

# Kelly's Irony in Pursuing Happiness In Macpherson's *Talk of the Town* Novel

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**Abstract.** This study attempts to analyze Kelly's irony in pursuing her true happiness. Kelly's irony covers her consideration that happiness could be found in money which contrasts the fact that she was not happy after being rich woman. The writer applies New Criticism as the concept in analyzing this study. In collecting the data from various books, journals, thesis, online information, and other related sources, the writer uses qualitative method. The writer focuses on characterization, setting, and irony in finding the theme of this novel. This research finds out that the conflicts influence Kelly's characterization. The setting creates the irony of happiness that Kelly experienced then motivates Kelly to pursue her true happiness. By finding Kelly's concept of true happiness, the theme can be revealed that happiness cannot be measured by the amount of money someone has. This study finally proves that the formal elements of *Talk of the Town* novel work together as an organic unity in establishing the theme.

**Index Terms :** *irony; happiness; to pursue*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study attempts to reveal how the characterization, setting, and irony support the theme of Macpherson's *Talk of the Town* novel that is happiness cannot be measured by the amount of money someone has. Commonly, people in America correlate the definition of their happiness with the money they have. However, the survey shows that although since the twentieth century the wealth in America has grown up dramatically, American on average are not happy and satisfied with their life prosperity (Leslie et al 2). This denies people's assumption that happiness can be achieved by having much money. However, ironically, people recently still think that money is the source of their happiness.

One of the literary works which depict this issue is the novel of *Talk of the Town* by Suzanne Macpherson. This novel tells about its main character, Kelly Atwood, in facing the irony of happiness in pursuing her true happiness. The irony of happiness shows the difference of what she expected toward money and the reality she faced. Defining happiness as having much money; Kelly later found out that she did not find happiness in money like she expected previously. Because she was from broken and poor family, she thought that being rich could pull her out from her miserable life and cure her painful wound. However, when she succeeded to be a rich woman, she found the opposite reality that money did not bring her to happiness. This irony of happiness faced by Kelly in her pursuit of true happiness attracts the writer to make it as her topic in this research since it can give valuable lesson of life to readers that in some ways happiness cannot be found in money.

Besides that inspiring a valuable lesson of life implied in the story, *Talk of the Town* novel is qualified enough to be analyzed deeper since the author's achievement in writing may not be undoubted. In 2005, Suzanne Macpherson was honored as contemporary fiction author by RITA awards. RITA or Romance Writers of America is an annual award given for best American romance authors held by RWA (Romance Writers of America). She proves her undoubted skill of writing by joining NINC or Novelist Inc. organization in which the members of NINC must publish at least two bestseller books. Suzanne has been experiencing in the publishing industry for ten years and becomes professional writer. In short, *Talk of the Town* novel is an appropriate object to be analyzed more to get a deeper interpretation of the main idea because of both its story and author are worth it (HarperCollinsPublishers).

In analyzing *Talk of the Town* novel, New Criticism theory is applied. New Criticism is used as the basic concept due to the fact that the topic is about Kelly's irony of happiness so that the analysis of this study focuses on irony and other formal elements of the novel to find out the theme. New Criticism is a concept of examining literary work which does not reveal the meaning of a text through the author and the readers' perspective. According to Tyson in his book, interpreting a text using New Criticism is based on the text itself (137). It means that the main source of the evidences to be interpreted is based on the literary work itself and other information from the author and reader's responses are not categorized as the supporting data to interpret the text. In analyzing with

this theory, only the intrinsic or formal elements of the text will be focused to find the meaning of the text. The formal elements such as characters, setting, plot, point of view, irony, paradox, metaphor work together as the organic unity to build the theme of a text. In establishing the main idea of one text, those formal elements connect one to another, work together, and cannot be separated.

To make a proper analysis of this research, qualitative method will be used since it supports in collecting the materials for the analysis. In collecting the related materials, the writer seeks for information from various books, journals, thesis, and other related sources in order to support the analysis of this study. As this research is based on New Criticism study, close reading method is done for collecting the data from the main source or *Talk of the Town* novel. There are two steps in doing close reading: examining the formal elements such as characterization, setting, and irony and then finding out the theme of the novel.

