

The Wanting Seed Study Guide

The Wanting Seed by Anthony Burgess

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Plot Summary

The Wanting Seed, by Anthony Burgess, is a dystopian view of a future plunged into worldwide famine and chaos by the mismanagement of government and abuse of the environment. It was published in 1963, a year after the appearance of another dark novel, A Clockwork Orange, which made Burgess famous. The Wanting Seed takes place in Great Britain, although other countries around the world are mentioned in which similar events occur. The novel opens with the mourning of a mother, Beatrice-Joanna Foxe, for her recently deceased little son. The child's body is being commandeered by the Department of Agriculture for use as fertilizer because overpopulation has resulted in a critical shortage of food.

The officials can hardly contain their satisfaction over the boy's death, which enrages Beatrice-Joanna. She seeks solace in her husband's brother, Derek Foxe, with whom she is having an affair. Beatrice-Joanna's husband, Tristram Foxe, is a mild-mannered history teacher at a boys' school, who is oblivious of the treachery of Derek, a high government official. For years, Derek has pretended to be gay because overpopulation has prompted the government to encourage homosexuality as a birth-control strategy. Beatrice-Joanna and Tristram are both repelled by this policy, which Derek accepts glibly. A soldier named Captain Loosely, who feels that he lost a promotion to Derek because he is heterosexual, tells Tristram about the affair between Beatrice-Joanna and Derek. Loosely wants to expose Derek as a closet heterosexual, thus ruining his career. The government has clamped down on birth and when Beatrice-Joanna becomes pregnant by Derek, she flees to the countryside to have her child. Meanwhile, Tristram accidentally gets caught up in a street demonstration over the food shortage and is jailed.

Derek has received a promotion and has little interest at the moment in Beatrice-Joanna. He has the power to release Tristram from prison, but decides to keep him there. While Tristram is incarcerated, social unrest mounts to dangerous levels over the food shortages. Beatrice-Joanna lives in the rural Northern Province with her sister, Mavis, and her brother-in-law, Shonny, and their two children while she awaits her baby. Tristram grows increasingly enraged over his fate, replacing his timidity with an intention to wreak revenge on his wife and brother. Loosely visits him in prison and Tristram gives him the address of Beatrice-Joanna's sister. Tristram then breaks out of prison and goes after Beatrice-Joanna. On his trip, he sees that social unrest has escalated into murder and open cannibalism. As he journeys, he sees the people rejecting the widespread pose of homosexuality for an uninhibited and heterosexual Congress. Loosely reaches the farm and takes Beatrice-Joanna with him to London, along with her offspring, twin boys. Tristram meets Shonny, who now bitterly regrets helping Beatrice-Joanna, because his own two children have been taken by someone and apparently have been killed and eaten. The government now begins to embrace heterosexuality again. Derek begins openly living with Beatrice-Joanna, and Loosely is demoted. Tristram is conscripted into the army and eventually is shipped to Ireland to fight in a mysterious war. It turns out to be a hoax, in which both sides have been forced by the government into battling each other, to reduce the population. Tristram, the sole survivor from his



battalion, escapes and returns to England. After a period of physical and spiritual recovery, he reunites with Beatrice-Joanna, who has longed for his return. Tristram's tribulations have erased his desire for revenge. A new government is installed and at the novel's end, it appears that a period of relative stability and sanity will begin.



Part One, Chapters One through Four

Part One, Chapters One through Four Summary

Originally published in 1963 and set in England in the indeterminate future, *The Wanting Seed*, by Anthony Burgess, is a dark comedy about what could happen to the world if overpopulation were to spin out of control. Chapter One of Part One opens at the funeral of Beatrice-Joanna Foxe's small child, under the authority of two men from the Ministry of Agriculture's ominously-named Phosphorus Reclamation Department. The men are singing a popular song about a lovely boy named Fred that ends with the line, "he's my meat." A man named Dr. Acheson consoles Beatrice-Joanna that the little corpse will, at least, add valuable phosphorous pentoxide to the soil. The child, Roger, died of meningial infection, and the doctor thinks the death for the best, considering the shortage of food for everyone, but Beatrice-Joanna is devastated and outraged. As she leaves the building, she enters an elevator with two homosexual men. She wonders if one of them is only pretending to be gay, as does her brother-in-law and lover, Derek Foxe, to improve his chances of promotion. As she leaves, she tells the two men that they are unclean, offending them. Chapter Two depicts Beatrice-Joanna's husband, Tristram Foxe, at the South London (Channel) Unitary School (Boys) Division Four, where he teaches history. He passes a recent map of Great Britain on a wall that shows Greater London has continued to expand until it now covers many provinces. Tristram enters the classroom and begins lecturing about Pelagius, a monk in the days of religion, who rejected the doctrine of Original Sin and believed humans could work out their own salvation, which made him a forerunner of socialism and communism. Opposed to this view of Pelagianism, says Tristram, are Augustinians. These pessimists believe in Original Sin and expect the worst of humans. Nowadays, he adds, there are no political parties and this old dichotomy no longer exists.

In Chapter Three, Beatrice-Joanna leaves the hospital and walks down a seaside street in Brighton, which is now part of Greater London. It is full of signs advertising strange-sounding products and police wearing grey clothes. Atop the gigantic Government Building, she sees a statue of Pelagius, a bearded, robed man gazing out to sea. She remembers a time when the statue was called Augustine, just as at other times it had been a king, a prime minister, a musician, an athlete, and her favorite, Anonymous. Next to the Government Building, she sees the smaller Ministry of Infertility, where Derek works.

In Chapter Four, Tristram is again teaching the history class. He says the parliamentary system of government has been replaced by a cycle, which is divided into three phases: Pelagian, intermediate, and Augustinian, which he calls Pelphase, Interphase, and Gusphase. In Pelphase, people are considered to be good, and controls on them are minimal, although the state controls the means of production. The Interphase begins when leaders recognize that people are not as perfectible as they had hoped, and brutal punishments are instituted. The chapter ends before he describes Gusphase.



Part One, Chapters One through Four Analysis

In the opening chapter, the author wastes no time establishing the major problems in the world he will describe, which are overpopulation and famine, and the government's terrible response to them. The callousness of the two attendants singing a popular romantic ditty also serves as a subtle foreshadowing of the even darker turn of events that will occur. The song's line, "He's my meat," is a supposedly romantic term that will prove to be literally true. The doctor is just as uncaring about little Roger's death as the two men, who are notably not with a funeral home but from the Agriculture Department. To them, not only is the little corpse useful as fertilizer, but the Doctor Acheson actually sees fit to mention this point as consolation to the bereaved mother. Beatrice-Joanna's repulsion at the sight of the homosexuals in the elevator, who might or might not be pretending to be gay as a way to improve their job prospects, seems politically incorrect to the contemporary reader, but the point of the satire is not aimed at the characters' sexual orientation. Rather, the author's point is that by definition, homosexual love does not produce offspring, which is why it is encouraged in the novel's overpopulated world. Beatrice-Joanna has just lost her young son, and the state's employees can hardly conceal their satisfaction. She is outraged by the hypocrisy and deception surrounding her, which are so intense that even her maternal instincts are considered suspect.

Tristram's lecture in Chapter Two functions not only as a primer on how the cycles of this society have recurring over time, but also as a foreshadowing of how and why social and political conditions will change as the novel progresses. In returning to Beatrice-Joanna, Chapter Three establishes a general structural pattern of alternating between her story and that of Tristram. One of the chapter's functions is to introduce the symbol of the statute atop the Government Building, whose identity changes with each major shift in governmental policy. Returning to Tristram, Chapter 4 picks up the lecture, which gives a name to each phase in the socio-political cycle. It is now clear that these phases will be important contributors to the novel's plot.



Part One, Chapters Five through Eight

Part One, Chapters Five through Eight Summary

In Chapter Five, Beatrice-Joanna enters the Ministry of Infertility. She sees desolate-looking mothers who smell of cheap spirits, or alc, collecting money for the deaths of their children, now that infanticide is rewarded by the government. Feeling angry and unaccountably guilty, Beatrice-Joanna collects payment for the death of her child. She takes an elevator to the Propaganda Department, where she sees Derek talking to others, conducting himself in an obviously gay manner. She gets him aside and tells him that Roger died, and he is sympathetic, but he tells her a small, mustachioed man standing in a corner, named Loosley, seems to be watching him. Beatrice-Joanna makes him say he loves her before she lets Derek go. In Chapter Six, Tristram tells the class that the Interphase cannot continue forever. The disappointment in the people that caused the brutal repression of the government is replaced by resigned pessimism, and the Gusphase takes over. Eventually, the governors realize that humans are not as bad as they thought, and the Pelphase begins, as the cycle renews itself. The bell rings and Tristram soon notices many boys will not make it to their next classes on time, but there will be no punishment, because this is the Pelphase.

