

Implied Values in Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang*

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the values implied in Peter Philip Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang*.

This novel portrays the life of the legendary hero Ned Kelly. Through the characterization, Carey has inculcated certain aspects of values in his novel. Carey's works are customarily set in Australia. His works explore the themes related to social values, nationhood and history. This paper not only helps to understand the character of an Australian outlaw, but also explores the motives, compassion and commitment that he possesses. In spite of being an outlaw, he is considered as Australian legendary hero. His adventures, deeds and hardships add value to the Australian history. And his personality imparts knowledge of values. The present scrutiny on this particular novel helps to unveil the values reflected through the character.

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1. Introduction

True History of the Kelly Gang by Peter Carey is based on the ventures of Kelly Gang. Carey's mastery lies in blending facts with fables. He is capable of bringing in a blurring line between fiction and history. This Booker Prize winning novel is no exception. It is a story bound narrative of Ned Kelly, an Australian folk hero. This novel explores the endeavours of Ned Kelly and serves as a historical manuscript and a reminiscent of Kelly and Gang. This research paper focuses on the values represented in the novel.

2. Australian Literature

History serves as a major source for Australian writings. Social and political conditions of Australia have brought an impact among the writers. Australia is not only a commonwealth country, but also a post colonial nation. Thus, it serves as a place of exile for convicts. The Irish rebels have been uprooted from their places and transported to Australia as they voiced and protest against the British colonizers. Again in Australia, they come across several kinds of oppression and even struggled for their survival. *True History of the Kelly Gang* portrays the history of an Irish outlaw, Ned Kelly. Historical fiction, particularly that of Peter Carey, revisits Australia's past and offers new ideas of relating to those events.

3. Value - A Measure of Goodness

Values are beliefs that inspire people to work or proceed in a particular way. They help us to identify what is significant to us. Sometimes, it is through the values that everyone is being judged. It includes the personal qualities, the way one treats himself/herself and others and also the interaction. Some values have innate worth for instance, truth, love, courage, ambition, responsibility, compassion and commitment. So, values can best be described as something good and worthwhile. When Good deeds are considered and their measures are defined as values, the deeds of Ned Kelly are definitely the same. Ned Kelly portrayed by Peter Carey in *True History of the Kelly Gang* has multifaceted personality. He is described as a boy, an adult, a lover, a

father, an outlaw and as a legendary Australian folk hero. At each and every phase of his life there is an implication of a measure of goodness.

A substantial importance is given to his boyhood life and youth, as the readers get familiar with his family-bond and heartfelt fighting spirit. The first image of the boy Ned with his mother, his siblings and relatives prefigures the miserable setting since his father is absent. Ned grows up determining to lend a hand to his mother and to the entire family. Thus, he shoulders the responsibility at very young age.

Jimmy were already ½ mad from his numerous incarcerations wild and foul mouthed and violent but always very patient and kind to me and he didnt laugh when I said I were leaving school in order to be a selector. He said a 12 yr. old boy could do very well at buying and selling horses on the side and he helped me break several more unbranded horses. (Carey 46-47)

Ned's juvenile is filled with hardening experiences and absence of potential role models. His father is dead, stepfathers are disliked for being lazy, uncle tried to rape his mother, relatives are too distant. Ned decides not to be like the people he knows. Harry Power is the only one left. Ned respects him for his skills in bushranging. He learns bushranging from Harry. Then, Ned has been left to manage by himself.

Kelly unhesitating nature of protecting his family from danger and dishonour shows his care over his family. This is explained by Gilmore as: "Honor is tied up with meeting expectations as a member of a corporate group defined by genealogy or affinity [...] and thereby protecting the group's collective reputation (Gilmore 131)." Ned puts his life at risk for his family.

