

Book review: the tortilla curtain essay

[Design](#)



Book Review: The Tortilla CurtainT.

C. Boyle's *The Tortilla Curtain* is about two couples both having their own view of the American dream. The understanding that life is eternally unfair and disappointing connects an illegal immigrant couple, Candido and America Rincon, and a rich yuppie couple named Delaney and Kyra Mossbacher. Both couples, in the end, find that their thoughts about the American Dream are mere illusions, even though one of them has attained their goals while the other is still blinded by this illusion.

A car accident makes way for the meeting of Delaney and Candido for the first time. A series of events takes place after this violent incident and then in the later part of the story, Delaney and Candido partake in a traumatic confrontation. The lives of the Rincons and the Mossbachers are told alternately in the novel to give voice to each of the four main characters up to the point where their lives become intertwined and their worlds "crash". The novel possesses scenes with a combination of humorous, terrifying, and ironic parts but in a sense that these scenes are all happening in the real world. The author T. C. Boyle does not focus only on immigration in his novel but also on issues about social consciousness, environmental understanding, crimes, and joblessness.

The novel "The Tortilla Curtain" exposes the "other" side of the American dream. The title of the novel comes from the common phrase that denotes the Mexican Border. Unlike the idea of the Iron Curtain which is impassable, the Tortilla Curtain is the opposite. The title symbolizes that the Mexican

border which is only made up of three strips of barbed wire along with some tortillas hanging on it can be passed on easily.

The novel focuses on four characters: Candido and America Rincons, and Delaney and Kyra Mossbachers. Candido can be described as a Mexican who thinks that going to America will make his life better, like any other illegal immigrants in the United States. The same idea holds for America, Candido's wife. Although Candido sometimes beat his wife, America holds on her version of the American Dream which in her imagination is consist of their own apartment with running water. On the other hand, Delaney Mossbacher has a good fortune unlike the Rincons. Though his family can be considered as upscale, he is not happy with his life. His life is not the one he wants it to be. Kyra, the wife of Delaney, can be considered as a representative of “materialism”.

She is a real estate agent who is dedicated to achieve success. The author uses these four main characters, I think, as a representation of many Americans and immigrants nowadays. The setting of the novel takes place on Southern California's Topanga Canyon. The Mossbachers live in a exclusive housing development called the Arroyo Blanco, while the Rincons lives in camps along the Topanga Canyon. I think that the setting of the place can also be considered as a symbol of immigration issues tackled by the author. In the novel, there is a proposition on building a fence around Arroyo Blanco but then Delaney thinks that this idea is “undemocratic”. The novel consists of a lot of symbolism in it. T.

C. Boyle uses a variety of ideas to represent certain things that are present in our society now the way each of us views them. In the third chapter of the novel, a coyote suddenly appears on the house of the Mossbachers which ate one of their dogs Sacheverell. The Mossbachers are outraged and in order to prevent this event from happening again, they built an even higher fence around their yard. Though they have constructed a higher fence, soon another coyote jumps over it and eats their second dog named Osbert.

Due to this incident, the Mossbachers realize that building a fence is not effective at all and comprehends that there is not much else they can do about the coyote problems. Also, the neighborhood debates on building a wall around them to keep “ the Salvadorians, the Mexicans, the Blacks, the gangbangers, and taggers and carjackers” out of them. Just like the coyote problem, Delaney Mossbacher does not believe that building a wall around Arroyo Blanco will not solve the problem with the illegal immigrants. Also, there is a line in the novel that could be referring to the problem regarding the protection of the border between the United States and Mexico. In page 215 of *The Tortilla Curtain*, Delaney said “ Trapping is utterly useless – even if traps were to be set in every backyard in the country – as countless studies have shown.

” With all the dialogues and events in the novel, it can be clearly said that the T. C. Boyle uses the coyote as a concrete embodiment of illegal immigration. Moreover, as I have said before, the wall signifies another similar idea in the real world, the Mexican-American Border.

There are two walls mentioned in the novel. The first is the fence built by the Mossbachers and the other is the proposed construction of a concrete wall around the Arroyo Blanco housing development. As mentioned earlier, these walls can be considered as a symbol used by the author to represent the Mexican-American Border. Moreover, there is another wall that can be pictured out in the novel. Though still close from each other, the house of the Mossbachers is located atop the hill while the Rincons are residing in a camp in the canyon beneath the hill. The author uses this geographical idea to represent that the Rincons, the illegal immigrants, are at the bottom of the society while the Mossbachers, a member of the Caucasian community is positioned at the upper part of the society. This representation of the locations of the Rincons and Mossbachers acts as a symbol that today, the white people has a great perspective on many components of life while the illegal immigrants have a very low opportunity on advancing their social status.

Overall, the novel comprises many issues that are present in today's time. Boyle tackles the issue about the discrimination of the white population towards the illegal immigrants particularly the Mexicans and the Blacks. The Tortilla Curtain also shows on how the illegal immigrants live their daily life and what are their motivations to believe in such an "American Dream". It can be clearly said that this novel is based on the imaginary idea "American Dream", the novel can be easily linked or compared to today's issues. The author T. C.

Boyle was born in 1948 in Peekskill, New York. Boyle graduated at the State University of New York at Potsdam then obtained a doctorate in nineteenth-century English Literature from the University of Iowa in 1977. References: