

Exploration of P.D. James's Novel, *The Children of Men*, Regarding Characterization  
and Juxtaposition

How does P.D James use characterization and juxtaposition of groups to show that humans  
react to a disaster without hope, and to what extent is this comment effective?

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## Introduction

*The Children Of Men* by P.D James is a dystopian novel, set in England in the year 2021 with the chaotic problem of infertility globally. The novel is structured with an alternating narrative voice between third person and first person, evolving around the main character, Theodore Faron, who is cousins with the Warden of England and a lonesome writer with a troubled past, from running over his own child on accident with a car to splitting from a marriage he did not truly feel love. Within the novel, there is a consistency of groups that are shown that consist of the Omegas, which are shown to be violent and unstable, the elders, the generation who are watching everything die out through their last breathes, the people who desire children, in their mid-years and are experiencing the crisis of infertility first hand, the government, consisting of the council and the Warden, and the Five Fishes, a group of rebellions who do not agree with the governments approach on the disaster consisting of the peoples Julian, Miriam, Gascoigne, Luke, and Rolf. During the beginning of the novel, Theo is approached by a member of the Five Fishes, Julian, to meet with the group at an isolated church. From that point on, Theo learns and experiences that not everyone agrees with the system the council and the Warden has made, and that humans have truly turned insane, from middle-aged woman carrying around fake dolls as a replacement for children to the elderly committing suicide. The Five Fishes convince Theo to have a meeting with the Warden on changing policies. The Warden and the council do not provide any help and choose to give no aim towards any signs of change, leading the Five Fishes to lash out and expose what they believe. During this time, Theo leaves England for the summer. As Theo returns, he is greeted by Miriam, giving him a message that one of the Five Fishes group members, Gascoigne, has been arrested and that they are going on the run with Julian wanting him to join them. Miriam had explained that Julian couldn't come herself because

she is pregnant. On the run, the group's main goal was to protect the baby from the governments reach. As the end of the novel nears, Julian gives birth to the newborn. At this point, Theo and Julian are the only ones left, the others have been killed. The Warden finds the couple with the newborn and tries to persuade the two to give the new born to him. With those action, Theo shoots Xan to protect the child and takes the Wardens ring to become the new Warden for the time being. The authors use of commentary on the different groups and their actions from the displayed chaos lead to the thesis to this essay. This essay follows the format with the thesis: **In the novel, *The Children Of Men*, how does P.D James use characterization and juxtaposition of groups to show that humans react to a disaster without hope, and to what extent is this comment effective?** This research question is worthy of investigating because it displays the authors literary devices to provide an explanation of a comment portrayed in the novel.

The main groups proposed throughout the novel all share a similar importance but in different ways, connecting to the main problem, infertility. The authors use of characterization, indirect and direct, and juxtaposition between the groups developed the reaction of characters towards the problem of infertility. This essay will be structured by the discussion of characterization, organized by the groups with similar characterization who also produce similar emotions, leading onto the discussion of juxtaposition, which is organized similarly.

### **Characterization: Omegas, Group 1**

P.D James shows the way humans react to a disaster without hope through characterization of groups. The Omegas, elderly, and the people who desire children are the first group that will be analyzed. They are grouped together because they have resembling emotions towards the event and give similar behaviors. The first group of the three that will be analyzed

are the Omegas. The group is characterized as viscous, uncontrollable, and a threat to society. An example of this is shown on page 179 as Theo described the Omegas having, " ... jerking legs, ornate heads, the patterned faces slit by wide," (James 179). The description of the Omegas portrays the group as inhuman and something that comes out of a nightmare. Additionally, an example is found on page 45 where it states " barbarism of the young... their violence...egotism disguised as idealism," (James 45). This text was the first time the Omegas were described to the reader, automatically describing the group as hectic. This is important because during the time the novel was published, the Omegas, people in their late teens and twenties, do not act as they are perceived in the novel, indicating what the disaster has done to the group. The exposure provides an extended effect on the reader with the events displayed. The Omegas had also shown the impact they had on characters in the novel. On page 211 after Theo and the Five Fishes were attacked by the Omegas, they effected Theo's thoughts by giving him an extended fear of the group than he previously had (James 211). This passage, with a few others, shows the fear characters in the novel develop from the Omegas. P.D James comments that when a very impactful disaster on humans occur, the young give up on their lives and become barbaric, giving up hope to pursue their education, get married, and have children. This is important to the authors comment because it is showing the negative change humans adapt to instead of trying to pursue a normal lifestyle, impacting other people in the society.

