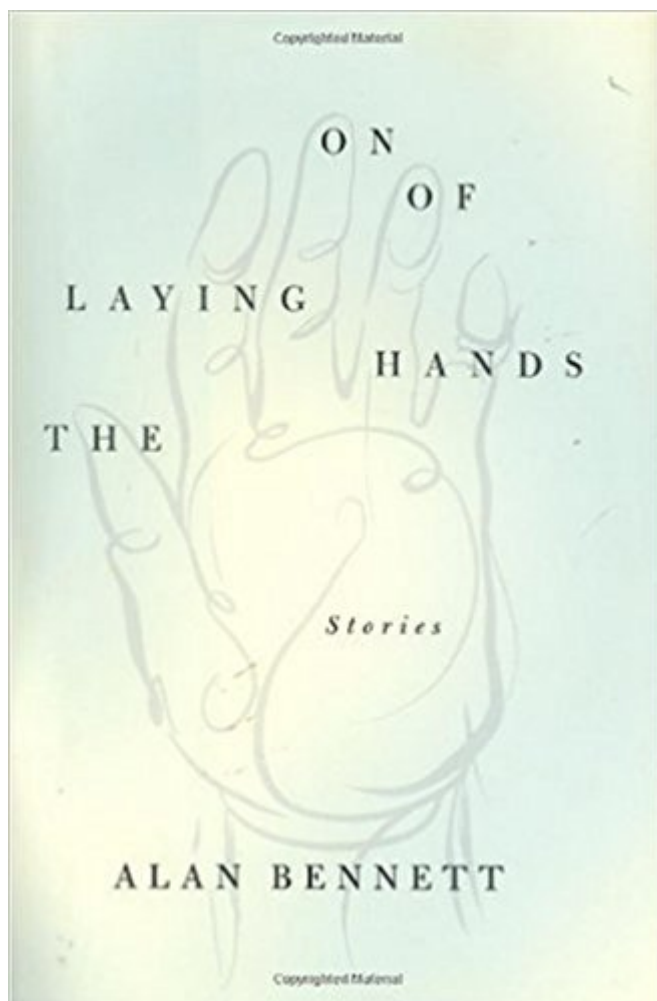


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# The Laying On Of Hands: Stories



## Synopsis

Three stories in one volume from one of Britain's most admired authors and playwrights. *The Laying On of Hands* is Bennett at his inimitable best in this funny, and mischievous satire about a society memorial service for a rather special masseur who has died at a tragically young age in Peru. In "Father! Father! Burning Bright" Bennett writes with tragicomic insight about a son's vigil at his father's deathbed where their lifelong battle continues to the end. With his pared down and deceptively simple prose style Bennett unflinchingly describes the random thoughts and haphazard conversations of the family members waiting in the hospital as they face life and death. In "Miss Fozzard Finds Her Feet" a podiatrist shows a lonely, unmarried department store clerk that there's more to life than looking after her brother. Part of the award winning and critically acclaimed Talking Heads series, "Miss Fozzard Finds Her Feet" was described in the New York Times as both "touching" and "hilarious."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

With his actor's ear for dialogue, his dead-on pacing, and his talent for social comedy, British playwright Alan Bennett (*The Madness of King George*) is hardly lacking in literary gifts. The three stories in *The Laying On of Hands*, two of which have been filmed by the BBC, are funny in different ways. The title piece is a slow-to-ripen satire set at the Anglican funeral service of a handsome young masseur, whose clients turn out to include cabinet ministers, soap opera stars, and the presiding clergyman. The second story, "Miss Fozzard Finds Her Feet," describes the odd

relationship a pure-minded middle-aged woman develops with her charming chiropodist (podiatrist). And the final story, "Father! Father! Burning Bright," follows a mousy schoolteacher named Midgley through the self-searching and nurse-hunting days preceding his father's death in Intensive Care. The range and subtle coloration of Bennett's humor will appeal, especially, to readers of Robertson Davies and Muriel Spark. --Regina Marler

Bennett hits the mark in the title novella of this brief collection, which also features a second, shorter novella as well as a single short story. The funeral of a masseur who serviced British celebrities in a variety of ways becomes the setting for a cheeky comedy of manners in the title yarn, as a young gay priest fails his first big test when he lets the final testimonials turn into an outrageous debate over whether the masseur died of AIDS or contracted an obscure disease while traveling in South America. The punch line falls flat in the second effort, "Miss Fozzard Finds Her Feet," when a woman finds a mutual outlet for her unusual sexual fetish in her ongoing appointments with her podiatrist. The final novella, "Father! Father! Burning Bright," gets off to a murky start as a married, middle-aged schoolteacher struggles to sort through his mixed emotions when a stroke leaves his father at death's door, but the ending, involving the teacher's strange attraction to his father's comely nurse, closes the narrative with a nice satiric twist. Bennett's multileveled approach makes the title story work, as he slowly layers his conceit with observations on the celebrity scene in Britain and the priest's recollections of his romantic interaction with the deceased. Unfortunately, the quality of craft drops significantly in the other two efforts, with the second novella in particular focusing more on manners than comedy. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

I found this work by Alan Bennett to be inviting however with so many possibilities for twists and trysts falling short of perfect. There were many places that the story could have gone especially near the conclusion I had hoped one or two might materialize. Witty, fun as ever, and clever, but for me a bit tame in the end. Perhaps after reading "The Uncommon Reader" with its twists and turns I expected more at the finish. All in all a very good read.

bought on the advice of a friend. Guess we don't have the same sense of humor.

The title story of Alan Bennett's "The Laying on of Hands," a novella that takes up half the book of three stories, demonstrates the playwright's sparkling versatility as a writer. Anyone who has seen or read Bennett's recent Tony-award-winning play, "The History Boys," will appreciate the more subtle

humor of "The Laying on of Hands," the focus of which is a memorial service for a highly attractive, skillful, and young (dead at age 34) masseur conducted by a High Anglican priest who, like most of those attending the service, has enjoyed the virile masseur's services, albeit without the knowledge of the others. Among the attendees is wide selection of mourners, including many of England's wealthy and famous, male and female, a "version of England," as it were. Add a self-righteous Archdeacon, there to report on the conduct of Father Geoffrey Jolliffe, who is conducting the service, and you have the ingredients for a smart, subversive dark comedy revolving around the question of "What did he die of?" To supply the answer would spoil the story. Read it and enjoy it; then read and see the movie version, available on DVD, of "The History Boys" if you haven't already. Wrestling With Angels: A Tale of Two BrothersÂ Bare RootsÂ Loud Whisper

I was very pleased with this collection of short stories. Alan Bennett is a delightful and thoughtful writer who pushes the limits of cultural comfort levels with his writing. Although I wasn't quite as enamored with these stories as I have been in the past with "History Boys" and "The Uncommon Reader," I was far from disappointed. If you are already a Bennett fan in search of new material I highly recommend picking this up. If you are new to Bennett and looking for an introduction to his work I highly recommend putting this one on your shelf... but read it \*after\* "The Uncommon Reader."

Good entertaining read

The unique and uncomfortable position of every Minister at every funeral as they just have a way of twisting and turning in the most unexpected directions. As always, sensitive and incredibly deftly nuanced. I'm not sure the author was certain how or where to end it but as always, a delightful offering from Mr Bennett.

Alan Bennett, as always, reveals his depth of understanding of human nature, especially human weakness in The Laying of Hands. His observations are so acute that the reader will wriggle with embarrassment and astonishment and possibly hope never to meet the author with the oh so perceptive eye.

Disappointing. Couldn't relate to the characters and found the story too far fetched.

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