Since Kelly grows up with sisters, he knows to behave in a decent manner with girls. But he hardly interact with girls. He shows interest on a girl named Caitlin. They both experience few moments of serene happiness in seclusion of nature. Their moment as described in the text as follows:

She held out her hand so I could help her off the rock and her hand were very warm and she led me down a steep wall she knew the way but seemed to need my

hand to guide her. Soon we come across the source of all the greenery it were a spring seeping from the rocks it were cool and dark with ferns growing from the crevices. Here we sat together side by side I were very happy for a while. (Carey 131)

This event shows his interest to have a relationship. But he has been sentenced to three years of imprisonment during his teenage. Thus, he himself remarks: “[My] last hope of youth was stripped away I had never kissed a girl but were old enough to be a married man (Carey 194).” Ned shows his passion for love and potentiality of parenthood as well. Even when he was a small boy, his care towards his newborn sister is commendable.

By the time he finished doctoring to my mother it were dawn a luminous grey light filled the light hut and all the world seemed bright and new. I were happy then [. . .] But I did not wish to leave my new sister with her soft downy black hair and her white white skin how it glowed like a sepulcher inside that earth floored hut. (Carey 31)

Kelly is actually an outlaw or a criminal. He is not only a murderer but also a robber. He himself has explained the pleasure of looting from the rich. He uses the robbed money to defend against the enemies. Carey’s Kelly is represented not much as a criminal, but as a soldier “I’m sure you know I have spilled human blood when there were no other choice at that time I were no more guilty than a soldier in a war (Carey 25).” Carey describes Kelly more as a victim than a criminal. While analyzing each and every phase of Kelly’s life, there are certain values implied in his personality such as love, kindness, compassion, commitment, leadership, self-assurance and dexterity.

4. From a Lawbreaker to a Legendary Hero

On analyzing the description of an outlaw’s life, it is evident that his unpleasant childhood and forsaken youth have forced him to choose the illegal path. He takes law in his hands and threatens people and eventually forced them to comply with him. His crimes are confessed and

accepted by the readers in reaction to circumstances. They might have felt indebted to pass over them without considering as actually criminal.

Ned is a commoner and this gives him a picture of manhood since he has to carry out physical chores. Gilmore rightly opines, “To know a man [...] you have to see him at work at useful jobs: you have to know his energy quotient as a worker, a producer, a builder (Gilmore 110).” These everyday activities are the sources of Ned’s physique and it also serves as a proving ground for his abilities.

Kelly is regarded as a great hero due to his performative excellence, fearless attitude, public activity, impressive physique and his war and strategies. In spite of being an outlaw he is a man implied with values. Ned’s willingness to protect the family and his daring deeds as a bushranger shows his commitment and compassion. His respect for women and elderly people needs a special notice when it comes to his values.

The rough manliness, tempered manners, mental ability and physical fitness show him as a rogue or a criminal. Whereas his compassion, commitment, love, justice, kindness, leadership quality, fearless nature, dexterity and self-assurance show him as a legendary hero. It is through the values a person is identified. It is the morals that are remembered over the years. Kelly is remembered as a bushranger, an outlaw and more importantly as an Australian icon.

Thomas Curnow, meanwhile, was escorted by six policemen directly from his cottage to the Special Train and from there he was taken to Melbourne, where government protection was provided him and his wife for four months. This was curious treatment for a hero, and he was called a hero more than once, although less frequently and less enthusiastically than he might have reasonably expected (Carey 419)

Ned Kelly is regarded as truly imperfect, in his imperfections and contradictory nature lies actuality which makes him truly an Australian. Kelly does not have a habit of paying obeisance to the rich and authoritative ones. He is bold, courageous and authentic to himself at any cost.

5. Conclusion

Values reflect every man's own personality, his sense of good and bad deeds. Those values help for growth and development. Family plays a major role in teaching values to the young ones. Sometimes life and experiences take in hand the responsibility of teaching mankind. In Ned Kelly's life, there is no scope of learning values. But some of his acts signify his inner self filled with morals. The present research has given an account of the events that describe the implied values in an outlaw who has been transformed to a legendary hero. The sense of commitment and compassion that Kelly possesses shows the truest heroic quality. Carey's description of an outlaw as a victim and as a hero leaves an inspiration for the readers to make our society a better place.

Works Cited:

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