

The cone gatherers

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



The Cone Gatherers "The Cone Gatherers" is a novel written by Robin Jenkins. The novel is set on a country estate in Scotland, during World War II and features two brothers, Calum and Neil, who collect cones for the war effort. The kind hearted Calum is disabled in mind and body and relies on his brother to care for him. Whilst on the estate, they encounter the gamekeeper, Duror, a handsome, seemingly stoic character, who takes an instant hatred to Calum. Throughout the novel, it dawns on Duror that he and Calum are not as different as he first anticipated. He sees himself in Calum. Before even realising this, he tries to get rid of the brothers by persuading Lady Runcie-Campbell who is head of the estate where the brothers work - that Calum is evil and dangerous. Eventually, Duror sees no other option other than to kill Calum. In doing so, there is a significant message in the novel that good cannot exist without evil, and possibly, that evil truly exists in us all; this is confirmed when Duror takes his own life after killing Calum. Throughout the novel, the author effectively develops the theme of good and evil. The theme is initially introduced by Calum and is emphasised through the goodness in him, and throughout his symbolic links to Christ. The narrator describes how at the start of the novel his "sunburnt face was alert and beautiful with trust." Calum is a deformed hunchback with a beautiful face; his good nature and trustfulness shines through allowing us to see his true beauty: he oozes purity and innocence. Although he is an adult, he has the mentality of a child, and only sees good in others: "And I ken that too, though you're simple, you're better than any of them. Is to be always happy a crime? Is it daft never to be angry or jealous or full of spite? You're better and wiser than any of them." Neil always defends Calum as he

knows he is not as wise to the evils in the world. Calum does not judge and is not guilty of prejudice; like Christ, he is full of kindness. He is extremely kind hearted to the point of being almost heroic; we look up to him connecting him with the idea of goodness and innocence, so beginning to develop the theme of good and evil. The theme is further developed through the character of Duror who represents all that is evil and cynical in the world. His constant obsession with Calum grows and at one point he imagines killing Calum which brings him satisfaction: " His fits tighten on his gun. He saw himself returning, kicking open the door, shouting at them in disgust, and then blasting them both to every lasting perdition." This suggests his fury with Calum and how it never ceases to exist; Duror constantly imagines the sensation of Calum dying and believes it will relieve him of his constant state of depression and resentfulness: he believes Calum must be killed in order for him to be happy or, at least content. Duror always sought refuge in the woods and believes Calum had robbed him of this: " The wood has always been his stronghold and sanctuary... where he had been able to fortify his sanity and hope. But now the wood was invaded and defiled, its cleansing and reviving virtues were gone. Into it had crept this hunchback, himself one of nature's freaks." Duror often visits the woods for a means of escape from his bed ridden obsess wife Peggy and her dictating mother. When the brothers arrive, he believes that they made such sanctuary impossible. He believes they must be removed completely and that they have no right to be there, especially Calum. We read about the origins of such hatred: " Since childhood Duror had been repelled by anything living that had an imperfection, deformity or lack". Calum on the other hand is seen as

someone who cares for all humans and animals, somewhat of a role model for others in his good will and nature. Duror on some level is envious as he is, burdened with a horrible life and blames his misfortunes on Calum. In this, his character represents all that is wicked, so continuing the theme of good and evil. Throughout the novel the theme continues as Duror begins to realise that he can relate to Calum and see himself in him. He says: " For many years his life had been shunted, misshapen, obscene and hideous; and this misbegotten creature, was its personification. " For Duror, Calum brings to life all that Duror hates about his own life, Calum represents, his deformity, all that Duror sees as ugly and yet, Duror cannot escape the fact that Calum represents the beautiful also. He sees himself in this: handsome, composed and stoic he is at the same time corrupt and flawed. Duror then wants Calum to suffer as he blames Calum for all that he suffers. He believes Calum should suffer a " destruction, an agony, a crucifixion" so referencing Calum to Christ and foreshadowing the conclusion of the novel - Calum must die. In the connection set between the perfect character of Calum and the flawed Duror, the writer begins to deliver his message on the theme of good and evil. Indeed the author concludes the novel by demonstrating that good cannot exist without evil. This is shown when Calum is killed and Duror ultimately dies too. Duror kills Calum by shooting him from a tree when he is gathering cones: " His arms were loose and dangles... though he smiled he was dead." Even in death, Calum seemed content, something Duror cannot feel. Calum may have died but it seems he has sacrificed himself for the greater good, in a similar way to Jesus who sacrificed himself for others. To emphasise such ideas, Duror's suicide illustrates the collapse of all that is

evil: " Duror, with his face shattered and bloody, lay dead." The once handsome Duror destroys his own mask: literally and more delivers his message: good and evil cannot exist independently. " The Cone Gatherers" by Robin Jenkins effectively develops the theme of good and evil in a way which is set to capture the interest of the reader. Introduced and developed through the characterisation of Duror and Calum, the final chapters and their events drive home the writer's message - good and evil do not exist in isolation - one is an integral part of the other.