In the step of examining formal elements, the characterization is firstly revealed. Because the topic of this research is Kelly's irony of happiness, her characterization is dominantly revealed. Kelly's struggles are revealed to find out her characterization because her conflicts influence her characterization. In the step of examining the setting, it is examined how the social condition of Los Angeles creates Kelly's irony of happiness which shows the contradiction of Kelly's expectation of happiness with the reality she got. Paradise along with its social condition is also examined as the place where Kelly found her true happiness. After examining these formal elements, the writer can find out the theme of *Talk of the Town* novel as the last step. By finding the theme, finally the writer can draw a conclusion of this research that the formal elements of characterization, setting, and irony work together in shaping the theme of *Talk of the Town* novel.

For a more comprehensive analysis, a scope and limitation will be applied in this study. The subject of this study focuses on the characterization, setting, and irony of the novel. In examining the characterization, only Kelly's characterization is revealed since her irony of happiness becomes the topic of this research. The analysis of setting focuses on revealing the social condition aspect of Los Angeles that create Kelly's irony and Paradise that creates Kelly's true meaning of happiness. The time aspects in supporting the concept of Kelly's true happiness is also revealed. The irony is analyzed in terms of showing the contradiction between the meaning of happiness that Kelly expected and she got in fact. Types of irony examined in this study are verbal, situational, and attitudinal irony. Then, Kelly's

concept of her true happiness can be found out as the theme of this novel.

To support the analysis of this study, the writer looks for some related studies. However, after looking in many sources, there is still not found any research using *Talk of the Town* as either thesis or journal. Yet, the writer has found one study which uses the same theory of New Criticism and two studies discussing the same subject of analysis but focusing different literary work. The first study analyzes the characters and setting element as the focus of the research which is done by Firenda Dian Megasari entitled *Dave's Journey in Search of Family Love in Dave Pelzer's the Lost Boy: A New Criticism Study*. This study analyzes the characters, setting, and plot elements in establishing the reason and process of family love seeking by the main character in the novel of *The Lost Boy*. Two other related studies which discuss about irony elements are taken from English literature journals: *The Poetics of Disengagement: Jane Austen and Echoic Irony* by Massimiliano Morini and *A Tragic Hap: Ritual, Irony, and Myth in the War Poetry of Wifred Owen* by William Kevin Penny. *The Poetics of Disengagement: Jane Austen and Echoic Irony* is a research by Massimiliano Morini which aims to show the gaps of echoic irony between the sayings and the viewpoint of the characters in Jane Austen's novel. *A Tragic Hap: Ritual, Irony, and Myth in the War Poetry of Wifred Owen* by William Kevin Penny discusses the functions of language as a literary device for developing the irony in Owen's poetry.

By using these three related studies for supporting this research, the writer finds out some distinctions and similarities between this study and those related studies. It can be clearly seen the distinction between this study and those related studies takes place on the object of analysis. It means that the literary works used in each study are different. This study uses novel as the object of the research while one of those related studies uses poetry as the object of discussion. The main similarity which easily recognized is the concept applied in this study and in those related studies: New Criticism. Both this study and those related studies use New Criticism as the basic theory for interpreting each different literary works in the research. Another similarity is the subject of formal elements which are going to be revealed in the analysis. Either this study or those related studies attempt to examine characterization, setting, and irony to look for the main idea of the literary work. Guided by those three related studies, the writer of this research would like to analyze *Talk of the Town* novel by Suzanne Macpherson to find out how the characterization, setting, and irony as organic unity

support Kelly's irony of happiness in pursuing her true happiness for building the theme of the novel.

So, back to the aim of looking for the theme of *Talk of the Town* novel based on New Criticism theory, the writer would like to examine how the characterization, setting, and irony support Kelly's irony in pursuing true happiness. The writer does not only reveal the formal elements of characterization, setting, and irony, but also shows how they connect one to another in building the theme. By this study, the writer hopes to contribute in providing a reference of New Criticism study for the readers who want to analyze literary works using New Criticism theory. Moreover, by giving a portrayal about the valuable lesson implied in this novel, this study is expected to inspire readers that money does not always guarantee their happiness.

