

The Children of Men Study Guide

The Children of Men by P. D. James

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Plot Summary

The Children of Men is a dystopian novel, set in a less-than-ideal world of mass infertility. In this setting the reader follows Dr Theodore Faron, a doctor of philosophy and a historian of the Victorian age at Oxford University. Theo leads a solitary life. Even when he was married he was not close to his wife or his daughter. When he joins a group of vigilantes who are standing up to his cousin, the Warden of England, Theo learns how to be passionate, for good or for bad.

The year is 2021 and the human species is dying out because men are infertile. The world has sunk into a depression. In Britain, the masses are appeased by the Warden, Xan Lyppiatt, who maintains the workings of a functional society in a doomed civilization.

Theo is approached by a group of dissidents. They believe Xan is a dictator. They want Theo to approach Xan and the Council with their demands before they launch their revolution. Theo agrees, as he is drawn to one member, Julian. As Theo expects, Xan will not meet the demands, which include shutting down the penal colony where convicted criminals are sent, putting an end to the organized suicide of the elderly and dependent, and holding an election. When Theo tells the group, who have called themselves the Five Fishes, they decide to move ahead with their revolution, which involves distributing political pamphlets and destroying wharves where the mass suicides are held.

Theo is confused about his feelings for Julian and is spooked by a visit from the State Security Police. He decides to travel around Europe for a number of months. On his return, he finds the revolution has continued in his absence. After a couple of weeks, Miriam arrives to ask him for help after one of them is arrested. Theo agrees, motivated by his feelings for Julian.

Theo finds out that Julian is pregnant. They are on the run from the SSP: Luke, a priest, Miriam, a former mid-wife, and Rolf, Julian's husband. Theo dislikes Rolf because of his relationship with Julian and his hunger for power. The feeling is mutual. Rolf ends up betraying the group to the Warden after Luke is bashed to death by the Omega and it is revealed he was the father of the unborn baby.

Miriam, Theo, and Julian must find a safe place for the birthing. Theo takes the women to woodland near Oxford. They set up camp in a woodshed where Miriam delivers the baby. When Miriam goes to fetch water she is garroted, presumably by Xan.

Xan and Theo have their final face-off outside the woodshed. They shoot at each other but Xan misses, while Theo hits his cousin in the heart. Theo takes the Coronation Ring from his dead cousin's finger and places it on his own. He shows the baby to the Council. In his new emotional state of being, he has found both love and power.



Book One, Chapter 1

Book One, Chapter 1 Summary

Dr Theodore Faron fills the first pages of his diary on the occasion of his fiftieth birthday, which is also New Year's Day in 2021. Through his diary he introduces himself as a doctor of philosophy and a historian of the Victorian age. He is divorced and childless. He is also the cousin of Xan Lyppiatt, the Warden of England, which is a position that has replaced the Prime Minister.

Humankind has lost the ability to procreate and, in his diary, Theo, as he is called, recounts a news bulletin he has just heard about the death of the last human being whose birth was officially recorded. Joseph Ricardo died at the age of twenty-five years, two months, and twelve days in a pub brawl in Buenos Aires. His death appears to be of little significance, being noted by a couple of sentences tacked onto the end of the bulletin. His birth in 1995, however, was a distinction that countries across the world wanted to claim.

The year 1995 is known as the Year Omega. This was the last year in which children were born. A slump in the number of births leading up to this time was put down to more liberal attitudes towards birth control and abortion, as well as women postponing pregnancy for their career. There was also a correlating fall in population due to the spread of AIDS, particularly in Africa. The result was seen as a positive solution to overpopulation and the resulting issues such as pollution.

When the lack of fertility was recognized, countries came together under the United Nations to solve the problem. However, as the years passed, this teamwork dissolved and was replaced by individual research efforts by each nation in a race to find a cure that may or may not be shared with the rest of the world.

Those born in 1995 are known as the Omega. Theo states that no other generation has been under as much scrutiny or has been as indulged as the Omega. It was not until they reached sexual maturity in 2008 that extinction of humankind became likelihood. Like their elders, not one of the Omega could produce fertile sperm. This revelation increased the rate of suicide, mainly around those of childbearing age. In England, Xan imposed a fine on the closest surviving relatives to stop the epidemic. At the time Theo writes in his diary, suicide is encouraged amongst the elderly as they become incapacitated and dependent. Their relatives are given pensions.

A flood of depression and illness has spread throughout the world. Any interest in sex has dissipated. Xan has attempted to combat the general feeling of malaise with state-funded porn shops, massage centers, and golf.

Book One, Chapter 1 Analysis

The main character Theo has his roots in philosophy and history, two areas that serve to balance and conflict him. He is philosophical about the end of the human species, but at the same time is depressed by the end of recorded history. He claims his diary is a philosophical tool, as opposed to a historical one. He plans to destroy it on his deathbed, rather than leave it behind for an alien species. This shows a lack of ego; however, this is misleading. As the story evolves and Theo connects with his emotions, he discovers a hunger for power. For example, when robbing an elderly couple, Theo admits to being excited by the power. He later chooses a gun over Julian. And, in the ultimate culmination of his narcissism, Theo takes the Coronation Ring from his dead cousin's finger in the final chapter and places it on his own, effectively naming himself the Warden of England. Power is a main theme of this novel.



Book One, Chapter 2

Book One, Chapter 2 Summary

Theo recounts in his diary his childhood with Xan. Their mothers were sisters; however, Theo's mother was a middle-grade civil servant, while his aunt married a baronet, Sir George Lyppiatt. While Theo was raised in a semi-detached Victorian house in Richmond Park, Xan lived in a manor house in Dorset, called Woolcombe, where Theo spent his summers after his father died of stomach cancer.

There is a rivalry between the sisters, which is also hinted at between the cousins. For example, Theo's mother gave him an unfashionable name so that Xan was not the only child to be named after forefathers. In addition, an overheard conversation between their grandparents questioned whether Theo might go further in life than Xan. Theo was a good student and reasonably popular, whereas Xan was inconsistent with his schoolwork and had no other companions over the summer. The pair were linked by birth. Theo says they were companions, but not, as suggested by journalists in later years, like brothers.

A close moment between Theo and Xan was when Theo realized a battle had been fought on the bridge at Woolcombe during the civil war. Five young Cavaliers had been killed. The teenage cousins went to the bridge on the anniversary, threw petals into the river, shot their guns in salute, and drank to their memory.

When Xan became Warden of England, he appointed Theo as an advisor-observer of Council meetings. Years later, their mothers died together at Woolcombe.

Book One, Chapter 2 Analysis

Like their mothers, Xan and Theo do not acknowledge their similarities until death approaches. The sisters died together at Woolcombe, united in their old age. Whereas, the similarities between Xan and Theo results in a stand-off in the final chapter, when Xan is killed. They share a hunger for power, which means one must die.

In this chapter Theo speaks of learning to shoot at Woolcombe and being surprised that he is a better shot than his cousin. This foreshadows the final battle between the rivals, when they shoot at each other at the same time, with Xan's bullet missing Theo and Theo's bullet hitting his cousin in the heart. The conversation between their grandparents foreshadows this event.

In this chapter a servant at Woolcombe, with no apparent role, is described. Theo is surprised at the manner in which Xan speaks to this person. It is revealed much later that Xan's father was homosexual and this servant was his lover. It shatters the perfect image of Xan's life and shows a similarity between the cousins in their relationships with their fathers. Both felt distanced from them.



Their afternoon on the bridge stays with them into adulthood. It is referred to later, when they discuss being the last two men on earth and what they would do. It is the one thing that reached them on an emotional level. Theo described it as an afternoon without guilt, which both are haunted by throughout their lives.



Book One, Chapter 3

Book One, Chapter 3 Summary

In this diary entry, Theo describes his love for Woolcombe. He is not sure that Xan ever felt that way about his home.

Theo literally grew up at Woolcombe, as he spent every summer through to college there. He always stayed in the same bedroom, right next to Xan's. He can imagine a succession of himself through the years pushing open the door and entering the room with Lyppiatt family quilts and a four-poster bed.

The Baronet bought Theo a bicycle so the boys could ride together. Theo says it was kind, but unnecessary, as he could have brought his own. Xan tells him that he doesn't have to ride it if he does not want to. He says nothing is compulsory at Woolcombe, except for unhappiness. Theo could never imagine anyone being unhappy at Woolcombe.

In later years, Woolcombe becomes a nursing home for a privileged few. Theo dreams that one day he may be able to return to his bedroom there and die as an old man. When he thinks of all the grand structures that will be left behind once the human species dies out, he is most affected by Woolcombe. He imagines it falling apart and his room there decaying.

Book One, Chapter 3 Analysis

Woolcombe is symbolic of Theo's life. He basically grew up there and has a desire to die there as well. The place brought Xan and Theo together in a way they could not maintain in the adult world. Likewise, it ended their mother's rivalry, as they spent their final years there together.

When he first visited Woolcombe, Theo imagined he was being put in the servant's quarters, tainted by his mother's rivalry with her sister. As it was, his room was next to Xan's and they shared a bathroom. This shows that his relationship with Xan was tainted from the beginning, which foreshadows their willingness to kill each other in the final chapter. When Theo imagines watching Woolcombe decay, it is symbolic of the way his relationship with Xan decayed, and in the bigger picture, the way the human species will.



Book One, Chapter 4

Book One, Chapter 4 Summary

Theo recalls his mother's artistic endeavors. She would replicate prints and sell them to antique shops. He realizes in later years that this was how she afforded school trips, cricket bats, and extra books for him. Theo saw the happiness this hobby afforded his mother and wanted to contribute. He would hunt down prints for her, pay for the cheap ones, and steal the expensive ones. His mother never guessed or questioned his methods of procurement. He believed this service could erase the guilt of not loving her.

Theo has always felt responsible for other people's happiness. He traces this back to the death of his father in 1983. At the funeral he was told he was the man of the house and would have to look after his mother. He hated the thought of such a responsibility, but took it on in any case.

He never saw himself as an easy child to love. He had not been close to his father, who he remembers better for the cancer than for anything else. It was an illness that was never described or explained to him. All he knew was that his father was sick. When the doctor visited he was sent to his room. Sometimes he would come home from school to be told that his father was in the hospital. Keeping his father's illness from him had the opposite affect of protecting him. It gave him a feeling of dread, and the feeling that when the inevitable menace descended it would be his fault.

The result is that he remembers his father as the cancer, rather than as a man. His main memory of his father has become a reoccurring nightmare for him. His father had cut his left index finger on a tin a few weeks before his death and his mother had bandaged it. It became infected and pus seeped through the gauze. He would sit at the table at dinner, ignoring his wounded appendage, or regarding it with slight surprise. In reoccurring nightmare, his father stands at the end of his bed pointing an oozing stub at him. He wishes his father had left him a different memory.

Book One, Chapter 4 Analysis

The fact that Theo steals for his mother's happiness foreshadows his theft of an elderly couple's car for Julian's happiness. That he feels responsible for other people's happiness is also referred to when he sees his ex-wife and her new husband in a later chapter. He is relieved that he no longer has to make her happy. Theo sees himself as incapable of making people happy. The scene where his mother is crying about the death of her husband and laments her luck shows that Theo feels he never truly made her happy. He could not make his wife happy, which was compounded when he accidentally killed their daughter. Then, when Theo steals from the elderly couple to help Julian, he becomes responsible for the death of the elderly woman.

As a result of the cancer, which spanned three years before his father died, Theo never felt close to him. He does not know whether this was due to the pain his father was experiencing, or whether he did not want his son to grow too attached to him. Either way, Theo is under the impression that he was not an easy child to love. This lack of love continued into adulthood and contributes to his inability to express his feelings.



Book One, Chapter 5

Book One, Chapter 5 Summary

Theo recounts the death of his daughter Natalie, aged fifteen months, in 1994. He was on his way to college from his home in Lathbury Road. He was backing the car out of the driveway when he ran over a soft bump, which turned out to be his daughter.

He has omitted the inquest from his memory, but is sure one of the findings would have been that he left the front door open. He can't remember whether he was supposed to be keeping an eye on Natalie, or whether she was supposed to be with Helena, his wife. What he does remember is the sensation that came over him five seconds before hearing his wife begin to scream, which was a horrible knowing sensation. He recalls his neighbor's angry face at the car window, yelling at him to get out of the car. He can remember thinking to himself that he knew his neighbor never liked him.