### **Characterization: The People Who Desire Children, Group 1**

People who desire children also had a similar attitude towards the situation as the Omegas. They turned into insane, lost, unstable, and helpless beings. To begin with, towards the beginning of the novel, on page 35, a woman's doll was grabbed out of her hands and tossed to the ground, causing it to shatter. The woman's reaction was absurd, she had, "... began gathering

up the broken pieces, sobbing, and moaning gently,” (James 35). The event and the woman’s reaction pictures how the people who desire children had gone completely unstable from the disaster, affecting their daily lives. It also indicates that the age group does not want to accept the fact that children are non-existent, needing to replace the children so they could feel a positive emotion. An example of direct characterization was displayed in the novels text, stating that the age group had become insane and unstable (James 36). The importance of the direct characterization is that it is directly portrayed by the author, leading to readers inferring that the problem is abysmal. The actions in fake child bearing is an important element to keep their stress level low. Also, not only is there the insanity in people’s behaviors, but the downfall of the desire of sex was displayed. Sex for an adult is a healthy and natural topic. In the novel it states,” Sex has become among the least important of the man’s sensory pleasures,” as well as, “Men and woman still marry, although less frequently,” (James 116). The quotes show how middle-aged people of both genders are characterized as giving up, not interested in love nor lust, lost in the despair of a tragedy. P.D. James portrayed middle aged people as given up with what is important to the values in the modern world, such as the idea of love, getting married, and potentially having children, like the Omegas. The importance of the characterization of the middle-aged toward the comment is immensely important because it showed readers the ongoing result of the disaster. The “adult” in the situation contributing the same emotions as the young, bizarre behavior of insanity.

### **Characterization: The Elderly, Group 1**

The last group in the category is the elderly, who are characterized as annoyed with the worlds dilemma and reaction, forgotten, weak, and hopeless. An example of this characterization is found on page 36 when a chaplain elder was complaining about the animals taking over his

building and not waiting until they will eventually have the world for themselves soon, since the animals will be the only ones left (James 36). The text example shows the characterization of the elderly as angered and annoyed with how the world is reacting within the situation. Another example of this is shown on page 47 where it states the, "mass suicide of the old." (James 47). The mass suicide is an option for the elderly who wanted to leave the Earth peacefully, avoid the negativity in the world, and escape the chaos. The mass suicides in the novel show how the elderly are characterized as given up on the future and forgotten. Another example of the elderly is found on page 53 where an elder was annoyed with how the childbearing aged practiced Christenings with animals stating, "That's not right. I can't stop it, but I don't approve," (James 53). The quote shows how some elders have given up and are starting to learn how to embrace the situation since they have no impact, but at the same time are annoyed at the event and nature. P.D James indicates that when a disaster of such happens, the elderly are upset with how the world has become, slowly growing weak with the realization of what has become forth. This results to some wanting to end their lives because they have no one to provide any nurturing to, such as a grandchild. The importance of the group is to show readers how some elders will give up in a chaotic situation while others will shake their heads from pathetic reactions coming from humans around them, possibly becoming wiser than all.

The three characterized groups are connected because they all show similar emotion of hopelessness after a human disaster happens, portraying the same reactions from different age groups, leading onto the authors comment. The comment he makes with these identifiable groups is displayed as effective because it impacts the reader's by engaging thinking about human actions if a disaster so horrid happens. The reader can infer through the use of characterization that although there are different aged groups, humans will react similar in emotion.

## Characterization: The Government, Group 2

A different characterized group is the government and the Five Fishes, both portraying the control they want and how to run society when a disaster occurs. Both play a very realistic role in the novel, the typical rebellion group and the government controllers. To establish the government's characterization throughout the book, the government is described as immensely controlling, controlling the majority to keep things in order to their desire, and remarkably suspicious. In Soo Darcy's critique essay, she states a similar opinion about the political powers in the novel," In this essay I argue that, through this pregnant character, political power in *The Children of Men* is shown to reside in the dormant threat of surveillance and technological intervention associated with pregnancy and reproduction, and it is this relationship between power and the body that constitutes the dystopian nature of James," (Darcy 1). Darcy's critique portrays that the government in the novel tries to take part in every situation that would involve the people and reproduction. An example of this is shown on page 94, Felicia's, a woman apart of the government stance, response to Theo's worries and findings of the truth in the society with things, such as the Quietus (elderly suicide), was very suspicious, indicating the government wanted it that way. Felicia had said," That particular Quietus was mismanaged," twice and proposed things such as saying," Towing them out to sea was obviously more sensible," after she explained that eighty-year old elders started jumping off cliffs because of the worlds dilemma, indicating the need of a "better" system (James 94). Felicia's repeated phrase of the Quietus as Theo was asking for answers to his concerns shows there is a restricted topic they will not bring up with him. Such actions throughout the conversation showed the characterization of the government being abnormally suspicious. During the same meeting between Theo and the government, Theo explained that The Man Penal Colony, an island that handles all criminals