In Chapter Seven, Beatrice-Joanna enters her tiny flat in the Spurgin Building to await the arrival of Derek. Shortly after the birth of Roger, she lost interest in making love with Tristram, although she still feels love for him. She is not sure if she actually loves or merely lusts after Derek. Her flat can be traversed in two strides, and all the furnishings are stored in the walls and ceiling, protruding at the push of a button. She sits, watches a news disc about a factory strike, and then bathes and changes into a dressing gown. Derek is late. She takes pain pills and then there is a knock at the door. In Chapter Eight, Tristram knocks at the door of the school principal's secretary and is ushered in to see the principal, Joscelyne. He mentions that the head of Tristram's department has died and Tristram was lined up to be his successor, but the problem is Tristram's family situation. He came from a family of four children, is himself married and had a child, and his wife has a sister with two children. All this weighs against Tristram, who now realizes the promotion will go to a younger man who is homosexual. Joscelyne warns him not to have any more children, because he would hate to lose Tristram.

Part One, Chapters Five through Eight Analysis

The dysfunction in British society is shown in Chapter Four to be even worse than merely welcoming deaths. The government is actually rewarding parents for killing their children, which is why many of them mothers collecting their payments are drunk on the cheap liquor called alc. Sadly, Beatrice-Joanna collects the money due to her, which makes her implicit in this corrupt state of affairs, even though she did not kill Roger. She also is having an affair with her husband's brother, which hardly makes her an admirable character, and yet these flaws are offset by her sorrow over the loss of Roger



and her victimization by the cynical government. In positioning her an outsider and a rebel against the terrible status quo, Anthony Burgess makes it possible to like Beatrice-Joanna. In contrast, the hypocrisy of Derek in pretending to be gay shows him to be dishonestly ambitious. His concern about Loosely watching him introduces a subplot in the novel. Beatrice-Joanna's loss of libido toward her husband is presented as a reason for her interest in Derek, and her need for love and comfort from someone on this despairing day is understandable. In Chapter Eight, when Tristram learns he will lose his promotion because his family has too many offspring, the satirical aspect of the situation is obvious. Losing a job because one is heterosexual is a complete reversal of the situation that pertained in the early 1960s, when this book was written.



Part One, Chapters Nine through Thirteen

Part One, Chapters Nine through Thirteen Summary

Derek is worried that Loosely might be watching him at the flat with Beatrice-Joanna. He says he is up for a big promotion, and will see the Minister that evening. When they make love, Derek asks if she has taken pills and she says yes, but later she realizes she took analgesic pills, not contraceptives. In Chapter Ten, Tristram gives his class a homework assignment and then tells them he is taking off the rest of the day. On the street, he sees three platoons of police with carbines, which a bystander says are new recruits. Tristram realizes it is the end of the Pelphase, and now the government will force people to be good. He begins to feel a little nervous about having left work before the final school bell. He goes to a drinking establishment for the only liquor sold, which is alc, made from vegetables and fruit peelings. Nobody smokes, and almost everyone is vegetarian. The place is full of homosexuals, which annoys Tristram. One of the drinkers, who is singing, tells Tristram he once was a priest, and that a few pockets of religious people still exist. Several police enter, all of them obvious homosexuals. The priest says he was defrocked because of an affair with a 17-year-old girl. The police start dancing, the priest complains about their homosexuality, and grinning, they beat him up. Tristram denies that he knows the priest, and quickly leaves.

As Chapter Eleven opens, Beatrice-Joanna is lying in bed with Derek, wondering if had intended to forego the contraceptives. She tells him that she cannot understand how he can pretend to be gay, when he obviously loves being heterosexual. He defends the government's strategies, and says the problem is that a family who were caught recently with six children were merely fined and warned. He snaps on the television to check the time, sees an image of the Pelagius statue, and wonders aloud what its new name will be. He dresses to go see the Minister, practicing his gay act before he leaves. In Chapter Twelve, Tristram goes to his flat after having had a couple more drinks at another place, and encounters Derek in the elevator. Derek says he had come to offer condolences concerning Roger's death. After he leaves, Tristram is puzzled by the visit, because he and Derek are not friends, and his older brother was mean to him even when they were young. At the flat, he asks his wife about Derek, but she simply confirms that he had come to visit. She reluctantly allows Tristram to make love to her, but he takes three male contraceptive pills to be extra-safe. In Chapter Thirteen, Tristram and Beatrice-Joanna miss a television announcement by Prime Minister Robert Starling that tough new measures will be instituted to curb child-bearing. A news clip shows a bloody end to the factory strike at the hands of the police, nicknamed the greyboys. The couple also misses the announcement of a new corps called the Population Police, whose head will be Derek Foxe.



Part One, Chapters Nine through Thirteen Analysis

Burgess moves the action forward in Chapter Nine with another mention of Loosely keeping an eye on Derek, and then he foreshadows a subplot with the information that Beatrice-Joanna did not take a contraceptive before having sex with Derek. In Chapter Ten, Tristram's early departure from school sets up his early arrival home in Chapter Twelve, but in the interim, he notices a troop buildup that indicates the relatively lax Pelphase is about to be replaced by the brutal Interphase. In the bar, virtually everyone is homosexual, which would be statistically impossible unless he were in a gay bar. Tristram has just lost his promotion to this hypocrisy, which makes his irritation understandable. The gay police grinning as they beat up the priest symbolizes the replacement of traditional guideposts of morality by the dangerous new order. It is significant that Tristram hurries away, unwilling to confront the powers-that-be. In Chapter Eleven, Derek's mention that he has a big meeting that night foreshadows news of his new job in Chapter Thirteen. Derek's attempt to defend the government's policies to a woman who has just lost her child is, at best, self-serving and unfeeling. He demonstrates that he is aware of the coming Interphase when he wonders what the new name will be of the Government Building's statue. In Chapter Twelve, Beatrice-Joanna's rather calm avoidance of Tristram's questions about why his brother had come to the flat is another mark against her character, just as Tristram's extreme caution in assuring she does not get pregnant shows again that is cowed by the system. The news announcements in Chapter Thirteen show that the Interphase is underway and that Derek's hypocritical act continues to work in his favor.



Part Two, Chapters One through Five

Part Two, Chapters One through Five Summary

As Chapter One of Part Two opens, Tristram is at home at midnight about two months after the start of the Interphase, trying to eat a cereal that tastes like paper, while his wife retches in the bathroom, which he assumes is because of the poor food. In the elevator on his way to school for a graveyard shift, Tristram hears people complaining about the police watching them all the time. At school, a student who has not done his homework explains that it was because he was moved to the state hostel. His parents were taken away because his mother is pregnant. Tristram feels helpless anger. In Chapter Two, Beatrice writes a love letter to Derek, whom she has not seen for two months, except on television. She asks that he send her a signal next time he is on TV, such as using the word "love" or "desire." On her way to post the letter, marked "private," she sees greyboys beating up an old man and she berates them, but they scoff at her. In Chapter Three, Tristram gets a letter at work from his sister Emma, who lives in China. She reports famine, and mass executions against those who break the population-control laws. The new department head, George Wiltshire, approaches and chastises Tristram for teaching that art has its historical roots in fertility rites. Tristram maintains that this is true, and Wiltshire warns him that he could lose his job if he does not stick to the syllabus. At lunch, Tristram feels ill and decides to go home. One of his gay colleagues jokes that it could be morning sickness, which obscurely bothers Tristram.