His marriage began to dissolve. They moved closer to the city, which Helena said should make Theo happy. It was a thinly veiled statement that the death of their daughter had made it possible.

When Omega arrived, there was no chance to try for another child. They began to sleep in separate rooms. Occasionally he would cross the hallway for sexual relief, but emotionally they were never connected. In February of 2020, Helena left Theo for Rupert Clavering, a poster and dust-jacket designer.

Theo still lives in the house they shared, a five-story, narrow Gregorian house. It would have seemed exorbitant for one person had there not been such a drop in population and subsequently in the housing demand. The interior of his house makes it clear who lives there; a man who lives alone, a historian, an academic.

Book One, Chapter 5 Analysis

Theo is unable to take responsibility for the death of his daughter Natalie. Even though he constantly says he killed her, he puts blame away from himself. He claims he cannot remember who was supposed to be watching Natalie. He mentions that the car that he backed over her with had been clumsily parked by Helena. He even says the house had been too large and expensive, as an extra attack on his wife. This takes part of the blame away from himself and onto her. To take responsibility for her death would be to add an emotional maturity to him, which he does not possess until the end of the novel. Even then it is questionable.

The reader also gains a third party perspective, when Theo tells of his wife's reaction to him. He says she believed he loved Natalie less. He could not argue with that. He feels she feels he might have liked her more if she was prettier or more affectionate or

quieter. This adds to the idea that Theo is unable to love unconditionally. Love is a major theme of this novel.



Book One, Chapter 6

Book One, Chapter 6 Summary

This chapter moves into third person, telling how Theo sees his diary as a task, not a pleasure. His life is full, but he embraces Xan's idea of having people undertake two weekly training sessions in skills that would help them survive when the population had greatly died out. It is not compulsory, but Theo undertakes two jobs, one at the John Radcliffe Hospital and one doing house maintenance.

It is explained that his full time job is teaching at the university, where the students are either mature-aged or a few former undergraduates who are doing research or taking higher degrees. It is the latter that Theo sees as justifying the university's existence. Theo is submersed as much as he can be in the university culture. He dines twice a week in the Hall, then on Wednesdays he attends the three o'clock service of Evensong in Magdalen Chapel. This is not to partake in what he sees as an archaic act of worship, but to listen to the choir.

On the way to the church he passes a woman with a doll in a pram. They are the only type of children's toys still to be made, because there was a craze where women would play act that the dolls were real children. The craze had passed, but this woman parades her doll proudly. Theo is repulsed. A second woman approaches and appears to admire the doll. Then she pulls the doll from the pram and swings it into a wall, shattering it. Theo is horrified by the doll owner's reaction; a primal wail of sheer pain and desperation. He hesitates before continuing on. He states that women who had reached their childbearing years in the year of Omega were notoriously unstable.

At the church he spots a woman in the congregation, who he picks as having attended a classes he substituted as a teacher for one of his fellow professors. She had been very outspoken. The class had been much less tiresome as a result, and Theo had been disappointed when she did not reappear the following week. After the church service the woman seeks him out. She is described as being quite attractive, Pre-Raphaelite. But her left hand is grossly disfigured. This means she is not part of the clinical tests women undergo for fertility checks, as Xan is not interested in breeding from what he considers bad genes.

Her name is Julian and she is part of a group of renegades. She wants Theo to speak to Xan on their behalf before they begin their uprising. They see a number of things that are currently happening in Britain under the Warden as wrong and want to stop them. Theo is most reluctant, but he decides to meet with the group the following Sunday, mainly to save Julian the humiliation of going back to her cause emptyhanded, when it was clear that approaching him was her idea.

Book One, Chapter 6 Analysis

This chapter introduces the key character, Julian. The fact that Theo notices her in a university class as an outspoken participant establishes her as someone who is about more than babies, unlike others her age. This is appealing, following Theo's description of the women who fawn over dolls, as though they are real babies.

It is therefore ironic that it is Julian who will have the first baby of the new generation. It is also ironic as this chapter tells that she has a deformed hand. The deformed are not desired as procreators and are therefore not tested for fertility.



Book One, Chapter 7

Book One, Chapter 7 Summary

Jasper Palmer-Smith asks Theo to visit him. He is a retired professor, who used to teach Theo and considered him a favorite pupil, even if Theo was not sure if he felt this way about Jasper.

Theo travels out to his country home, which he shares with his wife Hilda, who is incapacitated by old age. Theo is surprised to see the once stately Don looking as though he had aged ten years since he last saw him six weeks prior. His wife too, normally dressed impeccably, has congealed food on the front of her cardigan.

Jasper speaks of feeling isolated and is considering moving back to Oxford. He puts forward the idea of converting part of Theo's house into a flat, but Theo is repulsed by the idea. He enjoys his independence. Because he does not want to offend Jasper, he does not give an answer either way. He suggests Jasper get Sojourners, who are Omegas brought in from other countries, to perform menial tasks. But Jasper despises the idea of strangers in his home.

Jasper brings up the Quietus; a mass voluntary suicide for the elderly. He asks Theo what he thinks of it and Theo answers that he is not into gregarious death. Jasper mildly defends the Quietus, saying that Hilda had been talking about it. Theo does not imagine this is true, as Jasper's wife had been a strong minded academic in her day, who he is sure would find such a ritual repulsive.

On his way home, Theo spots a large queue for tickets to see an Evangelist called Rosie McClure. He says that after the year of Omega, it became popular for Evangelists to proclaim what was happening as punishment from a wrathful god, following centuries of sinful behavior. Such preaching quickly became unpopular, due to the depression already felt in the communities. Rosie teaches a new popular form of religion, which uses the Beatles song All You Need is Love as a jingle. Even mainstream churches have followed suit, throwing away the age-old doctrines of guilt. The Church of England has even replaced the sign of the cross with a golden orb, which represents the sun.

Book One, Chapter 7 Analysis

This is where the Quietus is introduced properly. The concept of someone that Theo knows going to the Quietus is unpleasant for him. He feels strongly against it. This foreshadows one of the main reasons why Theo joins the Five Fishes, aside from his infatuation with Julian, because he witnesses Hilda unwillingly taking part in one.

This chapter also introduces the idea of religion moving beyond the old book and into a more evangelist era. This foreshadows the introduction of Luke as a priest of the old religion. This is symbolic of his being an outcast and further cements his position in the

Five Fishes before the reader discovers he is the father of the baby, because he is not in step with society.



Book One, Chapter 8

Book One, Chapter 8 Summary

Theo sets off to St Margaret's Church in Binsey to keep his word to Julian. His main reason for keeping his word is because he does not want them finding him and harassing him again. He wants to nip it in the bud.

As he moves into the countryside, he walks along dilapidated and overgrown paths, which no one is bothering to maintain anymore. More and more people are moving into the urban centers, craving company and the knowledge that power and services will be supplied there for as long as possible, as promised by Xan.

Theo has been to the church before, because he used to take his morning walks through Binsey. He is surprised to see the house next to the church is still lived in, although it is run down. Out of the house comes the priest, who is reluctant for Theo to visit the church. He tells him there is a christening at eleven o'clock and he must be gone by that time.

Four people, plus Julian, are in the church. They have broken away from each other, as though in the middle of an argument, or seeking solitude. The group includes Luke, a priest; Rolf, Julian's husband; Miriam, a former midwife; and Gascoigne, who is the youngest of the group. Their cover for meeting is that they are the Cranmer Club who studies the old Book of Common Prayer. They are aware that this cover would not fool the State Security Police.

There are a number of demands the group has, including Xan holding a general election, not using the name Grenadiers for his private army, stopping semen testing and gynecological examinations which they see as degrading, as well as getting rid of the Quietus, the Sojourners, and the Isle of Man, which is where criminals are sent to instead of jail.

To win over Theo, Miriam tells of her brother, who robbed an Omega on the street and pushed her. He was sent to the Isle of Man. He managed to escape, which was unheard of. He came to see his sister and she was shocked by the change in him. That night he had the worst nightmares she had witnessed. He spoke of the horrors of a place where criminals were a law unto themselves. In the morning, the State Security Police came and arrested him. Miriam was sent his ashes a week later with a typed note that said he had been killed while trying to escape.

Theo is bothered by her story; enough to agree to go and see a Quietus for himself before he makes up his mind. He says he will leave them a note stating yes or no at the Cast Museum in Pusey Lane. He hopes it will be NO.

As he leaves the church he is disgusted to see the christening party arriving. In lieu of babies, two kittens are dressed in christening gowns.



Book One, Chapter 8 Analysis

In this chapter, Theo meets the Five Fishes. His first impression of Rolf is correct; Rolf is a man not at peace with himself. It is clear that Rolf has to be the leader, as he interrupts everyone when they talk.

His refusal to shake hands with Theo is ironic. It is clear he sees Theo as a threat to his leadership; however, it is Luke who ends up taking his position of power away from him later in the novel with the revelation that he is the father of the unborn baby, not Rolf. Theo sees Rolf's ambition to be the Warden. This is confirmed in a later conversation. This foreshadows his desertion of the group and betrayal to the Warden, as Rolf is in it for himself and not for the greater good.

Book One, Chapter 9

Book One, Chapter 9 Summary

Theo heads to Blythburgh for the Quietus. It has been twenty-eight years since he was there with Helena and a six-month-old Natalie. The memories are not happy. Natalie had been restless and Helena wanted to stop at an inn, where she could heat the milk. Theo had seen that the car park was crowded and he did not want Helena and Natalie being difficult and drawing attention to them. He shudders now to think how he put the comfort of strangers above that of his wife and child.

He stops at the same inn, alone, to have lunch. The car park is now deserted. The publican pours him a beer and heats him up the only food now on the menu, meat pies. After lunch, he continues to the north beach. He wants to have a coffee at the Swan, where he once stayed with his wife and daughter, but it is shut out of respect for the Quietus.

Theo arrives at the beach, where three coaches have pulled up. From them emerge bandsmen, and then elderly people and nurses. The old women change into long white dresses in the beach huts. Theo resents the intrusion in a place where families used to be happy. Then they line up with bouquets of flowers, like bridesmaids. The band plays songs that seem unfitting for the occasion, such as *Bye, Bye Birdie*, *Somebody Stole My Girl*, and *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*. The old women twirl and dance, which makes Theo think they may have been drugged. They are led onto boats, which are then pushed out into the ocean.

Theo starts to leave, thinking he's seen the Quietus. He feels that, while it was disturbing, he would not help the Five Fishes. As he begins to leave, a commotion begins. A woman being helped onto the boat begins to struggle and pulls away from her nurse. She then jumps from the jetty into the water. Theo instinctively runs to the water to rescue her. As he gets closer to the wailing woman whose clothes have been torn from her body, he realizes it is Hilda Palmer-Smith. As he reaches her, a soldier from the jetty jumps into the water and hits her in the head with the butt of his pistol. She struggles and he hits her a second time. Theo tries to help her, but the soldier hits him as well. He falls semi-conscious into the water. He feels someone drag him to shore and leave him on the beach.

That night he stays at a bed and breakfast. It has not been frequented in awhile. The owner had been looking for a sign from God as to whether to give up and move into the city. She saw Theo as a sign that she should stay. In conversation, he asks her about the Quietus. She denies that there are any in Southwold.



Book One, Chapter 9 Analysis

The Quietus that is witnessed in this chapter is a turning point for Theo. He has managed to distance himself from everyone and everything so far, but now he is drawn in as he witnesses the brutal treatment of Jasper's wife. He even puts himself on the line by trying to save her. There is no turning back for the protagonist now.

This chapter also adds to one's understanding of Theo's relationship with his wife and daughter. It affords a view into a softer side of Theo; a genuine regret. This is important, because while Theo is a cold character, he cannot alienate the audience. He admits he treated his family unfairly. He yearns to have a happy memory of his daughter. In an attempt to make it up to them, he stops at a pub he would not previously let them stop at. He also wants to relive their vacation by visiting the hotel they previously stayed in.



Book One, Chapter 10

Book One, Chapter 10 Summary

Theo has decided he will help Julian. He writes the word YES on a piece of card and leaves it under the head of Diadoumenos at the Cast Museum.