with the range of all crimes, had unknown and untold problems to the people such as the, ” murders, the starvation, the complete breakdown of law and order, ”. Xan, head minister of the government, replied with suspicion towards Theo’s knowledge of the prison instead of acting worried for the situation (James 95). This indicated that the government does know about the cruelty in the rules they have placed, but they don’t want to change it, showing their characteristics of being controlling and greedy. During the end of the meeting, direct characterization from dialogue was showed when Xan had told Theo, ’When governments are generous it is with other people’s money, other people’s safety, other people’s future, ” (James 97). Xan portrays the government's opinion in how things should be run. Xan directly states that the government is trying to be controlling over their people’s money, safety, and future from the problem going on in the world, extending the characterization of the want to be in control at all times. P.D James portrays that when a disaster happens, the government starts to take control over people’s lives to try and restore order and make lives for citizens the best they could until there is no more to be done. Even if it is unhuman to do somethings a certain way, the government seeks maintenance.

### **Characterization: Five Fishes, Group 2**

The next characters in the group that will be analyzed with their characterization are the Five Fishes. Although they tie in with the government, they contrast with different goals. The Five Fishes portray a desire for change, aiding the readers to see that everyone in the novel is hopeless except for one rebellious group. In the novel, the Five Fishes are characterized as rebels in society who have had rough experiences and will do anything for what they believe in. The Five Fishes are also described with strong personalities and gifted mind sets. The group consists of five people: Julian, Rolf, Luke, Miriam, and Gascoigne. Each member had a different reason

on why they were with the group. Rolf was in the group because he did not like the way the Warden had run things involving the problem of infertility and wants a democracy. Luke, Julian, and Gascoigne want to handle specific situations the government had started when the infertility hit such as the Quietus's and semen testing. Miriam wanted the government to change the way the Man Penal Colony is run because of her brothers experience and the lies of the Colony being safe and friendly. By having different reasons for a desired change in the rules, characterization in the group was shown by seeing the groups reaction to the ruling of the government. The group decided to proclaim five commands they wanted the government to do, shown on page 111, consisting of all the things they wanted to change regarding the chaos with infertility (James 11). By proclaiming their five commands, it shows the characterization of the Five Fishes being demanding individuals following what they believe in. This presents the group as not being afraid of getting in trouble, they are willing to take the risks. Although they proclaim these commands and tell others to join them, no one dares to join the mysterious group in their troubles. This shows the comment that everyone has given up and they will not try and do extra things to change the human races fate. Moving on, the groups characterization as strong individuals wanting change is shown repeatedly all throughout the novel. The group seeks help since the beginning. At the end of chapter six, Julian confronts Theo in the need of help, pleading because some of the groups plans are not going well, which shows the "will do anything" mindset for what they believe in (James 39-42). During part two, chapter twenty-one, the group had asked Theo once again if he could help them, even though their first plans with Theo had failed (James 143-148). This extends the characterization of the group that they are trying to change the problems in the world while everyone else around them doesn't seem to have the bother to act upon it. P.D James characterized the Five fishes as he did with this disaster to show

how even when the world is hopeless, there will always be a group, even a small one, that speaks up and cares for how the treatment and the lives of the remaining humans will be, reflecting on how the rest of the society has given up.

The Five Fishes and the government tie in together because of their insight of control and the fight they bring for what they want. P.D. James's use of characterizing these groups from indirect and direct characterization is shown to be effective because the reader is allowed to see these character groups more in depth. One reason why the groups are effective to its audience because the reactions between the groups are realistic. The events and behaviors from both groups are a typical response of what could be displayed from a government or a rebellious group. Another reason why the groups are effective is because both show the authors comment of everyone in the world losing hope. The government does not care in changing things for the better, just to keep things under control while they are frightened as well. Meanwhile, the five fishes are the only ones who predominantly care to change the society for the better, mainly because of their own political opinions or personal awakenings.

