

# Truth and justice in jasper jones



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Craig Silvey's Australian novel *Jasper Jones* stresses the importance of truth and justice in formulating human experiences, shaping understandings of oneself and world. It highlights that events aren't always positive; justice isn't dealt out fairly, and truth can be a burden.

Silvey suggests that people's response to a disclosed truth can empower or diminish their supremacy, creating a clearer comprehension of their true, human nature. When Charlie discovers Ruth's affair, her response is aggressive. According to him, " she keeps shrieking spitfire questions, just filling up this space with her stupid outrage," the imagery illuminating Ruth's hostility. It highlights that her initial reaction to confrontation is defensive, revealing her hypocritical nature. However, Charlie responds assertively, stating " but I feel calm." The disjunction of " but" signals a change in Charlie's behaviour and contrasts Ruth's reaction. Charlie's defiance is Ruth's punishment for her secret, conveyed in " No! You dug this hole, you fill it in." The italics blames Ruth and prevents her from avoiding the truth. The imperative indicates a progress of Charlie's bildungsroman journey, he gains the maturity to defend himself. It also signifies a role reversal - Charlie is now powerful and Ruth is defenseless, reinforced when Charlie thinks " she looks like a child. Scared, lost and unhappy.... she begins to cry." The simile of the child suggests that Charlie is the adult now, and that once the truth is out there, Ruth can no longer hide behind her ' motherly' appearance. Silvey illustrates that a critical part of the human condition is our response to a disclosed truth.

Silvey underlines that learning the truth can cause regret - it can formulate a negative outlook of the world and becomes a burden. Charlie grapples with

his knowledge about Laura Wishart's death, evident from the moment he learns of Laura's fate, declaring that " I feel like I'm underwater. Deaf and drowning." The drowning metaphor reveals Charlie's powerlessness, shock and distress at the discovery. He constantly feels anxious due to this, expressed in the recurring motif of insects - " There are insects crawling on my shoulders," the insects being representative of his omnipresent anxiety and danger. Once Charlie learns what really happened on the night of Laura's murder he still feels equally distressed, believing that if he had not followed Jasper Jones, he " would have stayed safe in my room...None the wiser. Much the lighter. I'd never had this awful brick in my stomach." Charlie's bedroom is a symbol for comfort and security, his leaving has thrown him into the deep end, referring to the drowning metaphor. The symbol of the brick also exposes how he is anchored by the knowledge. Silvey employs a stream of consciousness when detailing Laura's abuse, coupled with the repetition of the running on of words, " Thisiswhathappened," this elucidates that Charlie cannot contain the secret and he needs to reveal it quickly. Silvey demonstrates that knowledge of a complete truth doesn't provide closure or comfort to those who know it.

The text illuminates that human " justice" systems are innately corrupt and will use their privilege to, paradoxically, employ unjust methods to seek justice. This is expressed when the police interrogate Eliza. Charlie states that " She stayed firm when they plied her with sweets and lemonade and spoke soothingly, even firmer when they threatened her, when they hissed in her ear and told her she was betraying the people she loved." The verb choice of " plied" denotes that the police forcibly tried to reveal the truth.

The onomatopoeia of “ hiss” creates an illusion that they are snakes – poisonous, deceptive and vile. The juxtaposition of kind methods with cruelty conveys that institutions are multifaceted and use brutality to achieve their goals. It’s ironic that an establishment created to serve justice is capable of being so unjust. This is also evident when Jasper is beaten by officers whilst being unfairly detained. Jasper explained that “ They don’t need a reason,” which exemplifies their incompetence to find true justice and instead, abusing an innocent person. It’s also ironic that Mr Wishart participated in Jasper’s mistreatment, blaming him for his daughter’s disappearance when his actions resulted in her death. Silvey demonstrates that individuals in position of power ultimately become corrupted, becoming unable to serve true justice.

In contrast, the text elucidates that powerless people who seek justice utilize unconventional and unlawful methods to achieve it, as traditional means of equity will not work – typified when Eliza commits arson. As described by Charlie, “ The Wishart house is crackling furiously from the inside. It’s a single box of flames.” Fire is a symbol for rebirth and renewal, denoting that Eliza is cleansing the home of the atrocities that took place there. It also signals her own rebirth, strengthening her character to become more resilient. Using intertextuality, it links her to Jenny Likens as they both “ said nothing until the end.” This is Eliza’s way of speaking against her father’s maltreatment of Laura. The event is referred to as “ the antipodean snowdome,” highlighting that Eliza is shattering her own “ snowdome”, a symbol for safety, as it’s painful for her. “ Antipoden” is something that relates to Australia, reflecting Eliza’s Australian value of anti-

authoritarianism, and that her method of justice undermines traditional power structures. Charlie reflects on Eric Cooke's explanation as to why he murdered others, " I just wanted to hurt somebody," relating it to Eliza, denoting her anger at her father and reveals that crime is more complex than people perceive. People from all walks of life commit crimes, and sometimes, it can be considered heroic. The novel emphasizes that sometimes, the only way to achieve justice is through unsafe and non-traditional means.

Silvey underscores that truth and justice are instrumental in creating differing perceptions of the world, and that people's response to both these ideas can be negative, unfair or subversive. It reflects the inherently flawed and corrupt human condition.