It was Xan who introduced him to the Cast Museum. Their tastes differed. Xan preferred the early classical male statues, with their rigid and unemotional faces. Theo preferred the Hellenistic statues, with their flowing lines. It was also in the Cast Museum that Theo found solace following the death of his daughter and his move to St. John Street. It was mostly empty, but occasionally a school group would come through. Now only the attendant is there. He is an elderly scholar, asleep.

When the attendant wakes, he regards Theo with fear. Theo recognizes him as Digby Yule, a retired classics Don from Merton. Digby retains his fear, even after Theo wishes him well. He tells Theo that he is doing very well and that he is not a burden to his landlady or to anyone. Theo wonders whether Digby is worried he will alert the State Security Police that he was an elderly man ready for the Quietus. He can plainly see that Digby is not looking after himself properly, with a clean yet unironed shirt being one of a few telltale signs.

Theo imagines for a moment that he might suggest Digby come live with him, the way Jasper wants to. But he doesn't, both for fear of offending him and because he does not want to share his personal space. He thinks it would be fitting if Digby could work at the museum until he dies and become another relic of the past.

Book One, Chapter 10 Analysis

The opening line in this chapter foreshadows the commitment that Theo makes by agreeing to meet with Xan. It is a meeting that turns into a commitment to the Five Fishes, where he ends up on the run with them. Eventually, he shoots his cousin and effectively becomes Warden of England.

It is ironic that this decision is made at the Cast Museum, as it emotionally connects him to Julian. This is ironic because it is the same place he used to go to distance himself from the loss of his daughter and his wife. It is also a place that Xan introduced him to. They both liked separate sections, showing the slight difference in their personalities. But it is ironic that it is where Theo begins the downfall of his cousin.



Book One, Chapter 11

Book One, Chapter 11 Summary

Theo arranges a meeting with Xan. Xan sends a car and driver, despite Theo preferring to drive to London himself. When the car arrives Theo, is disappointed the driver is not his old driver, George. He finds out that George died in a car accident. Theo is suspicious, but thinks it better to say nothing.

On the way, Theo contemplates his time as advisor to Xan. He describes the four members of the Council as: Martin Woolvington, who is in charge of Industry and Production; Harriet Marwood, who is in charge of Health, Science and Recreation; Felicia Rankin, who is responsible for Home Affairs; and Carl Inglebach, who is the Minister for Justice and State Security. Theo says the delegation of responsibility was more about dividing workload than giving power. The decisions were generally made together in the council meetings. Theo had no power, only the power to influence, which he did not see as a good substitute.

Theo is nervous about how Xan will receive him, but sees no point in rehearsing the interview. He says while they did not part badly, what Theo had done was inexcusable. Xan was used to getting what he wanted. He wanted Theo at his side and he had defected three years ago.

Book One, Chapter 11 Analysis

This chapter shows the power that Xan has.

Theo talks about his previous driver, which would have provided a sense of comfort and familiarity in this new world he has entered into, where he is doing something for others with nothing in return. It is implied that Xan had his previous driver killed. He also has the king under house-arrest.

Theo sees flagellants, who beat themselves for the sin of mankind, in the park on his way to see Xan. He complains to the driver that he thought it had been made illegal. Their conversation shows that while Theo is not heavily religious, he still believes in God. This foreshadows when he performs the funeral rites for the priest Luke and where he christens the new baby with a mixture of blood and tears in the final lines of the book.



Book One, Chapter 12

Book One, Chapter 12 Summary

Theo arrives at the old Foreign and Commonwealth building that overlooks St. James's Park. This is where both the Council meets and Xan lives. Xan rejected Ten Downing Street as a place of residence and lives in an apartment upstairs in what Theo calls ordered and comfortable simplicity, which can only be enjoyed when one has money and staff.

When Theo is led by a Grenadier into the building, up a staircase, and into the meeting room, he is shocked to be faced by the entire Council. He had been under the impression that it would be a private meeting. Theo is also shocked to see that Xan is wearing the Coronation Ring, which is the wedding ring of England, reserved for royalty. Xan notices his displeasure and says it was Harriet's idea. He says he knows Theo is thinking that there was a time when he would have refused to wear it. In return, Theo says there would have been a time when he wouldn't have felt the need to wear it.

After a snide comment from Felicia that Theo's absence had not been noticed by the Council, Theo decides to get to the point. He expresses his disgust with the Quietus. He is told by Felicia that the Quietus in question had been mismanaged and appropriate action had been taken.

Xan says that when his time for death has come, he wants to take his lethal capsule in solitude in his bed at home. He does not see the point in the Quietus, but Felicia is keen on them. Felicia gives an explanation that the Quietus began unofficially when twenty eighty-year-olds took their lives by jumping off a cliff together. Felicia says that is messy and unsatisfactory. Now the government organizes for people to die together and they have to sign three forms to agree to take part.

Theo moves onto the Man Penal Settlement. Xan wants to know how Theo knows about the murders, the starvation, and the breakdown of law and order. Felicia says Theo was at the meeting when they discussed setting up the settlement and did not object. Theo asserts that he assumed the settlement would be properly run and policed. Felicia says that no one wants to police it. The old system in the 90s with jails and wardens did not work. There were drunken hooligans, dangerous children, and there was a rise in sexual and violent crime. Women were afraid to walk the street. Expensive burglar alarms were the norm. Xan says the old system was not without profit. He says Felicia, an ex-lawyer, profited from getting criminals both convicted and overturned.

Theo moves on the renegade's complaint about the Sojourners, who are treated like slaves. Woolvington is not in support of unrestricted immigration, but Theo points out that there is no shortage of resources or jobs or houses in an under populated world.



Carl, who is regarded by Theo as the brains of the council, speaks up. He says that the Council has a structure that works. In an age when the human race is dying and the wish to indulge and overspend is rife, the Council has managed to maintain low inflation and keep people in jobs, as well as maintain law and order. Carl says the few issues of the Isle of Man and the Quietus etc. are a small price to pay.

Theo believes that making a few small changes would not jeopardize what had been achieved. Xan says Theo's comments would hold more weight if he had not abandoned the Council. The Council then stands and leaves, and Theo is escorted out by a Grenadier.

Book One, Chapter 12 Analysis

Theo shows great distaste at the Coronation Ring that Xan wears. This is ironic, when one considers Julian's distaste at the end of the novel when Theo puts on the ring to assume the authority of Xan following his death.

The fact that Carl is described as being close to death in this chapter is important, because he is the only real threat as a successor to Xan. This paves the way for Theo to take the place of Xan when he is gone.



Book One, Chapter 13

Book One, Chapter 13 Summary

Theo is about to get into the car after the meeting with Xan and the Council when Xan appears at his side. He wants to walk through the park. He tells Theo that there is a limit to how much protection he can offer him and the people he is mixing with.

Theo asks Xan why he does the job of Warden of England. Xan says he originally liked the power, and then when that wore off he just felt he was the best for the job. The only other person suitable would be Carl, who is dying. He also knows that were he to give up power he would be bored with life.

Xan tries to find out who Theo has been consorting with, who it is that has sent him to the Council. Theo lies and says it is no one in particular. Xan questions whether it is students and suggests he might have to close down the university.

They talk about semen testing and the porn centers, which Theo is also against. Xan says that as long as it is viable, they will continue to test healthy males. They do not have any interest in testing those with criminal records or disabilities, although Xan says they would use the semen of one if it was proven to reproduce. They would have to breed out the bad genes, though. Xan also says the porn centers need to stay, because people need to keep interest in copulation.

During their conversation they speak of Woolcombe and Xan's mother and father. Xan reveals that his father was gay. His lover lived as a servant at Woolcombe. They were in the car together when it crashed, which Xan managed to hush it up. He said he didn't care, but the baronet would have. He also said he was angry about it when he was younger, but as he grew up he thought why shouldn't his father have lived the life he wanted to?

Xan wants to know what Theo would do if they were the last two people on earth. Theo answers that he would like them to drink and do a roll call of names, such as Leonardo da Vinci, and Shakespeare. Then they should shoot themselves.

Xan says the season should be mid-summer, the wine claret, and the place the bridge at Woolcombe, like when they commemorated the civil war as teenagers.

Finally, Xan tells Theo to warn whomever he is conspiring with that he is not a tyrant, but he cannot afford to be merciful. Theo sees a plea in his eyes for understanding.



Book One, Chapter 13 Analysis

This is a bonding moment for Xan and Theo. It creates more complexity for the final scene, as it shows that Xan is not a complete villain and that the pair could get along as adults as well as they did in their youth.

Xan also says that he cannot afford to be merciful. Theo recollects this later and realizes that Xan will come looking for the Five Fishes himself. He also realizes that Xan will kill him if need be. The plea for understanding that he gives Theo is for his cousin to understand that he will betray him if he pushes him too far.



Book One, Chapter 14

Book One, Chapter 14 Summary

Theo goes back to the museum to meet Julian and give her the news of his meeting with Xan. He warns that there is nothing the group can do unless they want to get themselves killed or sent to the Isle of Man.

Julian wonders whether being sent to the Isle of Man would be such a bad thing. She wonders whether a group of people would be able to instate some form of law and order.

Theo is contemptuous. He wonders whether Julian wants to be a martyr and if so, to what purpose. It is only worthwhile if one's name is remembered, and with the human race dying out that is not going to happen. The other reason could be that Julian craves the feeling of power that would come with subduing the criminals on the Isle of Man. Theo tells her to let it go. He says as time goes on, people will get older and crime will automatically decrease. The need for the Isle of Man and the ferociousness of the criminals will be no more.

Julian thanks Theo for his help and goes to leave, but Theo warns her that her group has no resources to launch a revolution. He says they do not even have shared motivation. Miriam is doing it to avenge her brother; Gascoigne because he is unhappy with the use of the word Grenadiers; Luke out of a vague Christian idealism; and Rolf out of ambition. He tells Julian she is doing it for Rolf and she should leave him. Julian says she is doing it because God wants her to. She thanks him again for trying and leaves.

Theo is glad she had not asked him not to betray her, because he does not believe he could withstand torture. It surprises him that he believes Xan is capable of torture. He has been judging him on their past together. He wonders whether it is him, not Julian who needs a history lesson.

Book One, Chapter 14 Analysis

This chapter shows how much Theo is beginning to care about Julian. He is offended that she sees him solely as a messenger when he goes to the museum to report on his meeting with Xan. He is also angry that she is controlled by Rolf, as he sees it. He warns her that the Warden suspects he was sent by someone. He is worried for her safety.

Julian is the first person to make him distrust his cousin. She is the first person to make him feel so strongly about something that he could consider it evil. This shows his emotions are beginning to be stirred.



Book One, Chapter 15

Book One, Chapter 15 Summary

Two weeks after saying goodbye to Julian, Theo finds a notice in his mail. It is from a group called the Five Fishes, who are urging the people of Britain to demand of the Warden of England a general election, full civil rights for Sojourners, and an end to the Quietus, the Isle of Man, and semen testing and the examination of women.

He feels the demands would not worry Xan too much, although he does think that if the SSP wants to track down the group they could do it very easily. He wonders whether he would have had the opportunity to influence any of the changes when he worked for Xan, but concludes he had in reality been powerless.

He feels their struggle is pointless and without posterity. He is angered that they place their beliefs upon others. He tears up the piece of paper and flushes it down the toilet. As he watches them disappear, he cannot help but regret not having the same kind of passion their fellowship shares.

Book One, Chapter 15 Analysis

Theo is struggling internally when he sees that the Five Fishes are putting their plan into action. He is filled with pity at their powerless and what he feels is their stupidity. By the same token, he is envious of their connection and their passion for their cause. Like the rest of the human race, Theo is looking for passion in his life.



Book One, Chapter 16

Book One, Chapter 16 Summary

Theo is invited by his ex-wife to see their cat's kittens. He is part owner of Mathilda, but decided not to go through the humiliation of a custody battle for a cat as so many do in the absence of kids in a divorce. He had received a postcard five days earlier to say they had arrived safely.

He had not been invited to the birthing party, which is a ritual where a group of around six people gather to witness the miracle of birth. Once giving birth, a cat must be sterilized and one female may be kept from the litter for breeding. Alternatively, Mathilda would be allowed one more litter and all but a male kitten would be humanely destroyed.

