

Importance of guilt in cal essay sample

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Cal is an insightful story set in Northern Ireland in Ulster in the mid 1970's, where Mac Lavery opens the novel with the protagonist Cal, a Catholic teenager living during the sectarian Troubles where there was intense socio-political and religious conflict between Catholics and Protestants, involving the rule of British colonialism/occupation of Ireland.

The novel tells of a story where Cal is caught up in his country's violent conflict and implicated on the edge of crime and violence, to the extent that he has acquired an oppressive secret and unbearable guilt. Guilt is a key element and central theme that Bernard Mac Lavery explores throughout the novel. In this essay, I will be explaining the significance of guilt and the overall impact it has on both the characters in the novel, as well as the effect it has on the readers where ultimately, strong emotions are evoked and a fuller understanding of the situation in Ireland is developed.

The main ideology of guilt in Cal originates from the legacy of Catholicism where the religion emphasises on confession and a desire of atonement, redemption and cleansing. Mac Lavery juxtaposes guilt with suffering by the concept of expiation through sacrificing personal pleasures and inflicting a punishment upon oneself all intertwined.

Cal is portrayed as a very religious character and his Catholicism is ingrained and well established. He goes to church and mass/confession often in the novel, where he tries to overcome the guilt of the crime committed, yet it seems hopeless. Mac Lavery gives the readers an insight by reflecting Cal's thoughts of regret and guilt. Mac Lavery writes, ' the only prayer he (Cal) could say with any sincerity was for his mother...the rest of his prayers

consisted of telling himself how vile he was'. Cal is disgusted with himself for being part of something so terrible, and is continuously tortured with the memory of driving the getaway car after Crilly murders an influential Protestant.

Another guilt feature involved in the novel is when Skeffington, ironically a school teacher and a member of the IRA – a terrorist group at the time – uses his ability to manipulate Cal and make him feel guilty in a very subtle, articulate and persuasive manner. Skeffington is convinced by his principles of 'fighting this war' and consistently tells Cal 'it is our responsibility. We have to make sacrifices. You cant just turn away...' Even though Cal knows what the IRA is completely wrong and feels violence is not justified, Skeffington makes Cal feel guilty. He is made to feel that he owes it to his people to help serve and protect and help contribute to save his people by winning this war. Skeffington's cold intellect and calculated blackmail escalates Cal's personal guilt with this additional responsibility on behalf of his society. Cal in a way feels guilty for not being active enough like Skeffington and Crilly in helping to defend the Catholic people.

Furthermore, guilt is also represented when Cal is with Marcella. From the start of the relationship, it is very satirical and shocking that Cal becomes romantically involved with the wife of the Reserve Policeman he actually helped to kill. As the relationship is based on dishonesty, Cal feels guilty of being with her and is unable to confess to her his sin, which would inevitably destroy their relationship. The more time Cal spends with Marcella, yet his inability to confess continues building up his guilt gradually and Mac Laverty

writes ‘ the happier Cal felt, the sadder he became...he wanted to confess to her, weep and be forgiven’. Many times, he comes close to telling her but cannot bring himself to do it.

Cal also feels bad when he is first invited into the Morton farm and he hears Mr Morton’s ‘ terrible bout of coughing- like death throes- and it went hacking on and on and on, taking no pause for breath’. The guilt that Cal feels at the precise moment is full of dread to the extent that he tries to block of his sense of hearing by staring intensely at a wall.

Overall, the novel has a degree of realism, which permits Mac Lavery to develop the characters and their emotions to the full, hence allowing greater involvement on the readers’ part. Cal’s guilt plays a huge part in his actions and is therefore integral to our understanding of life in Ireland during the Troubles. Mac Lavery encapsulates the essence of guilt which has an emphasis on the reader to release emotions of sympathy/empathy and conclude to a deeper understanding of the complex situation.

The novel is emotionally perceptive with sacrifice and guilt as recurrent areas of interest as Cal is unable to come to terms fully with what he has done. His desire for punishment is a register of his Catholic heritage/culture and a measure of the sin he has committed; but the narrative also makes it transparent that Cal is in fact just another victim of his environment and society.