade Walter's creditors. At this time Pritchett attended St. John's School.





Subsequently Pritchett attended [Allen's School, Dulwich](#), and [Dulwich College](#) but he stayed nowhere for very long. When his father went to fight in World War I, Pritchett left school. Later in the war Walter turned his hand to [aircraft design](#), of which he knew nothing, and his later ventures included art needlework, property speculation, and faith healing.

Pritchett was a leather buyer from 1916 to 1920, when he moved to [Paris](#), where he worked as a shop assistant. In 1923 he started writing for the [Christian Science Monitor](#), which sent him to [Ireland](#) and [Spain](#). From 1926 he wrote reviews for the paper and for the [New Statesman](#), which later appointed him literary editor.<sup>131</sup>

Pritchett's first book described his journey across Spain (*Marching Spain* 1928) and *Clare Drummer* (1929) was about his experiences in Ireland. Whilst in Ireland he met his first wife, Evelyn Vigors, but it was not to be a happy marriage.

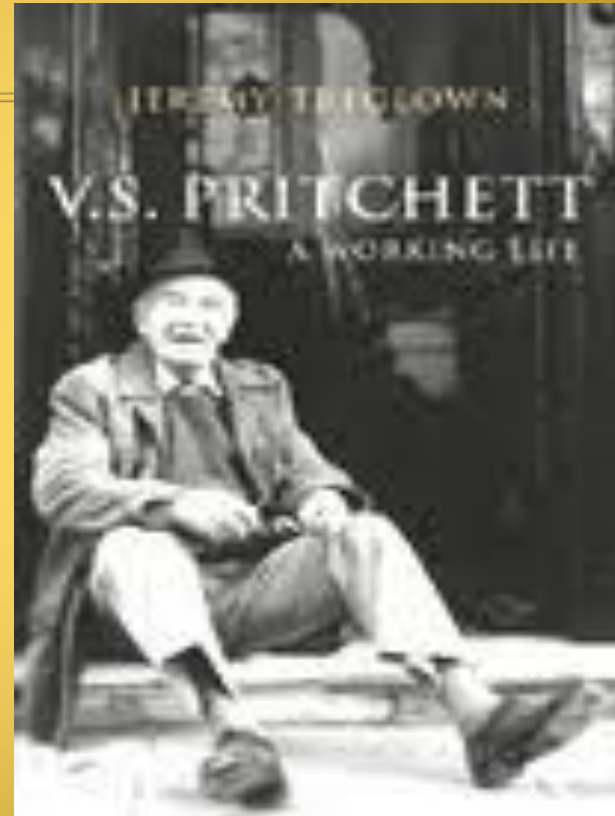
Pritchett published five novels but he claimed not to enjoy their creation. His reputation was established by a collection of short stories (*The Spanish Virgin and Other Stories*, 1932).

In 1936 he divorced his first wife and married Dorothy Rudge Roberts; they had two children. The marriage lasted until Pritchett's death in 1997, although they both had other relationships. His son is the journalist [Oliver Pritchett](#) and his grandson (son of Oliver) is the cartoonist [Matt Pritchett](#).

During [World War II](#), Pritchett worked for the [BBC](#) and the [Ministry of Information](#) while continuing to submit a weekly essay to the *New Statesman*. After the war he wrote widely and he started taking teaching positions at universities in the [United States](#): [Princeton](#) (1953), the [University of California](#) (1962), [Columbia University](#), and [Smith College](#). He was fluent in [German](#), [Spanish](#), and [French](#), and published successful biographies of [Honoré de Balzac](#) (1973), [Ivan Turgenev](#) (1977), and [Anton Chekhov](#) (1988), although he did not know [Russian](#) and had never visited the [Soviet Union](#).

Pritchett was [knighted](#) in 1975 for his services to literature and became [Companion of Honour](#) in 1993. His awards include [Heinemann Award](#) (1969), [PEN Award](#) (1974), [W.H. Smith Literary Award](#) (1990), and [Golden Pen Award](#) (1993). He died of a [stroke](#) in London on 20 March 1997.

Pritchett's short stories map the change of moral values, customs, speech, and details of everyday life of commonplace people in England from the 30's to the 90's. During the years Pritchett developed his own quiet style of expression. "... the writer of short stories has to catch our attention at once not only by the novelty of his people and scene but the distinctiveness of his voice, and to hold us by the ingenuity of his design..." (Pritchett in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Short Stories*, 1981) In his essays Pritchett showed interest in all kinds of subjects, from antiques to horticulture and the rag trade. He read for delight from Gibbon to Virginia Woolf, as one can find from *The Complete Collected Essays of V. S. Pritchett* (1991).