The day of his invitation is a year exactly since his wife left him. He wonders whether she and Rupert are in the small minority who enjoy a sex life. He also wonders whether Helena has criticized him to Rupert. He imagines she has, because he says there is some vulgarity beneath her preened exterior.

Theo wonders why he married her originally. He believes it was because he found her attractive and thought they had been on the same intellectual level. He convinced himself that if it wasn't love, it was as close as he would get. He says these days marriage is about not facing the inevitable decline and decay alone. People still fall in love. Often marriage is between the same sexes.

Theo surveys the home his ex-wife and her new lover share. He sees Rupert's artwork on the wall and imagines that was Helena's idea. They have afternoon tea. Rupert reveals the pamphlet, which Theo had flushed down the toilet. Theo pretends not to have seen it before.

Theo asks whether they took the pamphlet seriously. Rupert says he and Helena wondered whether they should alert the council when they called about the kittens, but decided against it. They were worried they may be seen to support it. Helena particularly has a problem with the idea of closing the penal colony. Theo imagines this is because the idea of violence and crime infringes on her cozy home. He argues briefly with Helena about the pros and cons of closing the Isle of Man.

When he leaves he realizes he is happy for his ex-wife, because she is content. He also realizes he is no longer responsible for her happiness. He witnesses a moment of tenderness between Helena and Rupert; the holding of hands. He feels envy and regret; not for what he sees, but for what he never achieved.



Book One, Chapter 16 Analysis

In this chapter, Theo receives a third party perspective on the leaflet by the Five Fishes. He realizes that the group may be capable of causing unrest after all. He also realizes that people are scared of free speech, something which would make an academic such as Theo unhappy.

When Theo visits his ex-wife Helena, there is an envy of her new relationship. This is not because he wants her back; rather, it is because he wants what they have. When he sees Helena and Rupert holding hands he is both envious and regretful. He has never been capable of such affection. This foreshadows his emotional achievement when he is holding hands with Julian as she gives birth.



Book One, Chapter 17

Book One, Chapter 17 Summary

Theo has been visited by two members of the State Security Police. His place is not searched and his diary not found.

Theo learns from Chief Inspector George Rawlings that there have been a few guerilla attacks by the Five Fishes, which the media has not reported. Their activities have included the ramps being blown up at the last two Quietus, and political pamphlets being distributed in the Sojourners camps, even though it is illegal for them to receive political material.

Theo assures the Chief Inspector that if he knew of a plot against the Warden, who is both his cousin and friend, he would tell Xan. It is play-acting and they both know it.

Book One, Chapter 17 Analysis

When Theo went to visit the Council, Xan was aware that he was speaking on behalf of others. Chief Inspector George Rawlings is trying to ascertain from Theo who these people are. He mentions that his niece attended one of his talks at Oxford University and that he found the name of the talk to be odd.

When Theo says that he did not name it, the Chief Inspector says he thought Theo would have named his own talks. Theo knows the Chief Inspector is aware he had been doing the talk for a friend, like he was doing when he went to see Xan. Here the Chief Inspector is alluding to Theo speaking on behalf of the Five Fishes and questioning whether he has a vested interest when he speaks for others.



Book One, Chapter 18

Book One, Chapter 18 Summary

Theo becomes concerned as he recounts the State Security Police visit in his diary. He believes he did not take it seriously enough. He imagines he might be under threat and that the State Security Police might already have the Five Fishes. The Chief Inspector could have been testing him. If the Five Fishes have not already been caught, Theo imagines he should warn them. However, he does not know how to get a message to them. He has no address, no telephone number, not even their full names. He has no choice but to wait and see what happens.

Book One, Chapter 18 Analysis

In this chapter it is clear that Theo's involvement with the Five Fishes has become dangerous and he can no longer view them as a ragtag group of dissidents.

The fear is upon Theo. He wonders whether the Five Fishes have already been caught, whether Julian has been caught. The fact that Theo wants to warn the group that the State Security Police are looking for them shows he is emotionally invested in them, whether it is because of their cause or because Julian, or both. It also shows that it is nearly time for him to make a decision.

Like all heroes who embark on a journey, it is the journey that calls them. For this reason, the author has made it that Theo has to wait until the Five Fishes come to him. This foreshadows the next step in the hero's journey, where Theo refuses the first call and travels overseas.



Book One, Chapter 19

Book One, Chapter 19 Summary

Theo runs into Julian at the market. He is filled with a romantic desire to buy her flowers and carry her bags. He warns her about the State Security Police. She tells him she is not concerned, but seems tired and older than when they last met. Theo tells her that if she ever needs help she knows where he lives.

He contemplates whether he is falling in love with Julian. He decides he should go traveling to clear his mind and distance himself. Those under sixty-five cannot travel freely, but Theo has the benefit of being the Warden's cousin.

Book One, Chapter 19 Analysis

Theo has been distanced from other people throughout this novel; however, in this chapter, he first speaks aloud what is becoming obvious. He is falling in love with Julian. He is head over heels to the point where he is transfixed when he spots her at the markets. He then has to fight the urge buy her flowers. He even offers to carry her bag, which is a traditional romantic gesture. She refuses.

This chapter is also where Theo tells Julian that all she needs to do is ask and he will help. This foreshadows a huge commitment on his part that leads to him being on the run with a pregnant Julian. However, at this point, Theo still has a long way to go in his journey towards emotional enlightenment. To distance himself and refuse the hero's journey before he fully embarks on it, he decides he will go traveling.



Book Two, Chapter 20

Book Two, Chapter 20 Summary

Theo returns home six months later, on the last day of September. He has been exploring Europe.

He phones Helena to find out whether anything has happened while he has been gone. She tells him nothing has been happening. Then she says there have been a few wharves blown up at Quietus and there are rumors in the media that dissidents are planning to free the convicts on the Isle of Man. She wants him off the phone, because she is expecting a call from the vet, as Mathilda is listless and off her food.

Theo begins to have nightmares again; however, instead of them being about his father they replicate the death of his daughter. Instead of killing Natalie, in his dream he has killed Julian.

Theo walks to St. Margaret's Church in the hope that he might see Julian. When he gets there he sees undertakers carrying away the priest in a coffin. The church is deserted and signs of a black mass are evident.

Book Two, Chapter 20 Analysis

Theo returns from his trip to a place that has not changed but seems to teeter on the brink of it. Theo is no longer used to the empty life he once had. Before he left it was starting to get full. He does not want to go back to his empty life and therefore has already accepted the journey that is coming his way.

The nightmares are symbolic, as they are usually about his father, whom Theo regrets not being close to. His father has been replaced by Julian, who he now wants to be close to. The fact that he is killing her shows that Theo cannot have emotion free from guilt yet.

In his search for the Five Fishes, Theo returns to the church where they met and finds the old priest had died. He admits this is symbolic of an impending doom and the change that is coming in his life.



Book Two, Chapter 21

Book Two, Chapter 21 Summary

Theo is making dinner one night when Miriam arrives on his doorstep. Julian has sent her to ask for his help. The State Security Police have Gascoigne. He was arrested two hours earlier when he was attempting to blow up another landing stage at a Quietus. It is only a matter of time before they get information out of him. Rolf, Julian, and Luke are waiting outside Swinbrook. They have Rolf's car, but the State Security Police will be looking for it. They need Theo and his car, as well as more supplies.

Theo agrees. He and Miriam drive to meet the others. On the way there, Miriam confides in Theo that Julian is pregnant. Theo does not believe it. Women have mistakenly thought they were pregnant for years, even going into a mock labor.

They meet the others at St. Oswald's Chapel. Theo has been there before with Xan and it makes him nervous that the Warden knows it. When they arrive, Theo is able to see the truth, that Julian is pregnant. He feels the baby kick.

Even though Gascoigne does not know about the baby, Theo wants Julian to hand herself over to the Warden. He wants her to have her baby in a hospital, but Julian wants to give birth away from the limelight. Rolf does not want the Warden to announce his child to the world. Theo imagines this is another example of Rolf being power hungry.

Book Two, Chapter 21 Analysis

The call to the journey arrives when Miriam knocks on his door. Theo does not even hesitate, which confirms he has already committed himself to the cause. The newfound passion spills over in negative ways as well though, as he resists the ideas of the Five Fishes. His motivation is in helping Julian, but he is slowly coming to the party on their cause.

The fact that Theo is in the middle of preparing a meal in a meticulous fashion, in an exact routine, shows that he leaves behind what has really been a bland life for him. He has no desire to eat the meal, but does it anyway, because there is nothing else to enjoy. This is like his discussion in the first chapter that he does not enjoy the national pastime of golf. It is a pleasant game, but Theo obviously needs more excitement. This shows similarities again with Xan, as in this chapter he recounts a conversation with his cousin who said he wanted to join the army because he didn't want to be bored.

When Theo first sees the pregnant Julian he kneels at her feet and presses his ear against her stomach. He wishes they could be alone. This shows he reveres her. It is however, a love/hate relationship, as he scolds her beliefs and later he even sees her

as grotesque. It also shows the overwhelming sensation of hope for the doomed human species. Hope is a main theme of this novel.



Book Two, Chapter 22

Book Two, Chapter 22 Summary

The plan is to drive over the border and into Wales where there is less support for the Warden. Theo and Rolf have an argument over who is going to drive. Rolf says it is clear that Theo thinks he is better than them.

Theo is worried the State Security Police will now be looking for his car. He wants to stop at Jasper's and borrow his car. They can also get supplies for the birth there. For this reason he insists he and Miriam are the ones to go. When they get to Jasper's house, Theo finds his old professor has shot himself dead. He has left a note, half is a Latin quotation about death, the other half is an apology for the mess and letting whoever finds him know there is still one bullet in the gun.

Theo takes the gun. He and Miriam decide not to tell Rolf or Julian that he has it.

Book Two, Chapter 22 Analysis

Rolf and Theo's relationship has not improved. The extra tension between them in this chapter foreshadows that Theo will be taking Rolf's place at Julian's side later in the novel. Rolf accuses him of thinking he is better than him, because he sees him as a threat. By the end of this chapter, Theo is already concealing a weapon, which it is suggested later that he use to prevent Rolf from abandoning and betraying them.

Jasper's death confirms for Theo that he has made the right decision in helping with the revolution. This is not a world that Theo wants to live in, and ultimately Theo is undergoing his own death.



Book Two, Chapter 23

Book Two, Chapter 23 Summary

On a rest stop the group emerges from the car to stretch their legs. Rolf wants to speak with Theo alone. He wants to make sure that Theo does not think he is the leader of the expedition. Rolf confesses that he would like to replace the Warden once it is revealed that he has fathered a child. He imagines his sperm will be sought after.

Rolf also admits that he has no intention of making the changes requested by the Five Fishes if he becomes Warden. He wants to be popular and he believes making the changes will work against this.

Theo raises a previously unspoken fear. What if the child is deformed? Theo then realizes it is something Rolf is worried about. He feels a moment of sympathy for Rolf. It is enough to stop him from adding that Rolf may be luckier if the child is deformed. Otherwise, Theo believes Xan will see Rolf as a threat and would kill him once they had stored his sperm.

Book Two, Chapter 23 Analysis

The fact that Rolf believes there cannot be two leaders foreshadows that he will leave the group. His position of power is dictated only by the fact that he is the father of the unborn baby. It is so precarious that he imagines Theo could steal that power from him. As it stands, it is Luke who does this when he is revealed as the real father of the unborn baby after his death. This idea of there not being two leaders also foreshadows the death of Xan, because at the end of the novel it is either Theo or him.

When Theo puts a damper on Rolf's master plan to become Warden by suggesting the child may be deformed, Rolf insists on taking over driving. This shows that he cannot handle criticism and needs to reassert himself as the person of power. This is why he leaves after he finds out the unborn baby is not his, because the only way for him to regain power is to change sides.



Book Two, Chapter 24

Book Two, Chapter 24 Summary

Rolf has taken over the driving. He is driving recklessly. Miriam tells him to stop before he harms the unborn baby. He slows abruptly and ends up with a front wheel puncture. They decide to take the car off the road to fix it. When they do they find a gate that leads into a paddock.

The battery of the torch dies when they are trying to change the wheel. They will have to stay camped in the clump of trees in the paddock overnight. Theo expects Rolf to be angry, but he accepts their situation.