Chapter Four starts with Tristram and Beatrice-Joanna discussing her pregnancy, which Tristram cannot understand. He is sure he took contraceptive tablets on the day of young Roger's death, which was the only time recently that they had sex. He asks if there is anyone else, and she firmly denies it. He says she must have an abortion, but she thinks it will be possible to have the child. Tristram strongly warns her of the danger, but she says God is stronger than the state, which really worries him. He goes out to buy quinine and castor oil. In Chapter Five, Tristram realizes he is being followed by a small man with a moustache. In a bar, he orders an alc and is approached by the man, who does not give his name but says he is a captain. He says his promotion in the Ministry was stalled by not being gay, and he asks Tristram if Derek's homosexuality is genuine. Tristram says Derek never showed any interest in girls, and the captain asks if Tristram has ever suspected his wife of infidelity. Tristram is incredulous, and then realizes it must be true. The captain says he saw the love letter Beatrice-Joanna wrote to Derek, and Tristram reveals that she is pregnant. The captain wants blame for the fatherhood to be placed on Derek, but he has no proof of the affair. Despondent, Tristram wonders what he can do, and the captain suggests that Tristram kill Derek as a crime of passion, which makes Tristram suspicious that he is being used.



Part Two, Chapters One through Five Analysis

Chapter One shows how much worse things have gotten in the Interphase than they already were in the Pelphase. The food is tasteless, police are everywhere, Tristram now teaches during a graveyard shift at school, and the parents of a student have been taken away because their mother is pregnant. Tristram's anger is disaffected, showing that his response to the oppression all around him is cowardly. Beatrice-Joanna's love letter to Derek in Chapter Two clearly foreshadows trouble, given the control being exerted on everyone's lives during the Interphase. The letter from Emma in Chapter Three serves to expand the crisis beyond England's borders, while foreshadowing even darker events to come. Tristram's little rebellion in teaching that art has its roots in fertility rites shows that he still has fight left in him, even as it makes a point about the life-enhancing power of art. Beatrice-Joanna's determination to have the baby is to her credit, even though she is deceiving Tristram. By now, it is clear that nothing is black-and-white in this story, and no character is utterly blameless. The captain, who does not name himself but obviously is Loosely, reveals in Chapter Four that his objective is to unseat his rival at work, Derek, by proving that he is heterosexual. At the same time, his revelation that Derek is having an affair with Beatrice-Joanna provides a dramatic turn in the plot. Significantly, Tristram does not reject the suggestion that he kill Derek on the grounds that it is immoral, but because he suspects he is being used. This adds layers to Tristram's character, not only in suggesting that he might entertain the murder idea under the right circumstances, but also in showing that he is not gullible, and his intelligence is not merely academic.



Part Two, Chapters Six through Ten

Part Two, Chapters Six through Ten Summary

In Chapter Six, Beatrice-Joanna is confronted outside their flat in the Spurgin Building by Tristram, who has been drinking and accuses her of the affair with Derek. He begins to make a scene, but is interrupted by the arrival of factory workers on strike for not receiving enough food. Platoons of greyboys arrive to brutally break up the demonstration, and Tristram is beaten and taken into custody. He tries to tell them Derek is his brother, but they throw him in a cell. In Chapter Seven, Beatrice-Joanna packs lightly, counts her meager funds, and gets on a train to Central London as the first stop on the way north to the home of her sister Mavis and brother-in-law Shonny. Population Police board and question her, but let her go. Chapter Eight shows Tristram in jail with the protestors, wondering when he will be released. Two greyboys arrive and pass out cards with the names of prisoners who are to be released, but Tristram is not among them. His requests to make phone calls are rejected, but he is allowed to write a letter.

In Chapter Nine, Beatrice-Joanna is boisterously welcomed by Shonny, who is glad she is unaccompanied by Tristram, whom he dislikes. Shonny pours homemade plum wine, which is illegal, and mentions they have been going to mass, also illegal. Mavis says rations have been cut and people are demonstrating. Beatrice-Joanna reveals that she is pregnant, which worries Mavis, especially because they have two children, but Shonny says she can stay with them. Both Shonny and Mavis express their dissatisfaction with Tristram. In Chapter Ten, Derek reads a note from Tristram asking to get him out of jail. The note says if he will not help, Tristram will tell everyone that Derek is responsible for Beatrice-Joanna's pregnancy. The letter is rubber-stamped many times as having been read by various officials. Amused, Derek decides to let his brother stew in jail for a while, and returns to writing his script of an upcoming television speech.

Part Two, Chapters Six through Ten Analysis

The confrontation between Tristram and Beatrice-Joanna in Chapter Six again shows her lack of honesty toward him. The arrival of the factory strikers and the police foreshadows the chaos that Tristram predicted in his lectures would develop in the Interphase. True to his rather weak character, he tries to get out of his arrest by using his hated brother as leverage. Beatrice-Joanna, the more forceful one of the couple, takes definite action in leaving home for what she hopes will be a safer pregnancy in the country with her sister, but once again, her lack of concern for her jailed husband's welfare is disturbing. Through the actions of his characters, the author is making the point that bad times can cause good people to do bad things. As Tristram writes to his brother, Beatrice-Joanna finds sanctuary with her sister and brother-in-law. The story is demonstrating that people are forced to rely on one another for help in trying times, even though such help can compromise their integrity or independence. Derek's

uncaring response to Tristram's letter is the first proof offered in the novel that he is not just manipulative, but vicious. On the other hand, Tristram's foolish threat to expose Derek if he does not help him is clear evidence that Tristram cannot possibly match his brother's wiliness.



Part Three, Chapters One through Four

Part Three, Chapters One through Four Summary

Chapter One begins with an unprecedented and uncontrollable blight that destroys much of the world's grain crops, fruits, poultry, and fish. Prime Minister Robert Starling lies awake at night, distressed by the famine that stalks the globe, and tries to discuss the problem with his unwitting young boyfriend, Abdul Wahab. The Prime Minister is left to think about horrible recent reports of starvation and cannibalism. In Chapter Two, Tristram has grown a beard in prison and has become very angry, especially in his vengeful thoughts about Derek. He makes his last of many attempts to convince his cellmate, who will soon be released, to go kill Derek, but is rebuffed again. The man is released, and his place in the cell is taken by the priest that Tristram saw beaten up in the bar. The man says he was jailed for saying mass. Over the loudspeaker, someone reads a prayer to the forces of death, asking them to desist. The priest is shocked, but Tristram realizes this prayer means the Interphase is ending, and he soon will be released.

In Chapter Three, fall becomes winter, and the Interphase does not end. Apparently, the prayer was just a way for the government to show it had tried everything to stop the famine. Shonny remains optimistic that things will improve, because people are inherently good and there is a God, and Beatrice-Joanna is pleased by this attitude, but Mavis is concerned about the lack of food. The couple's two children, Dymphna and Llewelyn, ask about God and the ritual at mass of eating His body and drinking His blood. Llewelyn announces that the parents of one of his schoolmates ate their boy. Shonny does not believe it, but the children say another boy stole some of the meat and ate it. Dymphna remarks that it is all right to eat God, though, because He is infinite. In Chapter Four, Tristram gets a visit to his cell from the captain, who says he has come to divulge the location of Tristram's wife. He gives the address, which is State Farm NW 313, near Preston, and says she is awaiting the birth of the illegitimate child. Tristram says that he is uninterested. The captain asks when Beatrice-Joanna conceived. He bribes him with a synthetic chocolate bar, which is fought over by Tristram and the priest, who now calls himself the Blessed Ambrose Bailey. Tristram says the conception must have been around the start of the Interphase. The captain does not understand the term, so Tristram explains. The captain says Derek and Beatrice-Joanna will be punished, and as he leaves, Tristram weakly protests that the child is his.

Part Three, Chapters One through Four Analysis

The worldwide blight is symbolic of everything that has gone wrong in human society. It is as if all Nature were rebelling against the damage people are doing to the moral order. Tristram's angry response to his unjust jailing is understandable, and it presages an important development in his character. He no longer will be as weak and easily manipulated as he has been until now. It is significant that Tristram, who earlier rebuffed



Captain Loosely's efforts to convince him to kill Derek, now attempts to convince his cellmate to do the same thing. Tristram has begun to adopt the strategies, and perhaps even the morality, of his oppressors. The conversation in Chapter Three between Shonny and Mavis and their children sets up an interesting parallel between the first report in the novel of cannibalism in response to the famine, and the Catholic rite of transubstantiation, in which a priest's prayers change bread into the body of Christ and wine into His blood before they are consumed by worshippers. The inescapable point is that both activities have sacrifice at their root, with the key difference that the victims of cannibalism have not sacrificed willingly sacrificed themselves for the good of humankind. In Chapter Four, when Tristram gives the address of the farm to Captain Loosely, he endangers Beatrice-Joanna and her impending offspring, which he feebly protests is his. This shows that Tristram's moral sense has been twisted by anger, hatred, and suffering. If he is to recover his dignity, he must find a way back to frame of mind governed by ethics and morality.