## **2. KELLY'S STRUGGLE IN PURSUING HAPPINESS**

Kelly's struggles are important to be found out firstly because they influence Kelly's characterization. In revealing Kelly's struggles which influence her characterization, it can be done by examining the external conflicts happen in the story. Griffith (31) stated that external conflicts involve the dispute between the characters with other characters or with the environments. Kelly's first external conflict happens with her drug user and drunkard mother on her childhood in San Francisco. Having many boyfriends, Kelly's mother often ignored her so that she was Kelly often escaped and slept in a railway station because she got lack of love from her family (Macpherson 6). Experiencing to beg money from strangers in surviving for life, Kelly had a desire to be a rich person. These struggles Kelly faced in her childhood shape Kelly's characteristic as a lack of love and money oriented person.

Besides personality, Kelly's conflicts with her mother also influence her appearance. Kelly is described as a 28-year-old woman. She was beautiful and thin. Her eyes were hazel. However, she looked like a bad girl because she had a wild rose tattoo on her foot, ring on her nose, and different color dyed on her hair (27). Her appearance may be influenced by her mother's bad behavior which failed to be a good mother for Kelly. The habits of Kelly's mother in consuming drugs and getting drunk gave a bad model for Kelly in looking for her self-identity in terms of appearance. Being busy with his boyfriends also made Kelly's mother ignore her so that her mother paid less attention to Kelly's appearance. In sort Kelly's characterization is depicted as beautiful yet looked like a bad girl, lack of love, and materialistic person.

It can be understood that Kelly's trait as money oriented person and her experiences in begging money from strangers motivate her to be a rich person. She considered that by having much money would pull her out from her miserable life. She thought that money could cure her pain memories with her mother in childhood so that she moved from San Francisco to Los Angeles to earn for life (5). In short, it shows that Kelly's conflicts with her mother shape her traits as materialistic person so that she determined her happiness meaning in terms of being rich.

The next external conflicts involve Kelly with Raymond, the man that hired her as secretary in his car showroom when she moved to Los Angeles. It is shown that her conflicts emerged after Kelly found a bag of cocaine by the time they just got married (2). After they had a fight, Kelly decided to leave Raymond and left her marriage ended. Her failed marriage brought Kelly to the memory of her mother who consumed drugs every day (5). It can be understood that by remembering painful experiences in her childhood made Kelly regret to marry Raymond. Her conflicts with Raymond also made Kelly realize that she did not love him, but she was only attracted by Raymond's wealth. Raymond is depicted as mature and successful man. He was a stable businessman who had a car showroom in Los Angeles (2). His hard working and well organized personalities drove Kelly crazy and makes Kelly wanted him so much. It means that she thought that by marrying rich Raymond, she could get happiness like she had expected since a child. In contrast to get happiness, Kelly found out her marriage ended and Raymond reminded her of her painful childhood. So, it can be seen that Kelly's conflict with Raymond made Kelly realized that having much money did not give her happiness like she expected before.

According to DiYanni in his book, this situation in a literary work is called irony or the contradiction between what someone expects and the reality happens (93). The irony of Kelly's happiness happens when what she expected to be happy by having much money contrasts to the reality she got that she was not happy at all. Being able to upgrade her economic class like she had dreamt since child finally did not lead Kelly to the happiness she pursued (Macpherson 54). Besides her conflicts with Raymond, Kelly's irony of happiness is also influenced by the setting of the novel. In examining the setting that influences Kelly's irony of happiness, the social condition of Los Angeles is revealed.

Griffith (40) stated that the social condition of setting reflects the manners, custom, rituals, moral value, and other cultural aspect of society depicted in the text and mostly they affect the characterization. It

can be seen from the novel that Los Angeles consisted of people from high class who prioritized fancy things as their lifestyle, such as car, technology, fashion, and makeup. Living in this metropolitan social condition which everything measured by material supports Kelly's materialistic traits so that it influences her meaning of happiness as being rich. Besides shaping her happiness in terms of money, Los Angeles also makes her ambition being a rich person come true by meeting her with rich Raymond. However, after fulfilling Kelly's expectation to be a rich woman, Los Angeles also showed the irony of Kelly's happiness. Los Angeles was the place where Kelly achieved her dream to be rich person yet it also made her realize that money did not give her true happiness. It can be inferred that Los Angeles met Kelly with rich Raymond to fulfill her expectation being rich woman, yet it also became the place where their marriage ended and reminded her of her painful childhood.