Book Two, Chapter 24 Analysis

This chapter shows two sides to Rolf. His anger causes them to get a flat tire, but when they realize they are stuck for the night he is diplomatic. He says they may as well eat and get some rest if they cannot go on that night. This foreshadows the day that follows when Theo appreciates that Rolf may be a natural leader after all.



Book Two, Chapter 25

Book Two, Chapter 25 Summary

Theo wakes uncomfortably the next morning. Everyone else is up. Rolf informs him that Julian and Luke and having mass a little ways away. Theo goes to check on them. He sees that they won't be long. Rolf says they never are. Luke does not go to the extent of preaching a sermon. Theo is angry that Julian has wandered from the group.

Rolf and Theo discuss their beliefs, which are non-existent on both sides. Rolf believes that the Warden is the real devil. He asks Theo what religion the Warden practices, but Theo says they never discussed religion.

Book Two, Chapter 25 Analysis

The private mass between Julian and Luke foreshadows the revelation that he is the father of her baby. Rolf does not feel threatened by Luke, which is ironic, because it turns out that Luke had an affair with his wife. Theo observes that Rolf seems to treat Luke like a child, which is again ironic, because of the power Luke holds over Rolf even in death when it is discovered he is the father of the unborn baby.

There is a meeting of minds between Theo and Rolf on the subject of religion, as in they are both atheists. Theo tries to distance himself from Rolf by deciding that Rolf has retained some religious superstitions. However, Theo has also retained some of religious superstitions, as he can remember the rites as he watches the mass, and at the end of the novel he marks the baby's head with the sign of the cross.



Book Two, Chapter 26

Book Two, Chapter 26 Summary

Theo writes in his diary, which he has carried with him on the journey. He writes of an idealistic setting, where they are spending the day lazing around waiting for nightfall. He watches Rolf take pride in meticulously cleaning the car. Luke looks after the stores. Julian and Miriam enjoy listening to Theo read Emma aloud to them, which was in the car.

At the end of the day they discover there was another torch in the car after all. Theo is glad they did not locate it the night before. He believes they needed this day. He feels closer to the others in the group. He is amazed that he can be at ease and committed to people he does not know anything about; their families, their friends, their last names. He also admits aloud that he may be falling in love with Julian.

Book Two, Chapter 26 Analysis

Just as Theo says they needed this day, so too does the reader. This bonding moment between the members of the group drives home the later horror of Luke's death and Rolf's betrayal.

When Rolf delegates a job to Luke, Theo acknowledges that Rolf may make a good leader. This makes Rolf a more dynamic character as he can be viewed as someone who wants to lead because he feels he is good at it, as opposed to someone who wants to lead because he is power hungry.



Book Two, Chapter 27

Book Two, Chapter 27 Summary

They have been on the road for a number of hours. Theo is starting to gain hope that the State Security Police might actually not be looking for them: after all, Gascoigne did not know about the baby.

They are forced to stop when they see a tree fallen across the road. It takes Theo a moment to realize it could not have fallen so conveniently as to block their way. Suddenly a gang of Omegas are upon them. They have painted faces and carry various bludgeoning weapons.

The group makes an escape plan for Julian. Rolf is to sneak her away over a high wall and the rest are to distract the Omegas. They are to join in their tribal dancing. Theo hopes they will at least be able to save Julian, if not themselves. At the best, the Omegas may only want to burn the car. Then the Omegas smash into the car. Julian and Rolf join the dance with the others, before making a run for the wall. They are almost there when the Omegas spot them and run for Julian. Luke steps to save her and he is attacked. They beat him unmercifully until he is dead.

When the Omegas drive away the car and set fire to it, Theo and Rolf go back for Luke's body, at the insistence of Julian. She is devastated. Rolf asks her whose child it is. She admits that Luke is the father of her unborn child. Rolf is furious and storms away. When he returns he is calm. He says they will need to find another car in the morning.

Book Two, Chapter 27 Analysis

The Omega are revered as the last generation of the human species. The birth of a new child would jeopardize this status. Although the Omega are not aware that Julian is pregnant, their attack on the group is symbolic of this threat. It also adds support to their cause, as the attack is symbolic of a world that needs saving, as the Omega represent a lack of fertility and the subsequent decline of civilization.

When Luke dies to rescue Julian, it is a very religious symbol. Julian's words that he died to save her have connotations of Jesus Christ dying on the cross for the sins of mankind. The fact that he is the father of her child means Julian is Mary Magdalen, the prostitute who wept for Jesus. This is fitting, as Julian is a flawed woman, as she has had an affair.

The fact that Rolf is angry and then unnaturally calm shows that the reader is in the eye of the storm. The storm comes when Rolf leaves the group a day later to betray them to the Warden.



Book Two, Chapter 28

Book Two, Chapter 28 Summary

Rolf is already up when Theo gets up in the morning. He tells them it is not a large forest. They will have to find a car and leave as soon as it is dark. He also tells them there is a ditch where Luke can be buried. Rolf does not help to move the body. Miriam and Theo carry it through the copse. Theo performs a small service, reciting a psalm and committal from Luke's prayer book.

Everyone except for Rolf eats berries. Theo wonders whether Rolf had already eaten when he was up earlier this morning. Rolf says he is going to get some more rest before they have to leave.

Book Two, Chapter 28 Analysis

Rolf is beginning to distance himself from the Five Fishes. He is up before them. He barely takes part in Luke's funeral. He goes to bed before them. It is hardly surprising that he is gone in the morning before they wake up.

In this chapter, Theo performs the funeral. Like when he watched Luke and Julian having mass, he remembers the familiar words. It is fitting that he now joins with Julian in her religion, in the absence of Luke. However, as Julian throws dirt onto Luke, Theo is repulsed by her squatting figure. It retains some of his old personality, where he is unable to completely and unconditionally love. The opposite happens in the final chapter, when he removes the bloody towel from beneath her without disgust.



Book Two, Chapter 29

Book Two, Chapter 29 Summary

Rolf is gone by the time they wake up in the early evening. Theo knows Rolf has gone to see Xan, because he craves power and will go wherever he can get it. Theo imagines they have around five hours, because Rolf will want to go right into London and see the Warden personally. Theo does not believe that he would trust the information with anyone else.

Theo says he could have kept him with the gun. Miriam explains to Julian about the weapon. Julian begs him to dispose of the gun, but Theo refuses. Theo decides they will have to get moving, but no longer to Wales. He imagines they can go southeast to the Forest of Dean.

Book Two, Chapter 29 Analysis

Theo is on his own with Miriam and Julian. He is now their protector and takes on his role willingly. This demonstrates his growth of character when considering his statement early in the novel that he has never wanted anyone to look to him for protection or love.

It is clear when Theo refuses to get rid of the gun that he has not completed his growth. He chooses the cold hard metal over the touch of Julian's body. The gun also represents the hunger for power that Theo has not acknowledged. It is fitting that Theo uses this gun to kill Xan, as he has forged an attachment to it.



Book Two, Chapter 30

Book Two, Chapter 30 Summary

Theo needs to get a new car, because the Omega burnt their old car. He walks an hour to a village. He can see an elderly couple watching television through the window of a house. He knocks on the door and pulls the gun on them.

Once inside he tells them he needs food, water, and a car. The woman is petrified and shaking. He then makes them tear up their bed sheets so that he can bind them. Once bound, he asks if there is anything they need. The woman requests water. He helps her drink some. Then he has to release first the woman and then the man so they can go to the bathroom. He checks with them that someone will come looking for them. They have a housekeeper come each morning. He takes what he needs, including their car, and leaves.

He clings to the hope that if they can outrun the Warden long enough, other babies will be born and the baby will no longer be unique. He admits he cannot see beyond the birth of the baby, however, as their plan to be on the run only extends until then.

Book Two, Chapter 30 Analysis

This chapter takes the reader back to when Theo used to steal for his mother's happiness. Now he is stealing a car from an elderly couple for Julian. This is proven by his guilt about taking their coats, which look brand new. However, he reasons that Julian will need them and that is justification enough for him.

A struggle between good and evil is evident in this chapter as Theo moves between sympathy and anger towards the elderly couple. Later, when he finds out the elderly lady died, he admits that stealing from the elderly couple gave him a sense of power.

Theo also admits that he cannot see beyond the birth of the baby, and has no need to. This foreshadows that as soon as they stop running to have the baby they will be caught by Xan.



Book Two, Chapter 31

Book Two, Chapter 31 Summary

Theo picks up Miriam and Julian in the Citizen that he has stolen from the elderly couple. He has made a decision that they will double back to Wychwood Forest, which is closer to Oxford and London. He does not have very much petrol and he does not believe that Xan would expect him to come closer to danger.

Julian has begun going into labor. For a while her contractions stop. Theo is relieved, because he can be more cautious and less hasty with his driving. Miriam and Julian are upset, because they know there is not much time before they are caught and they want the baby to be born first. The contractions soon start again.

When they hit the woods, they decide to get rid of the Citizen. Before they do, Theo turns on the radio, which he had not thought of doing previously. He hears a news report about his theft of the car. He discovers the elderly woman died. He is sick with misery, especially since he admits to having enjoyed the power he had over them.

They push the car into a pond and watch it sink. As they walk with the supplies through the woods, they hear a helicopter above. Theo realizes that Rolf would have phoned instead of traveled to London to see Xan. They had been searching for them longer than they thought.

They find a woodshed, which Theo knew had been there.

Book Two, Chapter 31 Analysis

Theo has a feeling of impending doom, which foreshadows his killing of Xan. When they push the car into the water to get rid of it, the women have no emotional reaction, but Theo imagines them all drowning in the car. He also throws his diary in, which is symbolic of ridding himself of his past life as previously he said he would destroy the diary on his deathbed. In this sense, Theo might even be preparing himself for death.

In their darkest hour, Julian appreciates the beauty of a hawthorn. Theo realizes that she can feel the beauty. Then Theo sees what she sees. There is a moment of joy as he sees a beautiful setting and Miriam calls out that she sees the woodshed. Theo has finally reached an emotional awakening, in their darkest hour.



Book Two, Chapter 32

Book Two, Chapter 32 Summary

The woodshed is not as hidden as Theo remembered, but he concedes that if Xan performed a ground search of the forest, they would be found no matter how secret their hiding.

They prepare for the birth in the woodshed, laying out the supplies. Miriam says they will need to light a fire once the baby is born to keep mother and child warm, despite the risk. Theo is sent outside during the preparation. He feels excluded, but sitting in the quiet forest gives him a moment to appreciate why Julian wanted to have the baby away from prying eyes.

Theo is very hands-on during the birth. He supports Julian from behind and he holds her hand. He is also very respectful of Miriam, whom he recognizes is a capable mid-wife. The baby is born and is a boy.

Miriam asks Theo to light the fire. He does so, but when he goes to put the kettle on he knocks it over. They will need to go to an abandoned house they passed earlier to get more water. Theo says he will go, but Miriam says that she will. She says that Julian needs him and she wants to bathe in the lake while she is gone. She doubts that Xan will allow her a bath and a four course meal before she is shot.

Book Two, Chapter 32 Analysis

This chapter shows the fruits of Theo's emotional awakening. He realizes that Julian was right about having the baby away from prying eyes, which shows he has stopped thinking he knows better than the Five Fishes. He has also stopped finding fault in Julian, because despite her grotesque sounds and expressions, he sees only the beauty of a birth.

As Theo and Julian are so united, Miriam is the one who goes to fetch water, which leads to her death. As Theo knocked over the water, her death is technically his fault. It is another death he feels responsible for: his father, Natalie, the elderly woman, and Miriam. The only person he is not directly responsible for is Luke. However, it is clear after Theo shoots Xan, that death has been a necessary evil to achieve good. Although, even Theo doubts this, as he refers to Xan's death as murder. The contrast of life and death throughout the novel is a major theme.

This chapter also signals that the end of their journey is not far away, because the group is willing to light a fire despite the fact that this will signal their location. It shows they are not deluded about being able to remain on the run and are willing to face their destiny. Miriam's comment about being shot by Xan also concedes this.



Book Two, Chapter 33

Book Two, Chapter 33 Summary

Theo is enjoying the company of Julian and her miracle son, but Julian is worried about Miriam. She says she has been gone for too long and wants Theo to search for her.

When Theo reaches the hut, he enters cautiously to find Miriam has been garroted. He fixes her grotesque body into a peaceful state. He believes Xan has come out himself to finish them off and claim the child as his own. He rushes back to Julian. They hope they will be able to face the end together and not be separated.

He finds Julian safe, but soon enough they hear Xan outside. Theo goes outside to face him. He learns that Rolf and Gascoigne have both been killed. Xan says that Julian will be looked after. He will probably marry her. He imagines her son may have fertile sperm they can use once he hits puberty.

The pair take aim at each other. As Xan fires, the baby cries and he misses Theo. Theo's shot gets Xan in the heart. Theo puts on the coronation ring just as the other members of the Council appear.

Theo takes the Council in to see the baby. Julian decides she will name him after Theo and his father. Theo anoints the baby with the sign of the cross, using a finger wet with blood from a towel that was underneath her during the birthing.

Book Two, Chapter 33 Analysis

When Theo finds Miriam garroted and in a grotesque state, he fixes her so that she looks at peace. It is an opportunity he did not have with the other deaths, and he fights his natural instincts of fear and repulsion. It proves the genuine bond that Theo has made with Miriam, which seemed unlikely in the beginning of the novel.

Before Xan arrives, Julian and Theo share a moment when he feeds her beans. He calls it an act of love. The reader witnesses Theo fully achieve fulfillment emotionally.

Theo rids himself of the last element of his old life when he shoots Xan and kills him. The coronation ring fulfills his grandparent's suggestion that he might go further than Xan in the end. He has an enormous ambition, which is the last thing that comes between him and Julian. When she asks him to remove the coronation ring and he refuses, it foreshadows problems after the novel ends. This is fitting for the dystopian genre of the novel.



Characters

Dr Theodore Faron

Dr Theodore Faron, or Theo, is the main character of the novel. He is a flawed hero. The reader is given an insight through both his diary and an omniscient narrator to his inner thoughts and actions. He is not happy, nor has he ever been truly happy. He is cold and distanced from others, perhaps something brought about by his relationship with his father, who died from stomach cancer after a three year illness.

Theo is much like his cousin Xan, the Warden of England, but unlike Xan, Theo gets married and has a child. It backfires as he never really loved his wife and accidentally ran over and killed his daughter, who he admits he never really loved either.

Theo finds love and passion for life through Julian. She is part of a group of dissidents, railing against the Warden of England. When Julian falls pregnant, Theo joins their escape from the government.

By the end of the novel he has found love with Julian and with her son. However, elements of the old selfish Theo are still there. He does not like being told what to do and intends to become Warden of England after killing his cousin, despite Julian's request for him to take off the Coronation Ring.

Xan Lyppiatt

Xan Lyppiatt is Theo's cousin. He also holds a position of extreme power as the Warden of England. Although, he admits it is not the power that holds him anymore but the worry of what he would be without it.

Xan and Theo spent every summer together growing up at Xan's home of Woolcombe. They were close, but not like brothers. When they grew up, Xan made Theo his personal advisor.

Xan was the son of a baronet. It was revealed later that his parents' marriage was not a happy one, as his father was homosexual. He died in a car crash with his lover the day after Xan became Warden of England. Xan hushed up the fact that he was with his lover. He despised their relationship when he was younger, but as he grew, he realized his father should have lived the life he wanted to. In the face of the death of the human species it hardly mattered.

Years after leaving Xan, Theo comes back on behalf of the Five Fishes to ask for reforms. Xan says no and warns him that there is only so much protection he can give.



Xan finds out from Rolf that Julian is pregnant and comes after the group himself, followed by the council and some trusted grenadiers. He garrotes Miriam when she is away from the group. Then he faces off with Theo. He is shot in the heart and killed.

Julian

Julian is one of the Five Fishes. She is married to the leader. She is a passionate and religious person, who Theo notes can see beauty in something as simple as a tree. Theo is drawn to her, perhaps because of the lack of passion in his own life.

She asks him to help their fight against the Warden of England, which he agrees to. He finds out she is pregnant. His ideals of her are not even broken when he finds out she is not pregnant to her husband, but to the priest Luke. Her passion extends to her child, as she insists on giving birth away from the public eye and not having the Warden involved in her child's life. This means they are on the run.

He continually begs her to leave her husband: not for him, but for her own freedom. Rolf ends up leaving her after he discovers the child is not his. He performs the ultimate act of betrayal by going to the Warden to tell him where they are.

In the end, she looks to Theo as her protector, as he has successfully helped her give birth in isolation. However, there are a few areas of contention between them. He refuses to throw away a gun at her request. He also will not take off the coronation ring, a symbol of power, when she asks.

Mrs Faron

Theo's mother is an important character for the fact that she links him to Xan, through his mother, who is her sister. She also demonstrates the differences between the Farons and the Lyppiatts.

It often appears that Theo's mother is jealous of her sister's marriage to The Baronet. However, on asking Theo whether the marriage is a happy one, she seems unsurprised the his answer is to the negative. It could be that she suspects that The Baronet is a homosexual, or it could be vindictiveness.

An additional layer is shown of his mother as the readers learns of Theo's father's death from cancer of the stomach. It is clear she had to be strong for her son during her husband's three year struggle. The first time Theo saw her cry was when his father died. At this time she refers to having rotten luck, which may be in reference to her sister's good fortune.

She is also described as an artist, which is a side occupation she pursues for extra money to give her son the things he desires. It is poignant, therefore, when Theo admits to the reader that he did not love his mother. He did care about her though, as much as he was able to.



She died at Woolcombe, with her sister. This shows a bond between the two, as their rivalry is ended by the ultimate finale.

Mr. Faron

Theo's father died of stomach cancer when Theo was a child. He remembers the cancer better than his father, even though he did not understand his father's illness at the time.

Theo is haunted by nightmares of his father pointing an infected stump of his wrist at him from the end of his bed.

Helena

Helena is Theo's ex-wife. He married her not because he loved her, but because he thought they were a good fit. She seemed to share his interests. She was the daughter of a university lecturer, whom she despised.

They had a daughter together, whom Theo accidentally ran over and killed in their driveway. Their marriage never recovered. Helena ended up leaving him and remarried Rupert Clavering, a poster and dust-jacket designer. They have an amicable, but not close friendship.

Natalie

Natalie is only a memory of Theo's in this novel. She has been dead for around five years. The first the reader hears of her is when Theo says he killed her. It turns out that Theo accidentally ran over his daughter when backing out of the driveway.

Natalie is a portal to Theo's guilt, which is the guilt that he cannot love. He believes that he does not love his other, or his wife, or in fact the daughter that he killed. He is accused by his wife of caring less about the death of their daughter.

When Julian gives birth the reader sees a tenderness that Theo has for both the mother and child, which he did not have for his own wife and child. This obvious distinction between Natalie and the newborn shows how far Theo has come on his personal journey through the novel.

Rupert Clavering

Rupert Clavering is a poster and dust-jacket designer. Theo does not find him offensive and Rupert accepts Theo as a former part of Helena's life, still tied to her because of the cat they owned together.



He appears to indulge his wife, allowing her to hang his artwork, despite it being against his nature. They do not appear to argue and are even united ultimately on their opinion with the Five Fishes.

The only time that Theo spends with Rupert during the novel is when he goes to see his cat's kittens. He sees the affection that his wife and Rupert share. He is relieved that Rupert is now responsible for her, although he is slightly envious that he couldn't have what they had.

The Baronet

The Baronet was father to Xan. He was a closet homosexual. He married Xan's mother purely to have a son and lead a respectable life. His lover lived at their home Woolcombe as a servant.

He was kind to Theo, who is surprised he never made a pass at him. Xan said his father would never have risked what he had, and also that Theo was not his type. Although, the Baronet was kind to Theo and bought him a bicycle so he could ride with Xan.

The day after his son was named Warden of England, the Baronet died in a car accident. Theo thought it suspicious, but Xan insists he only covered up the fact that his lover was with him.

Mrs. Lyppiatt

Xan's mother married a baronet, which made her sister, Theo's mother, very jealous. The life she lived was a lie, however, as her husband was homosexual. He merely wanted a trophy wife and a son.

The jealousy and rivalry that was demonstrated towards her in life was therefore unjustified. When she went to her brother-in-law's funeral she was criticized for wearing the wrong clothes, and was basically used as a punching bag. She seemed to be the blessed one in life; however, she was actually the downtrodden one.

The two sisters died together at Woolcombe, evidence that the rift was mended, being that Mrs. Lyppiatt had invited Theo's mother into her home. As their relationship is a metaphor for Xan and Theo's, this is how the reader expects to see them in the end: dying together at Woolcombe. The reality is very different, however, which adds to the shock when Theo kills his cousin in the final chapter.

Jasper

Jasper is an elderly academic. As a teacher, he was not well-liked by his students and was seen to be misogynistic. This cannot have been the case too much, because he married a fellow academic, who Theo describes as being fearsome in her day.



Because Theo was one of his pet students, the pair maintain a friendship. Jasper appears to rely on Theo more and more as he looks to the future. His wife is unwell and ends up dying in the Quietus. Theo does not believe this is her idea, but rather Jasper's.

Jasper asks Theo if he may come into the city and live with him. Theo avoids giving an answer. The next time he sees Jasper is when he is on the run with the Five Fishes and he needs assistance. Here he finds him dead on the couch, with a bullet through his head, having committed suicide.

Hilda

In this novel Hilda serves to show the horror of the Quietus. She once was a respected academic, but old age has stolen her mind and her mobility. Her husband appears to believe that the Quietus could be the most dignified way to end her life, although Theo does not believe that Hilda would condone such a practice.

Theo accidentally sees the Quietus that Hilda takes part in. Sadly, she is not a willing participant and throws herself into the water. She is killed by a SSP with a blow to the head from the handle of a pistol.

Theo tries to save her, but is also attacked. This episode launches Theo's involvement with the Five Fishes.

Miriam

Miriam is part of the Five Fishes. Her association with the group is motivated by her brother, who was sent to the Isle of Man for petty theft. He escaped and came to her house, where he shared horrific stories of the criminal-run community. He was re-captured and executed by the SSP. Miriam was sent his ashes and she took solace in the fact that he did not have to go back to the Isle of Man.

Miriam is a former midwife and one of the first civilians to be aware of the Omega. She speaks of looking at the deliveries that were booked in and seeing that there were none. Her role in the Five Fishes and, indeed, in the premise of the novel, becomes realized when Julian becomes pregnant.

Miriam embarks on a journey to keep mother and baby safe, bringing a certain amount of wisdom and experience to the novel. After delivering the first baby of what they hope will be many in a hut in the woods, she goes to find water. When she does not return, Theo searches for her and finds her garroted.



Rolf

Rolf is the husband of Julian. He is also the leader of the Five Fishes. He likes to assert his authority and resents Theo being involved in the crusade. It appears this is because he suspects Julian is attracted to Theo.

Rolf is proud to be the father of the new generation. He imagines glory will come his way and he will have the power of Xan. He is devastated and bitter when he is told by Julian what he long suspected; that Luke is the father of her child.

He abandons Julian, Miriam, and Theo and goes to the Warden to help track them. He is killed when he has outlived his usefulness.

Luke

Luke is a priest of an older, unpracticed religion. It appears to be Catholicism. He and Julian share an affair, which results in her pregnancy.

Luke is not out to claim the child or to take power on its behalf. He wants to make sure Julian is safe. He holds special masses for her each morning when they are on the run.

He is brutally beaten and killed by an Omega gang when he prevents them from reaching Julian. He is buried and Theo reads the service from Luke's own prayer book.

Gascoigne

Gascoigne is the youngest of the Five Fishes. He was previously a truck driver, which Rolf thought would be handy when it came to distributing political pamphlets across the country.

His main motivation for the revolution is driven by a family military history. His grandfather was a Grenadier, and he resents Xan's use of the term in his own private army.

Gascoigne puts himself to work trying to stop the Quietus by blowing up wharves. He undertakes an operation unapproved by his comrades and is captured. Their belief that it will not take long for him to talk spurs them into fleeing so that Julian can have her baby in peace.

Xan reveals in the final chapter that he had Gascoigne killed.

Digby Yule

Digby Yule is a retired academic, who now volunteers at the Cast Museum, where Theo runs into him.



He seems alarmed to see Theo. He insists that he is looking after himself. He is frightened that he will be seen as a burden and will have to take part in the Quietus. On closer inspection, Theo can see that Digby is struggling to care for himself. He has not washed his face properly, and while his clothes are clean, they are unironed.

Theo is aware that he could invite Digby to live with him, but he does not, partly so as not to offend him, but mostly because he is too selfish.

Martin Woolvington

Martin is an ex commander in the British Army and served with Xan. Theo imagines he is the closest a council member comes to being Xan's friend. Martin's loyalty to Xan is absolute. He is a person who does not like to waste time. For this reason, he doodles in the council meetings.

Martin does not have a hatred or mistrust for Theo, unlike the other council members. It was enough for him that Xan trusted him. He felt Theo neither contributed nor stood in the way when he was Xan's advisor.

In the final chapter, when the baby is born, Martin offers to send for an ambulance. He then stands sentry at Julian's head, as though in protection of the baby.

Harriet Marwood

Harriet is a member of the council. She is responsible for Science, Health, and Recreation. She is really there as a calming influence over the people. She is the oldest member of the council at sixty-eight, and Theo thinks of her as the wise woman of the tribe. He also thinks of her as extremely dangerous, for he believes she could make something as horrible as mass suicide sound reasonable.

When Theo comes to the council, she puts arguments to him without being scathing. She speaks what she sees as sense. She feels that Theo long ago gave up his right to contribute to the running of the country.

Felicia Rankin

Felicia is a former lawyer and now councilor. She is responsible for the Home Affairs portfolio and also for the Quietus. She seems hungry for power and control. She resented Theo being an advisor to Xan and questions what his purpose had actually been.

Felicia is only attractive from side-on. This is because her face is asymmetrical to the point where it verges on deformity. She can be quite vicious towards Theo, to the point where she brings up the death of his child when he approaches the council with his list of requests.



When Theo kills Xan in the final chapter, Felicia is invited by Theo to see the child, along with the rest of them. She comes as reluctantly and cautiously as the others. But once inside, her and Harriet cry and smile over the baby. When Theo orders them to leave, she does so, now subservient and unquestioning of him.

Carl Inglebach

Carl is described by Theo as the brains of the council. He is the Minister for Justice and State Transport.

When Theo approaches the council with requests, Carl speaks once, with finality. He states that in a world with so little to look forward to, it was the council that held democracy and normality together. There were certain sacrifices that needed to be made for this.

Carl is dying. It is obvious by the look of him and it is also stated by Xan when he is speaking about who could be Warden of England. He is someone who would crave the power were he not so unwell. This removes the threat from him in the final chapter when Theo kills Xan.

Carl is there, but like the others, is more interested in seeing the baby than bickering over who is in power. He states that it is beginning again, referring to life. However, on perhaps a deeper level, this could mean that Theo is taking the place of Xan.



Objects/Places

Woolcombe

Woolcombe is the estate where Xan grew up. Theo spent every summer there after his father died when he was very young.

Coronation Ring

The Coronation Ring is the wedding ring of England, reserved for royalty. Both Xan and Theo wear this ring during the novel.

The Five Fishes

The Five Fishes is a group of people who want to stand up against the Warden of England. They are Rolf, Julian, Miriam, Gascoigne, and Luke. They distribute political pamphlets and perform guerilla attacks.

Oxford

Oxford is where Theo lives. He is a professor at Oxford University. This is where he first meets Julian, when she attends one of his classes.

Cast Museum

The Cast Museum is where Theo passes messages to the Five Fishes. It is also where Theo sought solace following the death of his daughter and subsequent divorce. Xan introduced Theo to the museum.

Southwold

This is where Theo watches the Quietus that causes him work with the Five Fishes. It is also where he came on a holiday with his family.

Omega

The Year of Omega is the year when mass infertility was officially recognized. Omega is also the name given to the last generation born.



State Security Police

The State Security Police is the police force that maintains law and order in England.

Grenadiers

Grenadiers are the soldiers that form Xan's personal army.

Sojourners

Sojourners are immigrants brought in from other countries to perform menial tasks. They are deported once they are no longer useful.

Wychwood Forest

This is where Theo, Miriam, and Julian flee to allow Julian to have her baby.

The Woodshed

This is where Julian has her baby in Wychwood Forest.



Themes

Power

The novel displays a constant struggle for power. The rivalry between Theo and Xan is initiated by a rivalry between their mothers. Mrs. Faron was jealous of her sister, who married a Baronet and lived in a mansion. This tainted Theo's perspective, and when he first visited Woolcombe he believed Xan would make him stay in the servant's quarters.

From this beginning, the pair shared a love and hate relationship brought on by a feeling of competition. Theo was surprised to discover he was a better shooter than Xan. He also remembers a conversation between their grandparents, who wondered whether Theo would go further than Xan in the end. This sets the pair against each other in the reader's mind and foreshadows the moment when Theo shoots Xan and effectively takes his place as the Warden of England.

The role of Warden of England represents ultimate power in the novel. Xan himself struggles with the power as he finds himself unable to retire, despite no longer relishing the role. It seems he believes no one else is capable of the role, although many covet it.

The Five Fishes are also undertaking a struggle for power. Their overarching goal is to speak for a population that has no voice. However, they also want power individually. Miriam, for example, wants the power to avenge the death of her brother by the government. Julian wants the power to decide where she has her baby. Rolf wants the ultimate power that comes with fathering a child in a barren species.

When it is revealed that Rolf is not the father of Julian's baby, his chance at becoming Warden of England is revoked. He realizes that the only power he has is insider knowledge, so he switches sides. This is a turning point in the novel, because it gives Theo power over the Five Fishes, as he becomes their protector.

Theo pretends he does not want power in the beginning of the novel, but after stealing a car and supplies from an elderly couple, he admits he enjoyed the feeling of control. He also refuses to throw away the gun when Julian asks, clinging to it in his pocket with satisfaction. At the end of the novel, Theo seems to have ended his rivalry with Xan by becoming him. He places the Coronation Ring on his finger, and when Julian asks him to remove it he is irritated. Theo now epitomizes power as he is answerable to no one.

Love

Both the presence and absence of love form a theme in this novel.

Both Theo and Xan share a common bond of being unable to love. Theo attempted marriage and a family. However, he divorced his wife and accidentally killed their daughter by backing over her with his car. Afterwards, his wife accused him of caring



less because he loved less. He admits that affection had been the extent of his feelings for his daughter. Theo even admits he felt no love for his mother. Xan is also unable to love. He has no family, following the death of both his mother and father, having never married or had children.

It is fitting that Theo finds love with Julian. Theo describes her as being passionate when she enters the novel. It is a passion that he does not have in his life, as he is unable to feel emotion. Julian is full of love, especially for the child that she is bringing into the world. Theo struggles with the fact that she follows her heart instead of her head. He ridicules her involvement with The Five Fishes and he is unable to understand her desire to have her baby on the run.

In his pursuit of Julian, Theo embarks on a journey towards love. The first step in the journey is agreeing to help The Five Fishes for Julian. Another step is when Theo sees Julian at the markets and has to fight the urge to buy her flowers and carry her bag. Theo reaches emotional enlightenment near the end of the novel, when they are in Wychwood Forest and Julian sees natural beauty in a hawthorn tree. In their darkest hour, Theo is able to share her wonderment. This leads the way to him accepting and enacting his love for Julian during and after the birth of her son. Love is the ultimate prize in Theo's journey.

Life and Death

When faced by the death of their species, humans find their lives meaningless and devalued with The Children of Men. Once they become a burden on others they go to the Quietus, a mass suicide. It is a primal concept, like animals killing the weak of the herd. It is not about putting them out of their misery, but preventing misery for others.

While old life is devalued, new life is the opposite. The Omegas, who are the youngest generation, hold a God-like status. This is despite their behavior, which ranges from arrogance to criminality. It is said that when an Omega commits a crime they are offered a position in the State Security Police instead of being sent to the penal colony on the Isle of Man. Miriam's brother committed petty crime against an Omega and suddenly his life was worthless.

To be able to bring new life into the world grants Julian a God-like status as well. Although, Julian does not want to take advantage of it. When Julian insists on having the baby in private, Theo argues that she would have the best hospital, the best professionals, and the best treatment, all because of the value placed on new life.

Hope

Twenty-five years after the last human was born, people are losing hope that a cure will ever be found. The species is on death row. People are depressed. Life is devalued. People have even lost interest in the simple pleasure of sex. Theo also lives a life without hope. His goal in life is to die at Woolcombe and not leave anything behind.



This lack of hope is illustrated by Jasper Palmer-Smith. He was once a respected academic, as was his wife Hilda. They moved into the country after the Quietus so they could be self-sufficient until the end. As time wore on, their hope wore out. When Hilda became incapacitated with old age, Jasper sends her to the Quietus. He shoots himself soon after. He has given up on the world. This demonstrates the importance of Julian's pregnancy, as Theo discovers his deceased friend after finding out about Julian and her unborn baby.

Julian's pregnancy shoots a burst of hope into the novel, for both Theo and human kind. Theo says that it will be hailed as a miracle birth. If it is a boy with fertile sperm, the human species is saved from extinction. Julian holds out a different kind of hope. She hopes that other children will be born, so she can lead a normal life with her son.

The baby is born a boy, which shows their hopes are being realized. The proof of the impact the baby's birth will have on the human species can be seen when the Council, once feared and respected, enter humbly to pay their respects to the first of a new generation. The women, Felicia Rankin and Harriet Marwood, go one step further, cooing at the baby's side. As Carl Inglebach says, "So, it begins again".



Style

Point of View

The Children of Men by P.D. James is told in both first and third person, the former being in the form of a diary kept by the protagonist Dr Theodore Faron of the University of Oxford.

It is important that the reader is given an inside look into the protagonist through his diary. Given that Theo finds himself incapable of love until he meets Julian, he could be an unlikable character. The diary gives an immediate connection between the reader and the writer, which allows understanding and forgiveness for despicable statements, such as he did not love his mother or that he could have loved his daughter were she prettier or more affectionate.

The third person point of view is interesting in the sense that it does not serve to give the reader an inside look at other characters. It still follows Theo. This could more so be a tool to tell the story while Theo is on the run, or to tell of events that he may not write about in his diary.

Setting

The novel is set in the year 2021 in England. It begins in Oxford, which is where Theo lives because he is a lecturer at Oxford University. When he was married with a daughter he lived in Lathbury Road, which he was not happy about. It was too far out and the house was too large and too expensive. When they moved in closer to the city to St. John Street, Theo felt as though his wife had accused him of being happy their daughter was dead because it allowed him to be closer to the city. The Cast Museum is an important place in Oxford, as it is where Theo announces his decision to help the Five Fishes.

London is another important setting as it is where Xan is in the present day. Instead of living at Ten Dowling Street, like Prime Ministers, Xan had separated himself from that idea by living in the old Foreign and Commonwealth Building, where he also held council. This overlooks St James Park, where Xan and Theo speak in private after he meets with the council.

Woolcombe is where Xan grew up. It is a large estate, as his father is a baronet. This is also where Theo spent his summers as a child and then teenager, following the death of his father. The bedroom that Theo stays in at Woolcombe and the bridge where Xan and Theo pay their respects to fallen soldiers of the Civil War are located at Woolcombe. Both his and Xan's mothers died at Woolcombe, which had been turned into a retirement home for a privileged few. Xan does not have any wish to return, unless they were the last two men on earth and they could stand on the bridge and shoot themselves, whereas Theo would like to die there as an old man.



There are a large number of country locations that are involved in this novel, and serve largely to show the decay of civilization not yet evident in the cities. One is the wooded country in which Jasper lives. Theo goes there twice in the book. The first time he turns down Jasper when he asks for help. The second time is to seek help from Jasper. The house demonstrates the panic of Omega before there was a Warden of England. Jasper did what most others did by moving into the country where he could have a self-sufficient life with a vegetable garden and stream. His house was a fortress, with heavy locks in case the world got out of hand. It is ironic that Jasper wanted protection from others, as in the end it is himself he should be afraid of, as he takes his own life.

