

THE CHANGELING

By Robin Jenkins

Revision Pack

CHAPTER ONE

Overview

In *The Changeling*, middle-class school teacher, Charlie Forbes, wrestles with a moral dilemma: how will he save the young pupil Tom Curdie from a miserable home life lived in one of Europe's most wretched slum neighbourhoods? Despite recognising Curdie's academic potential, Forbes' attempts to "rescue" this child are misguided at best: the effects of his actions are seen in the novel's tragic conclusion.



Chapter One Summary

- We are introduced to the central characters, Curdie and Forbes.
- We note that Forbes believes himself to be a Good Christian – benevolent and kind. However, other characters see Forbes as pompous/sanctimonious/arrogant/foolish.
- We see that Curdie, although desperately impoverished, is smart. He tells lies/keeps quiet to preserve people's impressions/feelings.
- Forbes resolves to take Curdie on his family holiday with him – even though the Head Teacher warns him against it.

How the character of Tom Curdie is Established

Quotation	Context	Analysis
'They were far from knowing that he had given the answer, which was a lie, because he knew that they, and the teacher, were greedy for it.'	Pg. 2. Pupils have been asked to write an essay with the title 'The Sea'. Mr Forbes then asks Tom if he has ever seen the sea.	Jenkins' use of parenthesis is effective here in slowly revealing the reality of the situation. In the first half of the sentence, Tom Curdie is presented as a liar, having presumably tricked his teacher and peers by telling them an untruth. Yet, the second clause in the sentence and the parenthetical insertion ('he knew they, and the teacher, were greedy for it') show that Tom has told a lie for a particular reason: to satisfy his audience. He knows that they crave to hear details of his deprived existence and so has given them what they wanted.
'Curdie's smile was notorious: other teachers called it sly and insolent; it was, they said, the smile of the certificated delinquent, of misanthropy in bud, of future criminality, of inevitable degradation.'	Pg. 2 Curdie has brought his essay up to the teacher's desk to be marked.	In this section Jenkins employs a transferred epithet : Tom's smile represents his personality as a whole. Some say the child is 'insolent' or rude. However, Forbes sees Curdie's smile (as he views the child) as magnanimous – which means forgiving and kind.
'Tom Curdie [...] had one of the best intelligences in the school.'	Pg.2 Forbes reflects on the disparity between Tom's living conditions and his academic ability.	In this quotation we see Forbes acknowledge that the child is clever – despite the background he has come from. Indeed, Forbes reckons that Curdie is one of the cleverest in his year. This shows that often preconceived ideas about class can skew our opinion about intelligence.
'These queer noises and grimaces which the fat teacher was making were typical and funny, but amusement, like suffering, must never be shown.'	Pg.4 Tom watches the teacher as he reads over his work, and as Mr Forbes absorbs Curdie's answers to his questions.	Allows us to see Forbes as Curdie sees him. Use of the phrase 'queer noises and grimaces' show how absurd Tom finds these strange utterances of his teacher. However, the fact that he believes 'amusement must never be shown' (ie that he should not laugh at Forbes) shows that Curdie is not only academically intelligent but also emotionally intelligent.