# HIS BOOKS





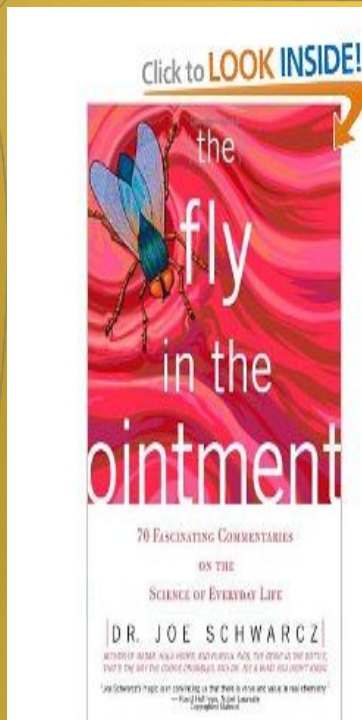
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# SELECTED WORKS

- ◆ *Marching Spain*, 1928
- ◆ *Clare Drummer*, 1929
- ◆ *The Spanish Virgin and Other Stories*, 1930
- ◆ *Shirley Sanz*, 1932
- ◆ *Nothing Like Leather*, 1935
- ◆ *Dead Man Leading*, 1937
- ◆ *ed.: This England*, 1938
- ◆ *You Make Your Own Life*, 1938
- ◆ *In My Good Books*, 1942
- ◆ *It May Never Happen*, 1945
- ◆ *ed.: Novels and Stories by Robert Louis Stevenson*, 1945
- ◆ *Build the Ships*, 1946
- ◆ *Dublin*, 1967
- ◆ *A Cab at the Door*, 1968
- ◆ *Blind Love*, 1969
- ◆ *George Meredith and English Comedy*, 1970
- ◆ *Midnight Oil*, 1971
- ◆ *Penguin Modern Stories*, 1971 (*with others*)
- ◆ *Balzac*, 1973
- ◆ *The Camberwell Beauty*, 1974
- ◆ *The Gentle Barbarian: the Life and Work of Turgenev*, 1977
- ◆ *Selected Stories*, 1978

# THE FLY IN THE OINTMENT” (1932) V.S.PRITCHETT



the relationship between the father and the son has not been well the past few years...but when the father becomes bankrupt his soft side is shown....Harold comes to visit his father and to help him.. when the father sees his son he becomes modest to him ' lowering his blue eyes for a seconds modesty..' he becomes shy in front of the son.. the son notices that the father has two sides ' like all other big faced businessmen his father has two faces..' this was noticed by the son for the first time! the father changes his attitude as soon as the son says ' you always were an optimist..' and he becomes aggressive and explains to him that he is 65 and does not know how long he'll live but he wants to make it clear to the son that he has ' worked hard to make business out of nothing..' ' he used to sleep in the office to get to the job early..' then suddenly he becomes happy and the ' big face overflows the little one..' he then begins to criticize his son's bald head and touches the pride of his son.. 'come in professor. this was an old family joke..' ' i would lecture the whole world- think big..' the son then tries to defend himself and says ' you've thought big till you bust..' to this the father replies, painting his real expressions and says, ' all 'big' business men get bankrupt..' , ' and the small ones feel proud to get bankrupt with the big ones, it makes him feel rich..' later the father accepts his mistakes that the lust for money is a curse and that ' money is my trouble.....i shall not see another penny as long as i live..' the son then wants to make an offer of money to him but he feels that his father would be ashamed as he had always made fun of his son and had neglected his family and always ran after money but in the end the money is no help but the son is still loyal to his father and wishes to help him. the father is not true to the son and hides his true feelings, ' i am not worrying. things are fine. i KNOW they are..' this tells us that the two were not close to each other and that the relationship although improves during the mid story but becomes the same at the end as his father's lust for money returns and the son further feels embarrassed.



## THE FLY IN THE OINTMENT" (1932) V.S. PRITCHETT

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1. "Fly in the ointment" is an idiomatic expression which means what?
2. Describe each of the main characters briefly. Who are they in relation to each other? What adjectives describe them the best?
3. Why is Harold estranged from his father?
4. Why does Harold's father need consoling?
5. Father says a lust for money is a curse – do you think he truly believes this? Why/why not?
6. Do you think it's possible to live the simple, happy, contented life without money that Father is describing? Do you think it's possible for Father? Can you think of anyone else who can?
7. Father can't kill the fly. What could this failure mean, figuratively?
8. Father feels old and like his search for money has been a waste of his life. Why does he begin to regret like this? Do you think he is being sincere? Why/why not?