

Remind yourself of
this extract from the
end of chapter 22

Literature



Chapter 22 marks a very significant turning point in the character of Palinor. So far in the novel, Palinor is portrayed as a genuinely good-natured person, despite claiming to be an atheist. He has engaged in many a philosophical argument with Severo and Beneditx who are already beginning to find difficulty in proving to Palinor the existence of God. We may be very shocked and perhaps disgusted at Palinor's actions the very first time we read this chapter, but if we look closer, it portrays many different meanings. In the middle of the chapter, we see Palinor being very domineering.

He gives Dolca the opportunity to refuse, yet carries on in a forceful manner. He knows he is causing her pain yet does not care because " his own need now was urgent, imperative". Joffre also seems scared by Palinor's actions: 'He stood by the bed with his teeth chattering in his head. ' However, as the lovers leave, they walk " weak-kneed and as though drunk. " This indicates that they did actually enjoy the experience, they were just nervous because it was new to them. Palinor asks why they have not had sex yet and Joffre replies 'I cannot... we want to... but she seems afraid. Joffre and Dolca would probably have believed in God, as the island of Grandinsula is a holy place.

One possible interpretation of this line is that Joffre may have meant that he cannot because of religion. He then pauses and realises he can confide in Palinor as he will not punish him for admitting his desires. The religion of the island has taught him to stay celibate until he marries. Even if he were not a devout Christian, he would still have most probably recognised the action as wrong because of the strong impression religion has on the society he lives in.

This is why Palinor finds Joffre praying in front of a crucifix later in the novel. He questions Palinor if there is such a thing as sin for him, worrying about the events of the night before. He feels it is a sin because it is the way he has been socialised, yet the first sentence of the last paragraph shows that he found pleasure in the act. Religion has masked him from previously sharing this intimacy with Joffre. This chapter may have created loyalties between the three members of the sexual act. From now on, they seem much closer, becoming almost like Palinor's disciples.

Palinor takes care of Joffre and Dolca by giving them money to live from, in return they visit him everyday in prison. The pair even find themselves longing for Palinor to be laying in between them near the end of the book. The bond may have been formed the night of chapter 22 as sex is supposed to bring people closer together. This situation shows how religion can make a person feel inhibited, as it does not allow the body to be celebrated. In this chapter, we see the real Palinor. We respect Palinor for holding onto his way of thinking, and not letting others imprint their views onto him.

Now, a new Palinor is emerging. One with an imperative need, an experienced teacher, it is quite a transformation of personality. When he is around others such as Beditx and Severo, he is ironically described in a Christ like way. His actions here seem to be anything but Christ-like. However, it could be argued that the image of Christ is continued in Palinor through this chapter. Jill Paton Walsh could be making the point that not even Jesus was perfect. He sinned when he healed on the Sabbath, as Palinor is doing now by breaking the laws of celibacy.

In the extract, Palinor goes out onto the colonnade. Before he does so, he puts on a " cloak over his nakedness. " He does this because what has just happened in the bedroom, he does not want to reveal to the outside world. He wants other people to see him as the innocent party. If anyone-especially Fra Murta- found out what had just happened, there would be less chance of his release. The theme of water and the flow of water is a continuous theme throughout the novel. A reference to this is used in the extract: " The moonlight was casting molten silver over the moving column of water he had raised up.

This line does not suggest that something dark and sinful has just taken place. The references to light and silver show that sex is a beautiful thing. The column of water could possibly represent Palinor's virility. He has always been portrayed as a handsome, sexual being. When Palinor was first found, all the women were amazed at how large his loincloth seemed to be. This perhaps reminds us that he is in fact a normal man, despite the comparisons to Christ. When Palinor built the column, he redirected the flow of the water, which symbolises the way he redirects the flow of Beditx's thinking.

Consequently, it is virility and power he has 'raised up' as well as the column of water. When Beditx is described in his room, the references to light continue: " At the far end of the colonnade Beditx's window was lit, and the grid between the panes made it appear like a large lantern in which Beditx's head, bowed over his books was centred like a flame" This part of the extract demonstrates that Beditx still has his faith. He is still

enlightened with the knowledge of God, this is shown by the illumination of Benedix's head in his window.

When Benedix loses his faith, these images of light discontinue, leaving him to lie in the 'deepening darkness'. There is almost a sense of innocence to Benedix here. While Palinor has been engaging in extravagant sexual activity, he was sitting alone in his room reading his books. Benedix is oblivious to sex, he does not understand it because he is forbidden to take part in such activities. This is shown in chapter twenty four when he flinches at being in Dolca's presence and finds it disturbing. Palinor expresses this opinion in the line 'I could teach you a thing or two about triangles. He could mean one of many things with the word triangles.

The obvious meaning being the sex triangle he has just engaged in, knowing Benedix has a lot to learn about sex. It could also be a link to the holy trinity or to one of Benedix's past philosophical arguments. Benedix felt he had the power in that argument because he had the knowledge, now the power of knowledge lies with Palinor. The author's voice is coming through here, criticising the church of being ignorant of sex and not allowing people to celebrate their bodies. The idea of gaining power the most significant in this chapter.

Before, it has been Benedix and Severo who have the power because they have many 'strong' arguments for the existence of God. Now we see this change in Palinor, the holder of power seems to change. It is from here that we see the deterioration of Benedix's faith. Palinor has just taken away Dolca's innocence, this prepares us for his to take Benedix's beliefs also.

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Although there seems to be an edge to the line about triangles, Palinor means no malice by it because he says it softly. However, this could also be read as having a patronising tone, Palinor trying to belittle Beditx.

The whole idea of whether an atheist could be in good faith is put under question in chapter twenty two. Jill Paton Walsh is raising some important issues here. It is an ambiguous chapter, Palinor corrupting the innocence of Dolca as well disturbing the peace of the church. He is also celebrating the body and helping Joffre and Dolca to explore each other, leaving them suitably pleased. Could it be his lack of religion that helps Palinor force Dolca to have sex with him? If so, it is his lack of morals that allows him to demolish the 'learned' Beditx's faith?