

Pathway Advanced: P.D. James, *Children of Men* (1991) – “One story, two plots!”

Material: Part A

The situation: The following scene is the ending of the novel. You will realize that novel and film-adaptation are very different versions of the same story. Remember that the screenshot in your textbook, showing Theo and Kee with the baby on their way out of a building during a military operation (Pathway Advanced, 372) is taken from a scene in the film which is close to its ending. There is no corresponding scene to this in the novel: Here, it is Julian who is pregnant and gives birth to a boy. Theo and a group of friends try to save her the totalitarian government represented by the “Warden of England”, Xan Lyppiatt, who happens to be Theo’s cousin. Since Lyppiatt finds out about Julian’s pregnancy and wants to use the child for his own political purposes, he and his soldiers hunt down the group. Being on the run, the father of the child, Luke, is killed, and Theo falls in love with Julian.

The following passage is the final scene in the novel: In its showdown, Julian has just delivered the baby and Theo has shot Xan in the attempt to protect mother and child. Since this moment, the state is without a government.

[...] It begins again, with jealousy, with treachery, with violence, with murder, with this ring on my finger. He looked down at the great sapphire¹ in its glitter of diamonds, at the ruby ²cross, twisting the ring, aware of its weight. Placing it on his hand had been instinctive and yet deliberate, a gesture to assert³ authority and ensure⁴ protection. He had known that the Grenadiers would come armed. The sight of that shining symbol on his finger would at least make them pause, give him time to speak. Did he need to wear it now? He had all Xan’s power within his grasp⁵, that and more. [...] For a time at least he must take Xan’s place. There were evils to be remedied⁶; but they must take their turn. He couldn’t do everything at once, there had to be priorities. Was that what Xan had found? And was this sudden intoxication⁷ of power what Xan had known every day of his life? The sense that everything was possible to him, that what he wanted would be done, that what he hated would be abolished⁸, that the world could be fashioned according to his will. He drew the ring from his finger, then paused and pushed it back. There would be time later to decide whether, and for how long, he needed it.

He said [to the soldiers]: “Leave us now.” [...]

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, no more, he felt something close to irritation. It must be for him to decide when he would take it off. He said: “It’s useful for the present. I shall take it off in time.”

She seemed for the moment content, and it might have been his imagination that there was a shadow in her eyes.

Then she smiled and said to him: “Christen⁹ the baby for me. Please do it now, while we’re alone. It’s what Luke would have wanted. It’s what I want.”

¹ sapphire = green gemstone

² ruby = deep red gemstone

³ assert = confirm

⁴ ensure = make sure

⁵ grasp = hold on

⁶ remedy = cure

⁷ intoxication = a state of being poisoned

⁸ abolish = end

⁹ christen = baptise

"What do you want him called?"

"Call him after his father and after you."

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The towel between her legs was heavily stained. He removed it without revulsion¹⁰, almost without thoughts and, folding another, put it in place. There was very little water left in the bottle, but he hardly needed it. His tears were falling now over the child's forehead. From some far childhood memory he recalled the rite¹¹. 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.

From: James, P[hyllis] D[orothy], *The Children of Men*. London: faber and faber 1993, pp. 340-342 (451 words)

Tasks

Comprehension

1. Give a brief summary of the action in this passage.
2. Name the objects / actions mentioned in the text, which you recognize as symbols, and explain their individual meaning.

Analysis

3. Structure the passage and explain the different characteristics of its elements.
4. *In ll. 15-27 we find two important narrative techniques to represent the trains of thought in a character (= "stream of consciousness"): The "interior monologue" (ll. 15-16) and "free indirect speech" (ll. 20-27). Describe the language features in each technique and compare their effects.

Evaluation (Leistungsdifferenzierung)

5. Write a short interpretation about the implications of Theo's thoughts and action: What does it tell us about Theo that he takes the ring and also christens the baby?

5 assignments

Must do: 1, 2, 3

Can do: *4, 5

Minimum 4 assignments

¹⁰ revulsion = disgust

¹¹ rite = ritual

Solutions Part A

Textbook: *Pathway Advanced*, pp. 365-368

Fokus Literaturvermittlung: pp. 138-149

Task 1

Summary

The scene describes Theo's thoughts after he has killed Xan Lyppiat. He looks at Lyppiatt's ring of power, which saves him against any violence by the soldiers and which gives him the feeling of security, confidence, and power. Theo is interrupted by Julian who asks him to christen the baby only after she remarks on the ring as an unsuitable item for Theo. He keeps silent, but imitates the ritual of a Christian baptism, using his tears instead of consecrated water. (81 words)

Task 2

Symbolism

Objects:

1. The heavy "ring" (l. 15) with its sapphire set in the midst of diamonds, and with a ruby cross. It "asserts authority and ensures protection" (l. 18) = political symbol
2. "Water" (ll. 40 and 42): an important element in a baptism rite, which purifies ('washes away') the baptised person from worldly sin = religious symbol
3. "tears" (ll. 41 and 43): ambiguous symbol of either pain or joy.
4. "blood" (l. 43): ambiguous symbol of life and pain = religious symbol
5. "sign of the cross" (l. 44): in Christianity, the tool by which Jesus Christ was killed. It symbolizes his ordeal as well as the redemption of mankind = religious symbol

Actions:

1. "It begins again, with jealousy, with treachery, with violence, with murder [...]" (l. 15): Theo, a cousin and thus a close relative to Xan Lyppiat, alludes to important biblical or mythical stories of men killing their brothers (fratricide): e.g., Cain and Abel (Gen.4.8) or Romulus and Remus (Roman mythology) = religious/mythological symbol for sin and the fallen human nature, used in religion and politics.
2. "he made on the child's forehead the sign of the cross" (l. 43-44): Theo's imitates a priest's gesture = religion

Task 3

Structure of the passage, explanation

The passage may be divided into four parts:

1. ll. 15-27: description of Theo's thoughts after he has killed Xan Lyppiat
2. ll. 28-34: a short sequence of verbal exchanges, with Theo's orders for the soldier and Julian's critical remark about the ring of power in Theo's hand
3. ll. 35-39: Julian's request to christen the baby
4. ll. 40-44: the description of the baptism

Parts 1 and 4 are clearly descriptions by the narrator, who uses the mode of "telling", in contrast to the two parts in between, which have less descriptive elements by the narrator but present the characters in dialogue, i.e. similar to a scene in a play. This is called "showing", and it is particularly obvious in part 3 where the narrator introduces the conversation but fades afterwards, without even using phrases like "s/he said".

Task 4

Narrative techniques

1. Interior monologue: "It begins again, with jealousy, with treachery, with violence, with murder, with this ring on my finger." (ll. 15-16) The interior monologue is written in present tense ("begins") and the first person ("my"). For a short moment in the description, the reader is taken straight into Theo's mind, and it resembles a 1st-person narrative – but it is limited to only one sentence in a context which is composed in the 3rd person.
2. Free indirect speech is written in the past tense and the third person. The questions about which Theo reflects are expressed in such a way as it might happen when in the situation proper, it seems he even answers: "Did he need to wear it now? He had all Xan's power within his grasp, that and more. [...] For a time at least he must take Xan's place." (ll. 20-21). Although it is almost a dialogic structure, this is all happening in Theo's mind, but described as a 3rd-person narrative.

In both techniques, and the reader becomes a witness of Theo's mental processes. Since the interior monologue uses the present and the first person, it is less distanced from Theo than the free indirect

discourse which also allows the reader to access a character's world of ideas and thoughts, but the third person as well as the past tense and pluperfect contribute to the fact that this is not as direct and immediate as the interior monologue.

Task 5

Interpretation

In this scene, Theo assumes both the political power of the state as well as religious power, by keeping the ring and by christening the baby. He realizes that the ring gives him "all Xan's power within his grasp, that and more. [...] For a time at least he must take Xan's place" (ll. 21-22). In his thoughts, Theo seems to legitimize his action, because the ring represents his own position above the law, and he seems safe with it after killing his cousin. Furthermore, Theo senses a moment of "sudden intoxication with power" (l. 23), which gives pleasure to him: Therefore, it is left open whether he will give away the ring to someone else later, or whether he is going to keep it forever. In his reflection Theo tries to imagine what Xan may have felt wearing the ring: "The sense that everything was possible to him, that what he wanted would be done, that what he hated would be abolished, that the world could be fashioned according to his will" (ll. 23-25). This sense of power is something that he does not want to let go too soon: "There would be time later to decide whether, and for how long, he needed it." (ll. 26-27)

Since he has not made up his mind, Theo notices his own "irritation" (l. 31) at Julian's critical remark about his wearing the ring, but actually she gives in to his "intoxication" and even asks him to perform the office of a priest. Without hesitation, Theo takes this role, too, although there no hint that he is entitled to do so. Therefore, the performance of the baptism has no official legitimation by the church: it is done by a layperson, without consecrated water, which is replaced by blood and tears, and without witnesses. In the end, Theo is the usurper of the political leadership of the state and an impostor who performs a religious sacrament without legitimacy.

Material Part B

The situation: You will now watch the final scene of the film-adaptation, which follows the ones displayed in the book, by an extract from the film-script and a film-still showing “the holy family” moving away from the battlefield, without being stopped by anyone. The three have made it to a little boat, and Theo rows them into the sea.

In the film, an illegal immigrant from Jamaica called Kee is the mother of the child; Theo is in no way related to her except as guide and body guard. Trying to escape both from the government and a terror organisation who claim the baby for their political purposes, Theo helps her towards her destination which saves Kee and the baby: A trawler, the “Tomorrow”, is said to pick them up from the row-boat...

Alfonso Cuarón, dir. (2007). *Children of Men*. Universal Pictures. DVD. 01:32:00-01:36:12

Or:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMJqQ3VrcCA&list=PLZbXA4lyCtqoXJ6FOzNzKqswuL4DXoL_4&index=11&t=0s (01:33:00-01:36:10)



Film-still from the final camera shot (01:36:07)

Tasks

Pre-viewing:

1. Describe the film-still and make suggestions for the film-ending.

First viewing:

2. Watch the scene and take notes of the main events. What is *not* shown at the very end?

Second viewing:

3. Watch the scene again, and form groups to record their observations about in the viewing grid.

Characters	Setting	Soundtrack	Camera operations
Theo:			
Kee:			

4. After watching the scene, evaluate these very different endings of both novel and film adaptation. Take into consideration your knowledge about the passages quoted in the textbook from the novel and from the film-script (*Pathway Advanced*, pp. 365-368 and 370-372) as well as the one quoted in Part A of this task sheet.

Solutions Part B

Textbook: *Pathway Advanced*, pp. 370-372

Fokus Literaturvermittlung: pp. 139-148, 151-158

Task 1

Description of the film-still

The film-still, a total shot, shows a row-boat in the open sea left of the frame centre, heading towards a buoy nearby placed in the right. The sea is quite rough (choppy) and weather seems to be bad, it is either foggy or there is heavy rain. In the row-boat there seems to be at least one figure seated to the left, although it is not possible to identify it. Nor is it possible to tell what is placed on the right of the boat, but there is another shape. In the background, we can see the front of a larger, motorized ship with two electric lights approaching out of the fog, heading towards the viewer. (116 words)

Task 2

Global understanding

Theo and Kee with the baby are shown moving along in the row-boat. Theo, rowing, seems to be injured, but at the beginning he is strong enough to talk to Kee. They think of a name for the child, and Theo shows Kee what to do in order to soothe the crying baby. When Theo is unconscious, the ship which seems to rescue Kee and the baby approaches. The camera does not show whether they are saved. (78 words)

Task 3

Detailed understanding

Characters	Setting	Soundtrack	Camera operations
Theo: seems to be wounded, rows the boat with increasing pain and difficulty, talks to Kee about how she can soothe the child, is grateful for her naming the child after him, seems to be unconscious or dead when the ship approaches	The row boat is very small and primitive, no motorization or technology that could help Theo in moving forward.		Mostly American shots that show the upper half of the body, alternating with half total which foregrounds the row boat. Few total shots which show the boat in its isolation in rough waters, and finally a shot that shows the rescue ship approaching.
Kee: appears to be tired, is desperate to be saved by the ship, does not know how to soothe a baby suffering from pain (hunger? digestion?), and finds a name for the baby which honours Theo, is desperate when Theo loses his consciousness or dies	The row-boat in open sea shakes in the waves, struck by the heavy rain and the strong wind; grey skies and rather dim light.		A final shot from down the boat up the ship, showing a sailor shouting down to Kee.

Task 4

Evaluation

Answer 1: „critical“

The novel seems to be very different from the movie. Someone who has read or watched the one, may not recognize the other, although a few basics of the story are shared by both: The main character's name (Theo), the desperate situation of mankind with the global spread of infertility (explained at beginning of the novel, as quoted in the passage in the textbook, and in the DVD film-clip) and the first birth of a baby in decades. In both the novel and the film, Britain seems to be ruled by a totalitarian

government, shaken by terrorist, and the movie emphasizes this violence by the military action (cf. excerpt and film-still in the textbook) before the possible rescue from open sea. In both media, the mother and her baby have to be protected, mainly by Theo the hero, from these powers.

Although there are certain similarities on these levels, the difference between the movie and the novel is so great to be recognizable. However, one may expect a greater degree of similarity, because it seems easier to identify with the characters if one „knows“ them already, and especially for a language learner the comparability of both novel and movie may be more supportive than in the present case. Here, it may be even frustrating for a language learner because s:he has to make sense of each of them, so it may be even double work. (235 words)

Answer 2: [„affirmative“]

Although the novel and the plot are very different, it is a legitimate approach to tell the same story. A film-adaptation does not have to be a 1:1 copy of an „original“ (the novel), because both are different media and the film can use its own „language“. Where the novel depends on words and the reader's imagination, the movie can rely on images and sounds created by the director, the actors and the production team.

Therefore it seems legitimate to use a different sequence of events (plot) for the same story, as long as the two independent works share a similar meaning: Indeed, the two works match in their most significant elements – the premise that there has been no child-birth since decades, and that there is a society which craves for re-birth, which is finally delivered by a mysteriously pregnant mother. She is in need of protection by a male figure who is not the father of the child. Both works end with a kind of baptism of the child, although the circumstance of this baptism is very different: In the novel, the baptism marks the culmination of power for Theo, whilst in the movie he gives his life for that of the baby. In each version, the new-born child represents the possibility of a new beginning. (217 words)