Part Three, Chapters Five through Eleven

Part Three, Chapters Five through Eleven Summary

Chapter Five begins with descriptions of an outbreak of killings around Great Britain, after which the victims are cooked and eaten. The most amazing story is that on an island, a community reportedly gorged on human flesh and then engaged in a heterosexual orgy. The next morning, an edible root was seen sprouting from the earth. In Chapter Six, the pet pig at the house of Mavis and Shonny is dying of a disease, even as Beatrice-Joanna delivers a boy, followed shortly by another boy. In Chapter Seven, the Blessed Ambrose Bayley is released from prison, much weakened, while Tristram protests that he should be the one getting out of jail, and begs for food. He tries to attack the warder, but is beaten up. In Chapter Eight, a priest named Father Shackel comes to the house of Mavis and Shonny after being released from prison. He says all the clergy have been freed. Shonny says they have heard rumors of cannibalism, but Father Shackel replies that the situation is unclear. He thinks the priests may have been released to help convince people not to eat one another. Before he leaves, he baptizes the twins, whom Beatrice-Joanna has named Tristram and Derek. The children come in from the barn and say the pig has recovered, and is eating eggs, which means the hens have begun laying again.

In Chapter Nine, Tristram has a new cellmate named Charlie Linklater, a giant man from Nigeria who has been jailed for fathering many children and beating up greyboys. Charlie agrees to help Tristram escape by manufacturing a dispute between the two men, and then beating up the warder when he enters the cell to intervene. This works, and Charlie asks Tristram to hit him with the warder's truncheon before he leaves, to make the escape look natural. Tristram obliges and, wearing the warder's clothes, enters a warders' washroom in the prison, where he shaves off his beard. He then is able to walk out of the prison unmolested. In Chapter Ten, Mavis asks Beatrice-Joanna what she plans to do now that the twins are born. She does not know where to go, but Mavis is very worried about greyboys discovering the babies. Shonny still supports Beatrice-Joanna, but the two sisters are very much on edge. The new mother has no recourse but to stay where she is. In Chapter Eleven, Captain Loosely of the Population Police arrives at the farm with two other policemen. Beatrice-Joanna hides with her twins, but the captain orders a search. Shonny tries to stop them but is confronted by the two policemen, and then Beatrice-Joanna appears, saying she does not want trouble but will not allow harm to her twins. The captain says they are safe, as he only wants to harm Derek. Beatrice-Joanna says she and her children will go with him.



Part Three, Chapters Five through Eleven Analysis

In Chapter Five, the outbreak of full-scale cannibalism, which is accompanied in one case by a heterosexual orgy, shows that all the rules of civilization are being dismantled, and yet an edible root appears, which symbolizes rebirth. It appears that such chaos is the price that now must be paid if humans are to find their way back to civility from the degradations they have imposed upon themselves. Beatrice-Joanna's delivery of twins is another symbol of the species' slow return to life even in the midst of death, symbolized by the diseased pet pig. The release from prison of the clergy, the baptizing of the twins, and the recovery of the pig and chickens are all signs that the cycle of life is renewing itself despite the damage humans have done to Nature. Tristram's escape from prison displays his new, more resourceful self, while moving the plot forward, toward whatever he eventually will do concerning Derek and Beatrice-Joanna. When Captain Loosely finds Beatrice-Joanna and the children, his declaration that the babies will not be harmed seems hard to believe in the light of the killings that are occurring everywhere, but the government has not yet shown itself to be operating entirely outside the law. With this plot development, the author has now completed the move of both main characters, Tristram and Beatrice-Joanna, out of their seclusions and into the chaos building in the world at large.



Part Four, Chapters One through Seven

Part Four, Chapters One through Seven Summary

Tristram is eager to find his wife as Chapter One begins, but he no longer wants revenge. The city is chaotic, with drunken people killing and cooking one another in the streets. He approaches a group, and is welcomed when he says he is just out of prison. They say the country is without a government, and Tristram says the Gusphase has not yet begun, which they do not understand. He drinks broth, and says he wants to get to the Northern Province. They say no trains are running, and the countryside is dangerous. He spends the night and in the morning, they give him meat to take on the journey. In Chapter Two, he walks a long way, often encountering the sights and smells of roasting flesh. He notices that drinking water is becoming slightly foul. A man tells him that all the prisons were emptied the day after Tristram's escape. The man says he is a soldier of a new army whose goal is restore order. He admits that everyone is a cannibal now, but claims he is one of the civilized cannibals, because his meat comes from a tin can. In Chapter Three, Tristram continues his journey and sees ploughed fields as he begins to enter the countryside. He hears flute music and people singing, and sees men and women having sex in the furrows. He decides the blight had been caused by the refusal of humans to procreate. Chapter Four describes an event at a town through which Tristram is passing. The men and women are being paired off by lottery, to go into the fields and have sex. The organizer worries that it will lead to trouble, but Tristram reassures him that civility will soon prevail again. The organizer says that he had himself castrated in the old days to advance his career and now regrets it.

In Chapter Five, Tristram has to evade the ladies of the town, who are desirous of him. He goes to Litchfield, where carnival or celebration of free love is underway. Even the clergy and the army march in the parade. The parade moves to a large field, where Tristram is propositioned by a woman and accepts. The celebration goes all night, with couples pairing off in the furrows. At dawn, Tristram continues his journey. In Chapter Six, he encounters more such revelry in several other towns. He notices the appearance of money, which suggests people have jobs, and birds being roasted alongside the human flesh. He sees a play, an event that would not have been allowed until now. He also sees a local newspaper, and grabs one to devour the news, which says a government has been formed and martial law has been declared. People are being commanded to return to work. Tristram continues his journey. In Chapter Seven, Captain Loosely listens on the radio to the news of martial law. His group is waylaid by townsfolk who admire Beatrice-Joanna's babies and take one of Loosley's men to boil and eat while letting the others go. Beatrice-Joanna is sickened by the cannibalism but also is starving, and struggles against the impulse to eat the roasted flesh. Captain Loosley confidently expects to find order restored upon their return to London, but his driver insolently calls him a fool. When they arrive at the Ministry of Infertility, they see its name has been changed to the Ministry of Fertility. Loosely is astonished, but the driver laughs derisively.



Part Four, Chapters One through Seven Analysis

The dominance in these chapters of the lawless Interphase symbolizes the central role that rules of conduct play in the civilized societies. Indeed, civilization cannot exist without such rules, and the people Tristram encounters during his journey across the countryside are living like animals. They devour one another ravenously, copulate at random, and foul their own drinking water. Nevertheless, as he goes along, he sees signs of civilized life beginning to reappear. People begin to cultivate the land once more, to play music, and use money, which means some of them have gone back to work. The soldier makes the weak case that he belongs to the civilized part of society, because he only eats human flesh that has been canned, which is morbidly funny but also has a grain of truth in it. At this point, not enough food remains for people to survive without cannibalism, and the soldier's point is that continuance of the species requires adherence to rules, even when those rules concern the proper manner by which people should consume one another. Tristram sees the wanton sexuality as essentially a good sign, because it heralds a return to normalcy, even though at the moment the behavior is out of control. Captain Loosely, on the other hand, has complete faith in his superiors, whose policies have brought about this chaos. He represents foolish, unthinking capitulation to the rule-makers. The point Anthony Burgess is making is that rules and laws are vital, but the good citizen retains the ability to critically analyze such strictures, and to speak up whenever leaders begin to take society down a dangerous path.



Part Four, Chapters Eight through Eleven

Part Four, Chapters Eight through Eleven Summary

In Chapter 8, a new prime minister named George Ockham gives a television speech about how everyone should be confident that they will be allowed to pursue the good life with minimal interference from government. Tristram watches the speech from an eating-house in the town of Chester, where he has just consumed a large meat-meal. He hears a loudspeaker announcement of a party by the river that night where partners will be provided. The town is full of soldiers and their equipment who distribute cans of meat they call "bully." He sees a news disc report of love-ins and human sacrifice in numerous countries, and then he walks out of town to hitchhike. A man driving an army truck offers a lift to a spot only a few miles from Farm NW 313. On the way, the driver says a war is coming. Tristram says wars are finished, and asks who would be the enemy, but the driver simply says that will have to be decided. In Chapter 9, Tristram gets another short lift, and then begins a three-mile walk to the farm. He enters the town of Preston to the electronic sounds of bells. In a large meeting hall with extremely high ceilings he sees an altar, pews, and priests. One priest takes the rostrum to announce it is Easter Day. He talks about Jesus, saying his blood runs through the whole world, and adding that God goes by many names. Someone in the congregation yells out that this blasphemy, and the priest worships at the altar of Baal, where sacrifices are performed, and where even his own children were sacrificed. Tristram recognizes the man as Shonny, whom he follows as Shonny leaves the church.

In Chapter Ten, Tristram questions Shonny in a bar about what happened to Beatrice-Joanna. Shonny gives only brief answers, berating himself for having trusted in God. Crying, he says a false God has taken possession of the church. He says his own children did not come home from school, and were killed. He becomes angry at having protected Tristram's wife and the two children, which is how Tristram learns she had twins. He tries to get more information about their whereabouts, learning only that they probably were brought to London. Shonny, consumed with rage and grief, tells him to go away. Tristram asks for a loan, but Shonny refuses to give him any money and Tristram leaves, angered. In Chapter Eleven, Tristram wonders if he should beg on the streets of Preston. He spots an army feeding center, where he gets stew. A captain enters and distributes money to the vagrants. He tells Tristram to sign for his money, which he does. He then is escorted out the door, with other men and women, where he is informed that he has signed up for the army. A sergeant says the tour of duty will be twelve months. Tristram begins to laugh, and the sergeant praises him for his good attitude.



Part Four, Chapters Eight through Eleven Analysis

The progression from the chaotic Interphase to the more stable Gusphase is foreshadowed at the start of Chapter Eight, when the new prime minister announces the advent of a less restrictive government. Nevertheless, the change is not immediate, and Tristram witnesses and hears reports of unabated human sacrifices and copulation. The distribution by soldiers of tinned human meat is another sign that the government is trying to restore order, although the macabre nature of the order they are restoring is part of the author's black humor. The driver who predicts a coming war is foreshadowing the battle in which Tristram soon will participate. The Easter service is another sign that the cycle is turning toward a restoration of order, but Shonny recognizes the hypocrisy all around him. Tristram is too busy trying to survive to comfort Shonny in his woe. He continues to eat the human meat that is offered to him, and his acceptance of money from the government is not without strings attached. His conscription symbolizes the tightening grip of the leaders on the people as they attempt to restore order by controlling the movements and actions of the populace.



Part Five, Chapters One through Four

Part Five, Chapters One through Four Summary

Chapter One begins with Derek cooing at the twins. He now lives openly with Beatrice-Joanna in a large flat with a view of the sea, and is a high official at the Ministry of Fertility, while Captain Loosely has been demoted to a junior rank. The couple talks about getting married and having more children, which the government encourages. Beatrice-Joanna seems less than thrilled with her life. When Derek goes to work, she turns on the news disc and sees news of developing hostilities between China and neighboring countries, which reminds her of reports of British Army troops training on the Annexe Islands. Once, she thinks she sees Tristram's face among the troops, but Derek says Tristram is dead. In her bedroom, she unlocks a box and extracts a letter she has written to Tristram that tells about the children, in which she writes that she believes they are his, and says that she hopes they all can be reunited. She addresses an envelope to him, care of the British Army, goes outside, and mails it. In Chapter Two, Tristram enters the office of a Lieutenant-Colonel Williams, who consults a report. It says Tristram has done a good job as an army instructor, except for his teachings in current affairs, when he asks the class who the enemy is, and what the war is about. Williams says it is not his position as a soldier to ask such questions, and when Tristram objects, he assigns him to a rifle company as a platoon sergeant. He is on Annexe Island B6, which is an artificial island in the sea, once used for population overflow but now housing a regiment. He meets a Lieutenant Dollimore, who tells him to take over instruction of troops in naming the parts of a rifle. Tristram tells a corporal to do the job, and asks Dollimore if he has heard of the battalion seeing action. Dollimore has heard nothing, but is delighted by the possibility.

In Chapter Three, Tristram lies on his bunk in the barracks, talking to the nearby Sergeant Lightbody about who the army's enemy is and where they might go. Tristram writes another of many letters to Beatrice-Joanna, although he has little hope they will be received. Lightbody talks about bomber planes and torpedoes, but Tristram says they no longer exist. Lightbody suggests that the army is its own enemy, and an era of endless war is beginning. He says women also are fighting in auxiliary units, but Tristram is doubtful, having heard nothing of this. They talk of the prospect of death. Lightbody is not too concerned, but Tristram wants to live. In Chapter Four, the platoon marches in the dark, stopping in a field lit by arc lamps, where a priest says mass. They have breakfast to a recorded speech about the glory of war, and then march to a quay. Dollimore counts six platoons as they enter a ship. Lightbody predicts no troops will be allowed out of the hold once the ship disembarks, which proves to be correct.

Part Five, Chapters One through Four Analysis

Derek's ability to adapt quickly to changing social conditions is another comment on the hypocrisy inherent in politics and governance. Beatrice-Joanna is not entirely happy



with the state of affairs, but this discontent seems to come not only from a dim recognition of the immorality that surrounds her, but also from her own inability to cleave to one partner. Her letter to Tristram is devious in expressing a belief that the children are his, when she knows this is untrue. Tristram's rebellion continues in Chapter Two with his attempts to awaken other soldiers to questions about the war, but he is punished by being placed in a fighting battalion. Dollimore's joy at the prospect of battle is a portrayal of the unquestioning dupe who becomes cannon fodder for leaders in all wars. Sergeant Lightbody is far more aware of reality than is Dollimore, but the sergeant is fatalistic about being in the grip of forces more powerful than he is, and such an attitude can amount to a death sentence. Lightbody knows that the troops will be sealed in the hold of the ship, which demonstrates the complete control their leaders now hold over their fate.



Part Five, Chapters Five through Nine

Part Five, Chapters Five through Nine Summary

In Chapter Five, Tristram has assumed the role of platoon leader on the ship, assuring the men that they will soon have a chance to fight the enemy. To him, however, it all seems strange and unreal, as if he were in an old war film. At night, he leaps from his bunk and tells Sergeant Lightbody they have to get out of here, but Lightbody replies that their death will be preceded by an illusion that they have choice in the matter. An orderly enters with letters, among which is Beatrice-Joanna's letter to Tristram. It is the first he has received, and after reading it, he unashamedly gets on his knees and prays. In Chapter Six, the soldiers have been on the ship for three more days, locked in the hold. Finally, they reach their unknown destination and disembark, one platoon after another. The brigade's captains are summoned elsewhere, which worries Tristram, who thinks this means the officers will be protected from whatever fate awaits the rest. One of the men, Corporal Haskell, recognizes the landscape well enough to be sure they are somewhere in Ireland. They march, and as they approach base camp, they hear a rhythm that sounds like heavy cannon fire, but it is too regular, as if it were a recording. The camp is surrounded by an electric fence. They see a convoy of trucks, which a soldier says is full of the corpses of soldiers.

In Chapter Seven, the men are told after mass that they will go to the front that evening. Mr. Dollimore quotes lines he learned in officers' training school, taken from war films and war poetry. Their dinner comes from a can labeled in Chinese script, and because Tristram's sister lives in China, he is familiar with the key word of the ingredients, which is "man." They march out of camp, through a hamlet, and to what looks like an old country home. Through the front door, they enter a long trench. Tristram demands to know who they are fighting. He declares there is no enemy and the artillery noises are fake, at which Dollimore threatens to shoot him for treason, and fires a shot far off target. In Chapter Eight, Tristram asks Corporal Haskell if he is certain they are in Ireland, and he says yes. Haskell believes the Irish are the enemy. They hear people approaching across no-man's land, and Tristram realizes he was wrong about the absence of an enemy. Dollimore says the attack will commence at 2200 hours and when the moment comes, Tristram does his job, prodding the others out of the trenches. He sees Dollimore and Haskell shot dead, and then recognizes that the enemy are all women. A soldier is shot and falls backward on Tristram, who plays dead underneath the body. Three minutes later, soldiers walk through the battlefield, shooting anyone who is not yet dead, but they fail to shoot Tristram. In Chapter Nine, as Tristram sneaks out of the trench in the middle of the night, he finds a table full of cash taken from the dead soldiers. He pockets it, and walks to the electric fence. He follows it to a gateway, where the startled sentry says he has never seen anyone come through from that side. Tristram says he has to file a report. He asks to see a map, which confirms he is in Ireland. The sentry says there is no available military transport, but a train station is less than a mile away, and Tristram departs.



Part Five, Chapters Five through Nine Analysis

War is so remote from Tristram's experience in this futuristic story that his only way to understand his situation is by remembering old films, while Sergeant Lightbody's assessment that the illusion of choice has been created for them is very much grounded in reality. When Tristram receives the letter from Beatrice-Joanna and reacts by praying, the suggestion is that human belief in God is an expression of hope, in contrast to Lightbody's despair. The electric fence around the base camp and the corpses being trucked away foreshadow a terrible experience for the platoon, which occurs in the following chapters. Tristram's guess that there is no enemy turns out to be technically wrong but symbolically right. The enemy is women who have been forced into the same situation as the men they are fighting, which makes them not real enemies at all. The real enemy is the government that has orchestrated this mutual slaughter. Its leaders, who include the army's higher officers, keep themselves at a safe distance from the battle, which shows once again how the few in power will ruthlessly manipulate the many followers. They even rob the dead of the money that has been paid to them, and Tristram now has no compunctions about taking the money for his own survival. At the gateway in the electric fence, he pretends to be one of the leaders, and this pretence is accepted unquestioningly, which shows how easily followers can be manipulated by those who express strength and conviction. The horrors Tristram has experienced have made him smarter and bolder, improving his chances of survival.



Epilogue, Chapters One through Four

Epilogue, Chapters One through Four Summary

On the train, Tristram has bad dreams about the slaughter, and how the corpses will be processed into food. He spends the next night in a hotel, buys civilian clothes in the morning, and boards a ship for the crossing to England. In Brighton, he feels very sick, and decides to stay in an Army hostel for five days to recuperate. He sleeps for days in a cold sweat. Finally, he gets up and orders eggs and milk, but is stressed, and goes back to bed. He cleans up, and goes to civilian lodgings nearby, where he pays for another week's stay. In Chapter Two, Tristram spends four weeks reading history in the library. When he has fully recovered, he takes a train to the War Office in London. He bulls his way past receptionists to a lieutenant, and identifies himself as a survivor of one of the Ireland massacres. The lieutenant takes him to see a Major Berkeley, and Tristram enters the office with his gun drawn. When he identifies himself, the major asks why he is not in uniform, and Tristram replies that his one-year tour of duty ended today. The two engage in a debate over whether the exterminations were murder, when both sides were armed and under orders. Major Berkeley seems unworried about Tristram's threat to make the killings public. He says rather than a government branch, the War Department is a corporation fulfilling a contract. He agrees to sign Tristram's discharge and to issue his final pay. Tristram gives him the gun. They shake hands, and Tristram leaves.

In Chapter Three, Tristram takes the train to Brighton, and visits the Education Department in search of a job. Openings are plentiful. He is offered a position at his old school, but Joscelyne is still principal there, and Tristram accepts a position lecturing in the history of war the Technical College. He rents a nice apartment, and then walks to the sea-front and approaches the Ministry of Fertility. He looks at the stone sculpture atop the neighboring Government Building, and wonders again who it represents, good or bad, in the world and in him. In Chapter Four, Beatrice-Joanna stands at the rails of the promenade looking out to sea, her two twins beside her in their stroller. On the other side of the sea, former Prime Minister Robert Starling waits in exile for the change of conditions that will allow his return to England. At a touch on her arm, Beatrice-Joanna turns, is startled, and then clings to Tristram. Neither one speaks.

Epilogue, Chapters One through Four Analysis

Once Tristram is free of the immediate threat to his life, the full impact of what he has experienced hits him, and he endures a prolonged illness that is both physical and spiritual. The money he took from the battlefield proves to be essential to his survival by enabling him to remain isolated and quiet for long enough to recover from the horror that has overwhelmed him. by the time he emerges from his convalescence, he has devised a bold plan of attack that begins with direct confrontation with the true enemy. Not surprisingly, he finds that the enemy is indifferent to his fate, full of rationalizations

about miseries inflicted, and mostly interested in wealth and power. Major Berkeley expresses no worry about Tristram's threat to expose the wrongdoing of those in power, and even allows Tristram to return unmolested to his former life. The acceptance by Tristram of this offer is both wise and sad. He understands that no satisfaction could be gained from wreaking vengeance on Derek, and he knows that his own salvation lies in finding and forgiving Beatrice-Joanna. The cycle has come full circle, and reason again prevails. Civilization will reassert itself, but Tristram's eyes have been opened to the evil that always threatens order, and to his own impotence in the face of it.



Characters

Tristram Foxe

Tristram Foxe undergoes the greatest personality changes of any character in the novel. At first, he is a rather bland and timid soul. He is a history teacher at a boys' school who lives a quiet life, obeys the rules, and does not even complain about his wife's lack of sexual interest in him. When their small child dies at the start of the book, he seems to accept the tragedy without much emotion. The only small rebellion in his life is to teach his indifferent students about a theory of cyclical phases in history that is not an approved part of the curriculum. Tristram has no idea that his wife is cheating on him with his own brother, but when he learns of it, the anger he feels is like an awakening after a long slumber. His imprisonment further fuels this anger, which becomes rage and bitterness that give him the courage to break out of prison. Full of thoughts of revenge, he braves the dangerous outside world, and the experiences he has in the countryside and later, in the military, are devastating. He goes through a long period of psychic and physical sickness caused by the corruption and violence he not only has witnessed but in which he has partaken. Yet he emerges from his convalescence stronger, more resourceful and, most important of all, without the thirst for vengeance that had been crippling his soul. By the time that he reunites with his wife at the novel's end, he is much wiser and more in control of his life than at the start of the story. The implication is that he accordingly will be a much better husband and father than he was than before all the trials that he endured.

Beatrice Joanna-Foxe

Beatrice-Joanna Foxe has elemental traits, almost as if she were an archetype rather than a normal human. She is the Earth Mother, the fundamental life-giver, driven by an overwhelming urge to procreate. In that sense, she represents what is best in humankind, yet her focus on sexuality also leads her to stray from her husband into an affair with his duplicitous brother. Her infidelity and her lies about it cannot be explained as a reaction to her husband's romantic disinterest in her, because Tristram seems attentive to her throughout the time they are together. Beatrice-Joanna seems to thrive on sexual intrigue, and she shows little awareness of Derek's moral failings. Later, when she pines for Tristram, her emotion seems to be driven as much by boredom or a need for novelty as it is by deep feelings for him. The only intense loyalty she displays is toward her children. Heartbroken by the death of her first child, she is determined to carry her next pregnancy to full term, despite the dangers posed by her choice. She takes advantage of the shelter afforded her by her sister and brother-in-law despite the threat to their safety posed by her presence. When she emerges from hiding to present herself to Captain Loosely, it seems to be first selfless thing she has done, although it could be interpreted as a bold gamble to save herself and her twins. Beatrice-Joanna does not lack bravery or self-assertion, but she suffers from a moral blindness that works in sad counterpoint to her good traits. She is not an unlikeable person, yet she is



flawed and untrustworthy, and there is no evidence at the novel's end that she has changed for the better.

Derek Foxe

Derek Foxe is the ultimate self-promoter in a society that places a premium on Machiavellian behavior. His pretence of being gay to help his career prospects is so diligently rendered that he goes into acting mode even before leaving the sanctuary of his tryst with Beatrice-Joanna at her apartment. He explains away the immoral activities of the government by arguing that the achievement of a desired end justifies any means. He embraces his promotion to head of the Population Police as a desirable career move, never questioning the brutality that he must foster as part of the job. He keeps his innocent brother in prison to protect his own position, and he displays no remorse over stealing Tristram's wife. His loyalty to her and to the twins carries with it the suggestion of ownership, as if he values them as commodities or material goods. When the ministry in which he works changes its title from "Infertility" to "Fertility," Derek flows effortlessly into doing work that directly contradicts what he previously has done. Full of glib argumentation and a masterful liar, he is a ruthless opportunist, willing to do whatever it takes to get ahead. A perfect fit in the corrupt government for which he works, Derek is a man without conscience, which by definition means that he is capable of evil.

Shonny

Shonny represents the decent, religious man who cleaves to his principles even in the midst of dangerous social breakdown all around him. Sadly, his faith in the goodness of humankind proves to be naïve, as his children are taken from him, apparently to be killed and cannibalized. He learns from this terrible experience that he cannot trust in God or in the social order to ensure that people conduct themselves with decency and honor. By the end of the novel, the bravado he had exhibited in insisting that the family shelter the pregnant Beatrice-Joanna despite the risks to their own safety has disappeared. In its stead are embitterment and devastation. Shonny is a good man, broken by bad times.