### **Juxtaposition: Elderly and The People Who Desire Children**

Another way in which P.D James shows the behavior of groups reaction of a disaster is through juxtaposition. Juxtaposition is shown throughout majority of the novel and shown between four groups: the elderly and the people who desire children, and the Five Fishes and the government. The elderly and the people who desire children are the first group that will be discussed in this essay that show juxtaposition throughout the novel. In the modern world the groups are seen as similar people with a few differences between their age groups and behavior, but in the novel, the elderly are the ones who give up and try being peaceful with the remainder of their lives while the middle-aged turn absurd and difficult. The groups provide the effect of

juxtaposition throughout the novel because, as stated before, they are associated together in behavior in the modern world but are contrasting each other in the novel. The contrasts are shown through the use of characterization, such as when the elderly are described as hopeless and suicidal while the people who desire children are characterized as insane and mentally ill. This is important towards aiding in P.D. James's comment because it shows the difference in people's behaviors, extending the display of the constant effect of hopelessness towards people's mindsets.

### **Juxtaposition: Five Fishes and Government**

The other two groups portraying juxtaposition throughout the novel are the Five Fishes and the government. The two organization both want to help the crippling society, but they both have contrasting ideals on how to help the society. The council is portrayed to admire a less pleasing way, wanting to obtain order for majority and give an unpleasant way of peace, while the Five Fishes want to give equal rights, happiness for everyone, and bring the issue forward that is occurring. This was shown throughout the novel by the characterization of the groups and by the main conflict between the two groups, Theo experiencing both sides. This adds importance to the novel because it shows how there is only one group of five people, that provided to readers, that have shown dedication. Contrasting, the government is similar to the other groups and have gone hopeless themselves, since they are not trying to unit their nation and people but do their own desires. To conclude, juxtaposition ongoingly shows the dramatic changes between similar groups in the novel with a disastrous problem.

### **Comment Effectiveness**

The comment P.D James is portraying is successfully effective. One main reason the authors comment was successful is because of the detailed use of characters with their

characterization and their emotions displayed in each group. For example, the Five Fishes had the detailed characterization of all five members, the government had Xan's characterization and personality shown throughout majority of the novel from Theo's point of view, the people who desire children had a character displaying the obsession with dolls, the elderly's volunteering of suicide showed their hopelessness, and the Omega's attack on the Five Fishes. Additionally, the groups being deeply characterized helps the reader understand the behavior of each group in the book. Although the Omegas were not shown until the end, characters from the novel described them with their fright, aiding the readers understanding of the Omega's impact. This made the readers understand why everyone became who they are in the novel and what led to that type of lifestyle during rough times. Another reason why the comment was successfully effective was because of Theo's point of view in experiencing all the groups during his day to day life. Theo's point of view gave the readers the opportunity to go in his thoughts and feelings about other people's reactions. This helps portray the successful effect because it is a direct characterization shown from the groups, providing aid to readers to identify the comment. Another reason why the comment was successfully effective was because of P.D. James's use of Juxtaposition. Juxtaposition helped show the dramatic changes between similar groups. This was successful regarding P.D. James's comment because it shows the extreme hopelessness shown by the groups changing complete roles in society. Lastly, the comment was successful because with the use characterization and juxtaposition, readers are able to conclude that the society has gone dark and hopeless. A critic, Kathryn Hughes, wrote in her criticism the same effect stating, "The whole point about a dystopia is that it presents us with a nightmare vision of the future in order to warn about disturbing trends in the present. This is where *The Children of Men* succeeds magnificently," (Hughes 1).

## Conclusion

To conclude this essay, the format was followed with the following question: In the novel, *The Children of Men*, how does P.D James use characterization and juxtaposition of groups to show that humans react to a disaster without hope, and to what extent is this comment effective? To summarize, all the groups characterization throughout the novel helped to show the effect of a disaster towards the human race and the chaos that occurs on different types of people in society. The ongoing use of juxtaposition between the government with the Five Fishes and the elderly with the people who desire children helped show the behaviors of people in society during chaos completely switches. Overall, P.D. James's comment was successfully effective because of the successful use of characterization and juxtaposition of groups that lead the readers to see the chaos and helpless emotions that the society faces from a human built crisis.

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