How the character of Charlie Forbes is Established

Quotation	Context	Analysis
<p>Though no one would belittle the benevolence of the Good Samaritan, in one respect he was lucky: he was alone with his conscience and his neighbor in trouble.'</p>	<p>Pg. 1 – these are the opening words of the novel.</p>	<p>In the opening words of the text Jenkins establishes the theme and situation for the novel. The term Good Samaritan is a biblical allusion and is suggestive of someone who goes out of their way to help someone else. The good Samaritan of this text is Charlie Forbes, who believes that it is his duty to help Tom Curdie and</p>
<p>'With his leer of sympathy he contemplated this small, smiling, incommunicable, deprived morsel of humanity beside him.'</p>	<p>Pg. 2 Tom has just told his teacher that he has never seen the sea in real life.</p>	<p>Use of third person omniscient narration is important here in showing us the reaction of both characters to this lie. Curdie cuts through his teacher's feigned sympathy by seeing him as leering at him. Listing is then used to convey the shift in perspective: Forbes notices first the child's smile, then the fact that he barely speaks, and thirdly that he suffers deprivation. The metaphor 'morsel of humanity' suggests that the child is not worth much to this world.</p>
<p>'So much wrong had been done to this boy. By Whom it had been done, Forbes could not quite say, except that he as a member of society must accept share of the blame.'</p>	<p>Pg.3 Forbes is giving further consideration to how a child can appear so neglected.</p>	<p>The lexical choice/metaphor of 'share of the blame' highlights the need to hold people accountable for Tom's current state. Whilst Forbes appears to benevolently shoulder some of the responsibility by calling himself 'a member of society', he simultaneously feels he is not actually responsible, indicated by the phrase 'by whom it had been done, Forbes could not say'. He wants to present himself as a benevolent member of society intent on helping those less fortunate, but we feel the pomposity of Forbes' ideas here.</p>
<p>'Why not take Tom Curdie with them this summer [...] to build up in him an immunity against the evil influences threatening him?'</p>	<p>Pg.4 Forbes starts to construct a plan about how he might be able to practically help Tom.</p>	<p>Use of the rhetorical question suggests that Forbes is trying to justify to himself his plan. Word choice of 'immunity', with its associations of fighting disease and illness, suggests that Forbes regards poverty/deprivation as a disease to be warded off. This idea is consolidated through lexical choice of 'evil influences'. Yet this is dangerous thinking: who is Forbes to decide what is dangerous for the child, and what right does he have to belittle Tom's background?</p>

Setting

Tom Curdie is from **Donaldson's Court**, a place described in the novel as the worst slum in Europe. The author paints a **bleak image** of Curdie's landscape: rodents infest the **dirty** tenements; prostitution is not concealed from public view; **alcoholism** and **violence** go hand in hand; and **criminality** is beyond the reach of the Police. Forbes wonders who wouldn't be affected by this lifestyle. The Head Teacher speaks of Donaldson's Court and the people who live there in unsympathetic and crude terms: he describes Curdie's family as a 'Hell's brew', claiming that he would not take a 'pet tiger' into the court as it wouldn't have the tenacity or survival instincts to come back out alive. Yet, Tom is still surviving.

Donaldson's Court is **contrasted** starkly with the teacher's holiday home in **Towellan**, a place Forbes views as the sight of personal and spiritual regeneration, a space full of **love, hope** and **renewal**. He believes that extracting Curdie from the slum for a few weeks will in some way protect him. But this idea is foolish because what happens when the child is taken home again?

Each of these aspects will be developed further by Jenkins in the course of the novel.

Theme

There are two **themes** that predominate in *The Changeling*.

Theme	Shown in this chapter through...
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<p>1. Social class and the impact of deprivation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The disparity in appearance between tatty Tom and his smartly turned out classmates in the Latin class • Charlie Forbes' belief that he can "fix" Tom • The attitude of middle-class teachers to working class people/areas • The description of Donaldson's Court, a place of generational deprivation • The fact that Forbes gets to holiday regularly
<p>2. The concepts of good and innocence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forbes' belief that he understands what is best for a child – when in fact he has no real understanding of Tom's experience • Tom's need to conform to what is expected in his English class • Tom's exposure to alcoholism, violence and crime lead to his loss of innocence

Why is this an effective opening to the novel?

The opening to this novel is **highly effective** because of the following:

- I. Jenkins quickly and effectively **establishes** the **characters** of Forbes and Curdie. We understand the challenges Curdie faces, and we note Forbes' strong desire to rectify/fix/save/help.
- II. The author's **thematic concerns** are clear from the start. Reference to the Good Samaritan in the opening paragraph sets up Jenkins' study of good and innocence. Descriptions of the boy's appearance, alongside descriptions of Donaldson's court, set up the theme of social class and deprivation.
- III. **Setting** is clearly **evoked**. We have the polar opposites of Donaldson's Court (which represents Tom) and Towellan (representing Forbes) and the middle ground of the classroom (where both classes meet). In the latter setting, Tom Curdie seems to be more intuitive and smarter, perhaps, than his clumsy teacher.