### **3. KELLY'S IRONY IN PURSUING HAPPINESS**

This irony of happiness Kelly faced can be revealed deeper by examining several types of irony. There are four types of irony, according to Griffith (48-50): verbal irony, situational irony, attitudinal irony, and dramatic irony (found in drama or play). Verbal irony happens when there is opposition between what the characters say and mean because the character's tone of speaking and body expression contrast to what they mean. In this case, verbal irony can be found from the sentence below:

When she divorced Raymond, she would ask for a settlement, since her income had been combined with his to cover the household expenses for the last two years. So, this was a good start. An early withdrawal. Enough money to start her life in a new direction. She decided to call this money 'damages'. (8)

This statement shows an opposite meaning from what the Kelly said. Although she found out her marriage with Raymond ended, she still thought about the settlement she would ask for Raymond, although she had known that money did not bring happiness. Having experience of not being happy with rich man, Kelly still asked for settlement and money from him. This shows there is a verbal irony when Kelly said money was a damage because her statement differs from the fact that she asked for settlement and money. It can be understood that she assumed money as damage while ironically, she still needed money to support her life after divorce.

The second type is situational irony in which according to Griffith, it happens when the expectation of the society opposes with the reality happens in the story (49). This is shown by Kelly's happiness which differs from what people commonly define. While

most people in the story correlated happiness with the amount money they have, Kelly did not find any happiness in the money she has. In this case, Myrtle supported most people's assumption that happiness related to money by saying that poverty would bring troubles to people (61). Myrtle agreed that people would be happy if they had much money because they could buy anything they want. However, what people expected that money would bring Kelly happiness is completely denied by Kelly. She experienced living in clover, but was still not happy. So, the situational irony happens between what people in the story expected that money would make Kelly happy, but in fact she was not happy at all with the big amount of money she had.

The last is attitudinal irony which is according to Griffith; it is resulted by the contrast between the expectations of one character with the reality (50). In this case, what Kelly expected from being rich could make her happy, in fact money did not bring her the happiness she had been looking for. Kelly finally understood that money did not give her happiness after realizing she married Raymond was not because she loved him, but because she wanted his money (Macpherson 96). So, what Kelly expected to be happy by marrying rich Raymond opposes with the reality she faced that she was totally not happy.

In short, Los Angeles also shows the irony of Kelly's happiness that money did not bring happiness to her. Then it also motivates Kelly to pursue her true meaning of happiness. She wanted to find happiness by being with someone she really loves so she wants to find the meaning of happiness from the true love. She also wanted to live peacefully in the environment whose people did not use drugs like Raymond and her mother. So, Los Angeles shapes Kelly's meaning of happiness in terms of being truly loved and living peacefully with people who did not use drugs and get drunk.

### **4. THE MEANING OF HAPINESS ACCORDING TO KELLY**

Finally, after facing irony of happiness, Kelly could find her true happiness by leaving Raymond and staying in Paradise. The setting of Paradise fulfills Kelly's expectation of her true happiness and ended her pursuit of happiness. Paradise was a small town in Washington which attracted Kelly by its beautiful scenery (16). There were many plantations in every side of the town. Colorful maple trees were standing on the roadside (20). Some old magnolia trees and roses also grew up in the edges of the town (152). Filling by beautiful nature, such as a park and lake is the representation of Paradise. The lake was surrounded by rolling grass hill and willow trees (102). In the evening, the sunset was very beautiful as the sun showed its color show of scarlet and pink in the sky. By the time the sundown, the moon was up

surrounded by sparkling stars (126). It is shown that Kelly was amazed with the beauty of Paradise as stated below:

Kelly stood on the clean sidewalk and gawked like a country hick home to New York City for the first time, only in reverse. There should be a sign that read WELCOME TO THE TWILIGHT ZONE. (20)

The social condition of Paradise also makes Kelly fascinated with the town. The people in Paradise were very kind and friendly which she never met neither in her hometown nor in Los Angeles. The warmth of Paradise people could be felt when they smile, greet, and wave to Kelly whenever she passed by the streets (35). She was very delighted with the harmonious life among the neighbors. She never found this feeling of living surrounded by lovely people in the harmonious neighborhood before (76).