Captain Loosley

Captain Loosely is an ambitious but dull servant of the government, who resents Derek's rise to power and works hard to undermine him. He tries to convince Tristram to murder Derek, and when that effort fails, he learns from Derek the whereabouts of Beatrice-Joanna, to take her and the children to government authorities as a way to destroy Derek's reputation. Stupidly, Loosely does not foresee that the upheavals throughout the country and the world will result in new government policies that once again will make heterosexuality praiseworthy, thus defusing the scandal of Derek's fatherhood. His relegation to a low post in the new government seems like a fair



outcome of his plotting, since any worse punishment would not be in keeping with a leadership that has repeatedly proven itself to favor sneakiness and self-interest.

Mavis

Mavis is Shonny's wife, and the voice of reason in the family. She knows that it is important to support her sister in a time of need, yet she also insists that their own family should come first. When Shonny fails to listen to her advice, the couple pays the ultimate price of losing their two children.

Mr. Dollimore

Mr. Dollimore is the lieutenant in charge of the army battalion to which Tristram is assigned. Dollimore is a fool whose concept of war is drawn from poetry and scenes from old films to which he was exposed during officer training school. He believes the government's war rhetoric implicitly, never for a moment doubting that the cause is glorious, and even threatening to shoot Tristram as a traitor when he asks questions. Dollimore rushes over the parapet in battle, and is immediately killed.

Sergeant Lightbody

Sergeant Lightbody has the lifetime soldier's cynicism toward the military and battle. He thinks the world is entering a period of constant, interminable warfare. He believes that the government wants soldiers to think they have a choice regarding going to war, although in reality they have no option. Lightbody does not believe he will survive and sees no way out of his predicament. He dies in battle.

The Beloved Ambrose Bayley

The Beloved Ambrose Bayley is a defrocked priest who appears occasionally in the book. He tells Tristram he was defrocked for a dalliance with a young girl. During the course of the novel, he is beaten up by gay policemen, is jailed with Tristram, and is released when the government changes policies to reaffirm the value of religion.

Robert Starling

Robert Starling is the gay prime minister of Great Britain during the novel's Pelphase, who is later exiled to a foreign country as the cycle begins to move into the Gusphase, and heterosexuality is again approved. Near the novel's end, Starling waits patiently for another turn of the cycle that will bring him back into power.



Abdul Wahal

Abdul Wahal is Starling's young male concubine. He plays the fool, asking silly or obvious questions, and pretending ignorance, but he knows more than Starling realizes. Adul also pretends to have great love and respect for Starling, but actually is contemptuous of him.

Dymphna and Lewellyn

Dymphna and Lewellyn are the young children of Shonny and Mavis. They ask questions about God and cannibalism, and near the novel's end are taken away from school by unnamed people who Shonny thinks will kill and eat them.



Objects/Places

London

London is where much of the novel's action takes place. In the future, Greater London has expanded hugely, until it takes in the seaside town of Brighton and many provinces in other directions.

Brighton

Brighton is the seaside town, now part of Greater London, which includes several important government buildings, the small flat of Tristram and Beatrice-Joanna, and a promenade beloved by the couple.

The Ministry of Infertility

The Ministry of Infertility is the government department in Brighton where Derek Foxe works. Its name later is changed to the Ministry of Fertility.

The Foxes' Flatlet

The Foxes' Flatlet is where Tristram lives with Beatrice-Joanna and where she entertains Derek for their trysts. A tiny place, its furniture and other accoutrements come out of the walls, ceiling, or floor at the touch of buttons.

The Spurgin Building

The Spurgin Building is a gigantic skyscraper in Brighton that contains the Foxes' little flat.

Unitary School (Boys) Division Four

Unitary School (Boys) Division Four is where Tristram teaches school in the first part of the novel. He later rejects an opportunity to return there to teach.

Northern Province

Northern Province is the rural region to which Beatrice-Joanna goes to stay with Shonny and Mavis while she has her babies.



State Farm NW 313

State Farm NW 313 is the address of the house where Shonny and Mavis live with their children. This is where Captain Loosely finds Beatrice-Joanna.

Preston

Preston is the town closest to State Farm NW 313. Tristram passes through Preston on his way to the farm, and sees Shonny at the church meeting, who tells him that Beatrice-Joanna and the twins have been taken away.

Annexe Island B6

Annexe Island B6 is an artificial island in the sea where Tristram is stationed after his conscription in the army.

Ireland

Ireland is where Tristram's brigade is sent for an ostensible war, which turns out to be a mass slaughter organized by the government of Great Britain.

The War Department

The War Department is where Tristram goes after escaping from the battle in Ireland. Located in London, the department turns out to be a private corporation.



Themes

Good and Evil

Over the course of this novel, British society moves through three historically-defined phases, in which government alters its rules and the amount of control it exerts over the populace in accordance with which of three underpinning philosophies prevails. These three views of humankind are essentially judgments of how good or bad, how strong or weak, people are at their core. In the Pelphase, the citizens are considered to be kind, trustworthy, and reasonable, and they are given license to act as they please. The Interphase begins after people take unfair advantage of their freedoms and begin exploiting each other—particularly the rich and powerful exploiting everyone else—which leads to strikes, riots, and crackdowns by police. The Gusphase is ushered in by a determination on the part of leaders that people aren't thoroughly bad, as had been assumed during the Interphase, but that they nevertheless are not intrinsically good, and therefore should be governed fairly yet sternly. Such notions of good and bad in people are at the root of religion, which is why religious observations are discouraged or encouraged by the government, depending on which phase is currently underway in the story. Of course, the leaders of a society are also people, whose actions can be good or bad, and this is the point that most interests Anthony Burgess in his novel. Aware that people have good and bad potentials in them, and are not simply one or the other, he shows that difficult or trying conditions in life can lead people into making bad decisions, and that evil actions can result. While not offering a specific solution to this threat, his novel suggests that the greatest crime is to lose sight of our common humanity. His book forcefully demonstrates that consideration of the ancient good and bad question must always begin with respect and reverence for every human life.

The Will to Survive

Famine becomes so intense in this novel that not only do people begin openly preying upon one another, but eventually the only way for almost anyone to survive is by cannibalism. This is the final affront, in that people cannot dehumanize themselves any further than by consuming each other. Stories of people stuck in situations that force them to either become cannibals or starve to death have a long history, but Anthony Burgess expands that rare occurrence into a global phenomenon, making it the norm for almost everyone. In so doing, he asks how low people will stoop in their behavior to survive. At what point will they say life is not worth living under such debased conditions? His answer seems to be that the will to live is more powerful for most people than the will to live morally. Burgess does not take a firm stand either for or against this conclusion. It could be defended on the grounds that survival is the foremost moral duty of each individual, because it is how we affirm the sanctity of life. It also could be attacked on the grounds that what makes us human - our soul or spiritual orientation and our sense of morality must remain intact at all costs, even unto death, if we are to retain our humanity. Rather than taking a stance on this question, the author



extrapolates a rare set of circumstances into the status quo to demonstrate that war, and even murder, are not the lowest points to which societies ultimately could descend. His is a cautionary theme with a nightmarish cast.

Aphrodite versus Ares

The saving grace from the tribulations in this novel is procreative love. This is ironic, considering that the problems in the story stem from global overpopulation. Yet the blight that destroys crops and fishes, leaving humans with virtually nothing to eat aside from each other, is seen by the author as having arisen from the repression of heterosexual love. What he means is that the balance of nature has been powerfully damaged by attempts to control overpopulation through repression of the fundamental urge of the species, which is to reproduce. The author's condemnatory depiction of homosexuality could be seen as homophobic, but its literary purpose is to replace the means of reproduction, through heterosexual couples and families, with a paradigm that is constitutionally incapable of producing children. If procreative love were to be entirely replaced by sexual congress that can yield no progeny, the fate of humankind would be sealed, but Burgess is not interested in exploring such an unlikely outcome. His deeper theme is that the natural order of things begins with love and continuance of the species through family. Aphrodite, the ancient Greek goddess of love, should be our guiding light, he suggests. In her stead, the option would be Ares, god of war. Artistry and all creativity in life stem from love, while violence and war yield only death. The natural order is life-affirming. It includes not only humans but all species and the balance is globally interconnected, which is why each aspect of it must be nurtured and maintained.



