
KÖNIGS ERLÄUTERUNGEN

Band 452

T. C. Boyle, **THE TORTILLA CURTAIN**

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PRÜFUNGSAUFGABEN MIT MUSTERLÖSUNGEN

In Ergänzung zu den Aufgaben im Buch (Kapitel 6) finden Sie hier zwei weitere Aufgaben mit Musterlösungen. Die Zahl der Sternchen bezeichnet das Anforderungsniveau der jeweiligen Aufgabe.

Task 5 ***

Illustrate the role of religion in the novel.

Model answer:

INTERPRETATION

Christian religion as a theme is present throughout the novel. A lot of information about the main characters can be gathered by looking at their view of religion.

The Mossbachers belong to the middle class, they do not go to church, but they are not necessarily atheist. They call themselves "agnostic" (I, 1). Religion does not play a large role in their lives although Delaney shows a quasi-religious treatment of nature. Kyra, too, shows a certain adherence to the protestant work ethic when she refuses to go to the movies with the family because she has to work even in the evening (II, 3).

The Rincóns, however, are deeply religious Catholics. They expect God to be in their lives and to interfere personally. This leads to a certain fatalism, e.g. "It was the Mexican way: acquiesce, accept. Things would change, sure they would, but only if God willed it." (II, 2; p. 214.4 ff.) Cándido and América accept their fate for quite a long time. This does not stop them from complaining to God.

Cándido even compares himself to Job in the Old Testament. The righteous Job is the victim of a wager between God and Satan. Satan tortures him and takes away his wealth, health and family to find out if Job remains a true believer in God. He does and is at the end rewarded richly. Unfortunately, Cándido is not quite as righteous as Job: he is still married to América's sister Resurreccion when they elope together, he himself has decided to move north with a minor, he does not treat América well when things go badly – he even insults and beats her, he eventually steals from the Mossbachers. However, he quite often tries to justify his actions to an imaginary being – God? "Was it wrong, was it a sin, was it morally indefensible to take from a dog? Where in the catechism did it say that?" (III, 4; p. 360.1 ff.)

One particularly unpleasant character in the novel is José Navidad. "Navidad" is Spanish for Christmas. He certainly does not show any signs of bringing good into the world, so here Boyle is being very ironic in his name giving.

Boyle also takes up a religious theme in Thanksgiving. Originally the day to thank the God the creator for the harvest, Thanksgiving has, like Christmas, been extremely commercialised in the USA. The Rincóns have not had any harvest but get a turkey from a white American who does not know what to do with the free gift from the supermarket. Again, however, fate hits them hard: the fire to roast the turkey turns into the bushfire that eventually destroys all their belongings and money. Boyle likens it to the coming of the Apocalypse (III, 2).

América believes in divine intervention when the cat appears at the birth of her daughter Socorro (Eng.: succour, help) and calls her a saint (III, 2). The scene reminds us of Christmas, the birth of Jesus: the travelling couple, no inn, the birth in a hut, only animals looking on.

Even the flood at the end is reminiscent of the great flood in the Bible. It swallows everything, good or bad. However, Boyle's novel does not give us a Hollywood or even the Biblical ending – the baby sadly dies and we are left with Cándido's outstretched hand towards Delaney.

Task 6 **

Contrast the Mossbachers' life to the life Cándido and América aspire to.

ANALYSE/
INTERPRETATION

Model answer:

América has very clear ideas about what she wants in the USA: "I want one of those houses," she said. "A clean white one made out of lumber that smells like the mountains, with a gas range and a refrigerator, and maybe a little yard so you can plant a garden and make a place for the chickens. That's what you promised me, didn't you?" (I, 2; p. 50.8 ff.) Add to that a TV, a car, a washing machine, nothing fancy, just the things white Americans have. As Cándido thinks to himself when he lies around injured, "He'd taken América from her father so they could have a better life, so they could live in the North, where it was green and lush the year round and the avocados rotted on the ground and everyone, even the poorest, had a house, a car, and a TV – and now he couldn't even put food in her mouth." (p. 46.31 ff.) It is not an unreasonable wish, considering that most citizens in the US have these things, and the Rincóns are willing to work for it. It is their American Dream, fuelled by television programmes which showed these ideals and talks of other Mexicans who "had made it".

In addition, Cándido wants respect. The American Constitution promises equal rights, freedom, and the opportunity to be happy, to dream and put those dreams into practice. He feels that he has been treated unfairly in Mexico, and that he has a right to be better off.

The Mossbachers obviously own what the Rincóns would like to have: a house, a garden, a television and all mod cons. But where does it all come from? Contrary to Cándido's family, Delaney's family had money and passed some on to him (II,1), so that he is financially independent. He does not have to go to work, he can devote his time to nature and writing his column. This is probably not the life Cándido would aspire to: While it does give Delaney an inner satisfaction to be close to nature, it does not give him the respect from his fellow men who are businesspersons. Cándido would rather work hard and be among his fellow men for a chat and a drink than out watching birds.

Both Mossbachers are well-educated, the prerequisite for getting satisfying jobs and earning good money. Although we do not find out what schooling the Rincóns had, we can assume that both only have a very basic education. They did not even learn English at school. The American Dream of course suggests that anyone can go from dishwasher to millionaire. However, very few people do, and those who do work very hard to get there. Kyra is one of those people who have climbed their way almost to the top of their business. She makes good money in real estate because she goes the extra mile for her customers and her boss. Unfortunately, her family life suffers as a result of her work. She has no time for Jordan and very little time for Delaney. The family exists only in the background and is very often a burden rather than a joy. América has quite a different picture of family life. She would much rather be at home, looking after the house and her children. She probably couldn't even imagine a life like Kyra's.

Looking realistically at the Mexican family, they are not going to achieve the Mossbachers standard of living. On the other hand, it is not where they want to be. They aspire to the basics which is what any human being should have – a good home and an opportunity to raise your children in a positive environment. While the Mossbachers have a lot more material goods, they are not necessarily any happier in their lives.