The beautiful physical setting and friendly social condition of Paradise made Kelly feel comfortable so that her painful memories with Raymond and her mother could be cured in Paradise. Paradise served as the most desirable place Kelly wanted to live because of its friendly and kind people. Besides neighborly, the people in Paradise did not use drugs like people she met in San Francisco and Los Angeles. The people in Paradise rubbed along with each other which made Kelly could live comfortably and peacefully, which become one of her true meaning of happiness she was looking for.

It is shown that Paradise also gave another meaning of happiness in terms of being loved by a mother. Getting less affection from her mother since child, Kelly wanted a mother role that would care and love her. In this case, she found the care and love of mother from Myrtle, an old lady Kelly met on the bus and asked Kelly to stay at her house in Paradise. Myrtle treated Kelly as her own daughter because Myrtle had no children to take care of (44). In other word, Paradise gives another meaning of happiness Kelly had been searching that she did not find in both San Francisco and Los Angeles. It was the care and love from mother.

Another meaning of happiness in terms of being loved by lover was also reached by Kelly in Paradise. She felt the happiness of being truly loved by Sam that Raymond never gave. This makes her sure that she really loved Sam. It was her first time to love someone and being loved back by someone whom she really loved in her life (246). So Paradise met Kelly with Sam, her true lover, who she did not find in Raymond's figure.

Finally, Paradise with its beautiful nature and friendly people could fulfill Kelly's expectation of true happiness. She got care and love from Myrtle as her mother's replacement. She could feel being loved from the first time by her true lover, Sam. She also

could live peacefully with friendly people who did not use drugs and get drunk. Paradise provided Kelly her true happiness in terms of living peacefully, being loved by both mother and lover.

Besides the setting of place, Kelly's definition of true happiness is also supported by the time setting during the story happens. The story in *Talk of the Town* novel happened in October 2003 (25). The story occurred within October until December. October was the gloomy time for Kelly as she faced irony of happiness and had a failed marriage with Raymond. She also found Raymond using drugs which reminded her drug user and drunkard mother. In November, Kelly she almost found her true meaning of happiness in Paradise. She had lived in a peaceful Paradise, been taken cared by Myrtle as mother's substitute, and been loved by Sam as true lover. Finally, in December, Kelly understood the meaning of her true happiness that was being loved by mother, loved by a lover, and lived in a peaceful environment with friendly people.

The meaning of Kelly's true happiness can be supported by the time she reached it which was in December. December is the Christmas time when all family gathers. It can be related to Kelly's meaning of happiness which was about love and family. This is shown by Kelly's expectation to be loved by people who regarded her as a family which was fulfilled by people in Paradise. Finally, she could live surrounded by friendly people in lovely neighborhood like what she expected. She also got a mother's replacement from Myrtle who loved and treated Kelly as her own daughter that Kelly never got before. In December as well, Kelly got married to Sam the man who really loved her and whom she really loved for the first time. Kelly also could feel the warmth of Sam's family that she never got in her childhood. December as Christmas time when people gather with their family symbolizes Kelly's true happiness in terms of being loved and gathering with people she loved. After finding out that Kelly's irony and the meaning of her true happiness which was being loved and living peacefully, it can be understood that the theme of *Talk of the Town* novel is that happiness cannot be measured by the amount of money someone has.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

It can be concluded that by applying New Criticism as the basic concept in this study, the theme of *Talk of the Town* novel can be revealed. It is also proven that the formal elements of characterization, setting, and irony of the novel connect one to another to construct the theme which is happiness cannot be measured by the amount of money someone has. In analyzing the characterization, it is shown that the conflicts influence Kelly's characterization as a beautiful yet bad girl in appearance, lack of love, and materialistic

person. By analyzing the setting of place, it can be revealed that Los Angeles fulfilled Kelly's expectation to be a rich person and it also created Kelly's irony of happiness by showing that money did not give her happiness. Then Los Angeles motivated Kelly to look for her true happiness which was found in Paradise. In examining the time setting, it is shown that the story ended in December exactly at Christmas. This supports Kelly's definition of her true happiness in terms of being loved by mother, lover, and people surrounded her because Christmas was family time when people mostly can gather with people they love. From the theme that is carried in this novel, people can learn that money can sustain daily needs but it cannot guarantee people's happiness.

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