Style

Point of View

In this novel, Anthony Burgess alternates between the points of view of his two main characters, Tristram and Beatrice-Joanna Foxe. He goes into the thoughts of both characters, but only sparingly. For the most part, he shows what they are thinking and feeling by depicting what they do and say. In that sense, the novel largely employs a dramatic viewpoint, enhanced by the consistent use of third person. The book is dominated by dialogue and action. Either Tristram or Beatrice-Joanna is present in almost every scene, but they sometimes are mere onlookers as other characters come to the fore. The author's choice of third person gives him distance from the characters, which is important, because both protagonists are flawed people. By avoiding the use of first person and by not delving deeply into the thoughts of his two protagonists, Burgess refrains from either judging or empathizing with these damaged characters. His third-person point of view concentrates instead on driving the narrative forward quickly through a focus on actions rather than thoughts. The effect Burgess creates is of a headlong rush through events that unfold so rapidly that there is not much time for reflection on mistakes being made by the characters or flaws in their understanding of themselves and others. This is useful, because the author is not principally concerned with examining the personalities of his characters. Indeed, they represent types of people - timid or bold, honest or dishonest - caught up in events much more powerful than they are. Burgess is more interested in collective or societal ethics in this novel than in individual problems, and his choice of viewpoint serves that interest.

Setting

The novel is set in Great Britain, principally in London, although that city as seen in the future has spread all the way to the sea. Greater London now embraces the seaside town of Brighton, as well as many formerly outlying provinces. The two main protagonists live in Brighton, where key government buildings also are located. Another setting that plays a role in the story is the seaside promenade in Brighton, which represents contact with Nature's powers of renewal and regeneration. Both Tristram and Beatrice-Joanna journey during the novel into the Northern Province, which is rural and affords a degree of sanctuary from the strictures and power of the government and its soldiers and policemen. When Tristram takes a solo trip in the Northern Province to find Beatrice-Joanna, he passes through a number of English towns. They are fairly interchangeable in terms of their description by the author, but collectively they amount to a panorama of uncontrolled human behavior, ranging over time from murder and cannibalism to hedonistic bacchanals and orgies. Burgess transforms the bucolic stereotype of the English countryside into a nightmare of leering faces and roasting human flesh. Later in the story, when Tristram is conscripted into the army, he is originally on an artificial island in the sea. This temporary setting is almost devoid of features, but when his batallion is shipped to Ireland, the battle zone they encounter



there is a setting drawn sharply with the use of only a few key details. Their base camp is surrounded by an electric fence. Much of the action in Ireland occurs in the dead of night. The battalion is marched into what looks like an old farm manor, but beyond the door is a long trench, as was used in the trench warfare of World War I. Again, the setting creates the impression of a bad dream, which perfectly suits the novel's nightmarish plot.

Language and Meaning

The vocabulary used by Anthony Burgess in his books is among the largest of any modern author. He is fond of extremely unusual words, some of which are obsolete. He uses descriptive forms of words that are normally seen as nouns, or vice versa, and he employs jargon from technical or semi-technical pursuits, such as music, rhetoric, or biology. Examples of such words in this novel, which are not included in the vocabulary section of this guide because of their highly unusual nature, include: steatopygous, tigrine, alveolizing, strabismus, vexillae, chunnering, bathycolpous, flavicomous, spondees, celidhs, anthropophagy, and thallasographers. There are many other rare and mysterious words in the book. Burgess is also famous for creating words and artificial languages in his novels, as he did in his most well-known book, *A Clockwork Orange*, and other writers have praised his inventiveness with vocabulary. In this novel, the strange words help to create an otherworldly effect that is appropriate to a story set in the indeterminate future, in which events of almost unimaginable horror occur. Even so, it is sometimes unsettling to read a dialogue between two people, and suddenly encounter an extremely large or learned word in the mouth of, say, a government functionary. Apparently, in this book the future brings not only widespread murder and cannibalism but extraordinary language skills as well. Despite the big words scattered throughout the text, much of the rest of the writing is easy to follow. The author's intent is clearly not to confuse or dismay the reader, although the posturing effect of the vocabulary is hard to ignore. Even so, liberal use of dialogue and action verbs gives the story momentum, making it a relatively quick read.

Structure

The novel's structure is linear in time, although the text is multiply divided into parts and chapters. It begins with a note that says the book's title is drawn from a refrain in a folk song. The volume is divided into four parts and an epilogue. Each such section has from nine to thirteen chapters, except the epilogue, which has four chapters, and the chapter count starts at one in each new part. The straightforward structure is an aid to the author's objective of keeping the action moving at a rapid pace. No character stays in one place for very long, the government and police regularly change their policies toward the public throughout the story, and society goes through major upheavals over the course of the tale. Only about one year elapses during the novel, but the many changes that occur in the characters' lives and in the wider world during that year seem to compress time. The effect is of a classic page-turner, which makes for a quick read, slowed down only by the author's extraordinarily large vocabulary. It is significant that



Burgess begins his tale at the death of a child, because widespread deaths and killing haunt the novel, but equally significant is his ending of the story with the reunion of the husband-and-wife protagonists. In a classical sense, comedies end with marriages or reunions, while tragedies end with death. By beginning with death and ending with reunion, Burgess chooses a structure that helps to place his novel in the category of black or dystopian comedy, signaling that amid the bleakness he sees hope for the future.



Quotes

"The young dandy, bright with cyclamen lipstick, twittered at her tears" (Part One, Chapter One, p. 7).

"Ethnic divisions were no longer important; the world was split into language groups" (Part One, Chapter Three, p. 16).

"A near-vegetarian world, non-smoking, teetotal except for alc" (Part One, Chapter Ten, p. 38).

"But, of course, we don't have slogans to make us good any more. We have the big stick" (Part Two, Chapter Four, p. 70).

"I suppose sublimation is the big word; don't eat your neighbor, eat God instead" (Part Three, Chapter Eight, p. 141).

"This new flat of his had belonged to a real reading man, a professor of Chinese, whose flesh had proved, despite his great age, not un-succulent" (Part Four, Chapter One, p. 167).

"He passed jolly or somnolent dining clubs, corpses, bones, but was not himself molested. The endless city had a smell of roasting flesh and stopped-up drains" (Part Four, Chapter Two, p. 169).

"Yes, but damn it all, we in Aylesbury are at least civilized cannibals. It makes all the difference if you get it out of a tin" (Part Four, Chapter Two, p. 172).

"Once you kill the liberal society you create a vacuum for God to rush into, and then you unleash murder and fornication and cannibalism" (Part Four, Chapter Ten, p. 204).

"She needed two men in her life, her day to be salted by infidelity" (Part Five, Chapter One, p. 222).

"The end of war is the means of war. And we are the enemy" (Part Five, Chapter Three, p. 233).

"The Romanized transliteration was clear at the bottom of the label. Ripe, soft, properly cooked man" (Part Five, Chapter Seven, p. 250).

"The new books were full of sex and death, perhaps the only materials for a writer" (Epilogue, Chapter Two, p. 273).

"The War Department is a bit like prostitution: it cleanses the community. If we didn't exist, a great deal of nastiness would bubble up in the State" (Epilogue, Chapter Two, p. 279).



Topics for Discussion

Imagine you live in the nightmarish world described in this novel where people cook and eat each other in the street. Would you rather starve to death than stoop to such behavior or would you join in to survive? Defend your position.

When the government organizes the battles between male and female troops as a way to reduce population, its argument is that both sides are armed and hence it is not mass murder. How does this situation differ from that of sending soldiers to fight and die in a war whose causes and goals are often unclear to the troops?

Beatrice-Joanna is ambivalent about whether she wants to be with Tristram or with Derek, but the two brothers are quite different. What do you think she likes in each of them? What does this reveal about her?

Midway through the novel, Tristram emerges from jail a changed man. In what ways would you say the experience of prison harmed and improved him?

Derek argues in favor of the government's methods, saying that desperate conditions make it necessary to take measures that normally would be unacceptable. What is wrong with this logic?

In the context of the story, why are people disgusted by those who pretend to be gay as a way of helping their career prospects? Do you think the author is homophobic?

Shonny overrides the concern of Mavis about the family's safety in his willingness to help the pregnant Beatrice-Joanna. Later, he deeply regrets his decision. Do you think he made the right or the wrong choice regarding Beatrice-Joanna? Explain your position.