Another country setting is the church where Theo first meets the Five Fishes. To get there he must walk across Port Meadow to Binsey, which had been his favorite Sunday morning walk back when the world was normal. The farmhouses are abandoned, with their windows boarded up and in some places damaged by vandals. The paths are overgrown, as the elderly are too weak for the work, the middle-aged too busy, and the young too nonchalant. When Theo arrives at the church the reader witnesses the remnants of normality. The church house is occupied, barely, by an eccentric priest. When Theo returns later in the book, the priest is dead, which signals the death of that area. The church has fallen into disrepair and black masses with animal sacrifices are often held there.

Southwold, where the Quietus is held, is where Theo realizes the horrors that are occurring. It was once a beachside community that welcomed holiday makers, who would dress in the brightly colored beach houses and play in the water. Now it is deserted and the only beach houses to be preserved are used for elderly women to change into robes for the Quietus. One of the last bed and breakfasts remaining open there is on the verge of collapse as there are never any guests. Residents have been moving into city centers. On the way to Southwold, Theo stops at a pub at Blythburgh, which he had refused to stop at when he had been going on a family holiday to Southwold. In penance to his ex-wife and deceased daughter, Theo stops at the deserted pub. He is served a beer by the publican and given a pie, which is the only food they have available.

When they are on the run from Xan, the Five Fishes head out through Swinbrook and head for Wales. When they are accosted by the Omega, they lose their car, Luke dies, and Rolf deserts them. In a nondescript village nearby, Theo steals another car from an elderly couple. They drive back in the direction of London, as they can no longer go to Wales and they do not have much petrol. It is also unexpected. They are heading for Wychwood Forest, which is about twenty miles from Oxford.

A woodshed in Wychwood Forest is the birthplace of Julian's baby and the final setting of the novel. There are abandoned cottages on the outskirts of this forest. Miriam goes to one to get water after the baby is born and is killed.



Language and Meaning

The language is formal and long-winded. It is not typical of the year it was first published, which was 1992. However, it does create a feeling of it being a classic and timeless piece of writing. It also is best to convey the serious messages that are contained within the novel.

The language tends to slow down the pace of the story. This is because it is a book where language and meaning are more important than the events within the novel. It is about a man's internal struggle and its result on the exterior. This is easier to convey when using formal and stiff vocabulary, rather than more modern styles, which can give a more light-hearted mood.

The characters even speak formally. This is mainly due to highly the high intelligence of the majority, being the members of the council, the warden, and others. However, at times it can be questioned whether the formal dialogue works with characters such as Rolf, for instance. Also, when they were boys, which would have been in the 1990s, they spoke so formally it could have passed as the nineteenth century.

The language can therefore make the book difficult to understand, but in that sense it carries more weight in what the author is trying to say through her characters.

Structure

This novel is comprised of two books. Book One, called Omega, contains nineteen chapters. Book Two, called Alpha, contains thirteen chapters. Omega refers to the infertility of the human race and the final generation that is moving closer to death with each passing year. Alpha refers to the ultimate winner or the Alpha male. This could be viewed in a number of ways, as Theo overcoming Xan, or as the baby being born. The chapters within alternate between diary entries and third person point of view.

The plot of the novel is straightforward. There are no subplots; however, there are many flashbacks. It is about a man's journey to love and meaning in life. The human species is facing extinction and Theo is getting ready for it, as is the rest of the world. However, he becomes caught up with a revolutionary group and falls in love with Julian. She turns out to be pregnant, the first woman to be pregnant in twenty-five years. Theo helps protect her and the baby from the government. In the end he faces off with his cousin, the Warden of England, and wins. The baby is born free.

The novel is slow to begin with as it establishes the setting and situation, as well as the characters. In order for the novel to have an impact, the reader must understand the severity and the intricacies of the human species as it is faced with extinction. There are a lot of flashbacks, which are courtesy of Theo's diary. He speaks of his childhood and the death of his daughter. All of this helps to establish his character and gives the reader a connection and an understanding of his actions. Once this character establishment has occurred, the pace quickens and the novel becomes easier to read.

Quotes

"The four billion life forms which have existed on this planet, three billion, nine hundred and sixty million are now extinct. . . It really does seem unreasonable to suppose that Homo sapiens should be exempt. Our species will have been one of the shortest lived of all, a mere blink, you may say, in the eye of time." Book One, Chap. 1, pp. 13-14

"It is one of the moments from my boyhood which has remained with me, an evening of pure joy, unshadowed, untainted by guilt or satiety or regret, immortalized for me in that image of Xan balanced against the sunset, of his flaming hair, of the pale petals of roses floating downstream under the bridge until they were lost to sight." Book One, Chap. 2, p. 22

"At heart I am only touched by the thought of Woolcombe; the imagined smell of its musty deserted rooms, the rotting panels in the library, the ivy creeping over its crumbling walls; a wilderness of grass and weeds obscuring the gravel, the tennis court, the formal garden; by the memory of that small black bedroom, unvisited and unchanged until the coverlet rots at last, the books turn to dust and the final picture drops from the wall." Book One, Chap. 3, pp. 25-26

"I don't want anyone to look to me, not for protection, not for happiness, not for love, not for anything." Book One, Chap. 4, p. 31

"He was as irritated with himself as with the group. He might despise them as a gang of amateur malcontents, but they had outwitted him, had sent the one member whom they knew he would find it difficult to refuse. Why he should have found it difficult was a question he was not at present willing to explore. He would go to the Quietus as he had promised and leave them a message in the Cast Museum. He hoped that the message could justifiably be the single word, NO." Book One, Chap. 8, p. 79

"The mass emigrations, the great internal tumults, the religious and tribal wars of the 1990s have given way to a universal anomie which leaves crops unsown and unharvested, animals neglected, starvation, civil war, the grabbing from the weak by the strong. We see reversions to old myths, old superstitions, even to human sacrifice, sometimes on a massive scale. That the country has been largely spared this universal catastrophe is due to the five people round this table." Book One, Chap. 12, p. 114

"'I am not a tyrant, but I can't afford to be merciful. Whatever it is necessary to do, I shall do.' He looked at Theo, who thought for one extraordinary moment that he saw in Xan's eyes a plea for understanding." Book One, Chap. 13, pp. 121

"Theo asked himself how many of the other reforms he might have achieved had he stayed as Xan's adviser. But he knew the answer. He had been powerless then and the Five Fishes were powerless now. If there had been no Omega, these were aims which a man might be prepared to fight for, even to suffer for. But if there had been no Omega, the evils would not exist." Book One, Chap. 15, p. 130



"He took the paper into the lavatory and, after tearing it precisely into quarters, flushed them down the bowl. As they were sucked, swirling, out of sight he wished for a second, no more, that he could share the passion and the folly which bound together that pitifully unarmored fellowship." Book One, Chap. 15, p. 131

"I was seized with a ludicrous urge to dash to the flower-stall, press notes into the florist's hands, seize from their tubs the bundles of daffodils, tulips, hothouse roses and lilies, pile them into her arms and take the bag from her encumbered shoulder. It was a romantic impulse, childish and ridiculous, which I hadn't felt since I was a boy. I had distrusted and resented it then. Now it appalled me by its strength, its irrationality, its destructive potential." Book One, Chap. 19, p. 152

"It was easier for him to kneel, so he knelt, unselfconsciously, not thinking of it as a gesture of homage but knowing that it was right that he should be on his knees. He placed his right arm round her waist and pressed his ear against her stomach. He couldn't hear the beating heart, but he could hear and feel the moments of the child, feel its life. He was swept by a tide of emotion, which rose, buffeted and engulfed him in a turbulent surge of awe, excitement and terror, then receded, leaving him spent and weak." Book Two, Chap. 21, p. 177

"Well, you must have some idea what you plan to do if you manage to wrest power away from the Warden.' 'It won't be a question of wresting it away. The people of Britain will give it to me. They'll have to if they want Britain repopulated.'" Book Two, Chap. 23, p. 192

"During the afternoon, while rummaging in the back of the car, Miriam found a second torch, little larger than a pencil, wedged down the side of a seat. It would hardly have been adequate to replace the one which failed, but I am grateful we didn't know it was there. We needed this day." Book Two, Chap. 26, pp. 204-205

"And then Luke sprang forward. Seizing the Omega he tried ineffectually to drag him back, crying out: 'No, no. Take me! Take me!' The Omega let go of the cloak and, with a cry of fury, turned on Luke." Book Two, Chap. 27, p. 212

"For the first time since Luke had died he turned to her. The torchlight moved steadily and slowly from Miriam's face to hers. She said: 'Luke's. The child is Luke's.'" Book Two, Chap. 27, p. 216

"With her graceless swollen body, it was difficult for Julian to squat, and Miriam put out a supporting hand. There came into Theo's mind, unsought and unwelcome, the image of a defecating animal. Despising himself; he thrust it aside." Book Two, Chap. 28, p. 225

"Somewhere in the world other children would be born; he made himself share Julian's confidence. This child would no longer be unique, no longer in special danger." Book Two, Chap. 30, pp. 241

"He said: 'The worst is that I enjoyed it. I actually enjoyed it!' Miriam was unloading the car, shouldering the blankets. 'Enjoyed tying up that old man and his wife? Of course



you didn't enjoy it. You did what you had to do.' 'Not the tying up. I didn't mean that. But I enjoyed the excitement, the power, the knowledge that I could do it. It wasn't all horrible. It was for them, but not for me.'" Book Two, Chap. 31, p. 251

"It was as if in one moment the forest was transformed from a place of darkness and menace, in which he was at heart convinced that one of them would die, into a sanctuary, mysterious and beautiful, uncaring of these three curious interlopers, but a place in which nothing that lived could be wholly alien from him." Book Two, Chap. 31, p. 256

"He could understand now her obstinate choice and it seemed to him, sitting in this peace and quietness, to be both right and reasonable." Book Two, Chap. 32, p. 259

"She said: 'See, you have a son,' and laughed. It seemed to Theo that the decrepit shed rang with her joyful and triumphant voice. He looked down at Julian's outstretched arms and transfigured face, then turned away. The joy was almost too much for him to bear." Book Two, Chap. 32, p. 263

"'If it's a boy and he's fertile, he'll be the father of the new race. If he produces sperm, at thirteen - at twelve maybe - our female Omegas will only be thirty-eight. We can breed from them, from other selected women. We may be able to breed again from the woman herself.'" Book Two, Chap. 33, p. 273

"And it was in that split second of time that the child cried, a high mewling wail, like a cry of protest. Theo heard Xan's bullet hiss harmlessly through the sleeve of his jacket. He knew that in that half-second he couldn't have seen what afterwards he so clearly remembered: Xan's face transfigured with joy and triumph; couldn't have heard his great shout of affirmation, like the shout on the bridge at Woolcombe. But it was with that remembered shout in his ears that he shot Xan through the heart." Book Two, Chap. 33, p. 275

"Theo thought: it begins again, with jealousy, with treachery, with violence, with murder, with this ring on my finger." Book Two, Chap. 33, p. 277

"Julian looked up at him. For the first time she noticed the ring. She said: 'That wasn't made for your finger.' For a second he felt something close to irritation. It must be for him to decide when he would take it off." Book Two, Chap. 33, p. 278

"His tears were falling now over the child's forehead. From some far childhood memory he recalled the rite. The water had to flow, there were words which had to be said. It was with a thumb wet with his own tears and stained with her blood that he made on the child's forehead the sign of the cross." Book Two, Chap. 33, pp. 278



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the motivation for power. Which characters in the novel are seeking it, and for what reason?

What does the Coronation Ring represent? Do you feel it is right for either Xan or Theo to wear it?

Discuss Theo's feelings towards Julian. Are they always positive? What do you think will happen between them after the novel ends?

Explain the importance of Woolcombe. Why do you think Theo regards it more as a home than Xan? What was its role in Xan and Theo's relationship?

Compare and contrast Theo and Xan. Do you think they represent good and evil, or do you think they represent a mixture? Do you believe Theo will follow in Xan's footsteps as the Warden of England? Do you think the Council will allow that? Will he make a better Warden than his cousin? Was Xan a good Warden?

Explore point of view. Why do you believe the story is told in first person and third person?

Discuss Julian as the mother of the new generation. Why do you think the author chose this character to play this role? What is the meaning behind her being disfigured?

Compare and contrast the relationship Xan and Theo had with their fathers. Do you believe this contributed to their relationship at all? How do you think this affected them personally?