


~~Chapter II~~9 Guilt and Freedom: ~~in the Novels of~~ Thomas Keneally

 The achievement of Patrick White has been to open Australian readers to the symbolic significance of their surroundings. This ~~has~~ ^{has} helped to lessen the self-conscious nationalism which characterizes much earlier writing, and to enable writers to use the Australian experience and the imagery derived from it to answer the universal problem of what it is to be human, rather than the more limited question of what it is to be Australian. Nevertheless, even in writers who have exploited the symbolic significance of the Australian ~~land~~ environment, the traditional bitterness against a sterile landscape and disappointed hopes remains. While the concerns may be cosmopolitan, the viewpoint as much as the subject matter remains distinctively Australian. The emphasis shifts, however, from the railing against the bitterness of fate to a recognition of the guilt of man in creating an adverse fate, or at least in failing to rise above it.

Although Patrick White has had the most decisive influence on ~~the tradition~~ the tradition of Australian writing in the years since the second world war, there have been movements in a number of different directions. On the one hand, novelists such as Thomas Keneally and Randolph Stow have developed symbolic styles of writing to explore the inner meaning of man's life. On the other hand, the realist tradition has continued to flourish, both as a way of conveying the nuances of society and, most recently, in a desperate attempt to make some sense out of man's life ~~in~~ in society.

The most successful practitioner of the symbolic style has been Thomas Keneally. His novels have probably gained an easier acceptance because of White's establishment of ^{the} a symbolic mode of viewing character and event, but the similarity between the two writers is largely on the surface. While White deals in large structures, building his effects through events over a generation or more, Keneally prefers a tighter structure ~~xxxxxxxx~~ focussed on a single episode or sequence of events. This structural difference reflects a difference in the writers' metaphysical framework. Both are concerned with what might be called the drama of man's salvation. In White this drama takes the form of a struggle to exclude triviality so that the vision may be found. In his most recent novels the vision is succeeded by a further struggle to realize it within the world, but the task is still lifelong. In Keneally's novels, however, the question is essentially one of right choice, and the structure therefore needs include only the events which lead to and follow from the choice.

Keneally's first novel, The Place at Whitton,¹ ~~ix~~ revolves around the choice of good or evil. The two extremes are presented in the conventional religious terms of a seminary and a witches' coven, but the author is concerned as much with the ~~similarity~~^{conjunction} as with the opposition of his two poles. When the guilty priest, Pontifex, finally slays his witch, we are left uncertain whether the act is good or evil, an act of ~~XXXX~~^{love} or an act of destruction. What it ~~is~~^{is,} clearly ~~is~~^{is,} a final choice by which Pontifex commits himself, ~~ix~~ paradoxically, to life, just as he has advised the girl he meets on the beach a few hours before he makes his own choice.

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"You'll have to get to the stage . . . where you ~~give~~ trust your whole being to another creature. There are all ~~XXXX~~ sorts of dangers. The other creature might destroy your ~~XXXX~~ body. He might destroy your soul. That's the lottery. But at one stage or another, you've got to give utter trust. In a world of rotten motives and twisted passions, you have to give everything into someone ~~XXXX~~ else's keeping. If you survive the giving, you come to flower. That's the odds." ~~2~~ (p. 215)

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|| Pontifex's authority for this advice is that he is "a man who's been to the extremities of human experience and come back sad and damned, but wise." ~~2~~ The extremities to which he has been include repeated murder and an attempt to escape into the priesthood. His first murder pursued him into the seminary, in the form of an accomplice who blackmailed him into co-operating in the rites of the ~~black~~^{black} mass and ~~who~~^{who} eventually became the second victim. Pontifex believes that in his extremities he has found wisdom, but this still leaves him damned. There is in the book, however, the implication that in his very

damnation he finds ~~his~~ salvation. His advice enables Collette to give herself to love, and his slaying of Agnes has a quality of love about it. Before he throws himself into the sea he prays for grace, and we are reminded that salvation can come ^{up} between the stirrup and the ground, ^{up} although Keneally deliberately throws doubt on this again by denying ~~the~~ Pontifex the slow death which ^{the priest} he had anticipated to give him the chance of making his peace with God. Finally, the structure of the book, with its careful parallelism between the black and the true rites, suggests that either may hold the key ^{to} of salvation.

The characters in The Place at Whitton dream of a justification beyond this life, but the justification is systematically denied. The love affair between Dawes and Collette, which is set against the destructive affair of Pontifex and Agnes, is singularly unpromising, an affair of desperation rather than ^{of} love. The life of the seminary is similarly unfulfilling. The characters aspire to God, but the novel emphasizes rather the physical ^{dilepi} ~~dilapidation~~ of the institution and the barrenness of its rituals. Instead of celebrating the meaning of the participants' lives, the liturgy in the novel comes to symbolize the emptiness of the roles the various characters are condemned to enact. They are not people who have given themselves to life so much as people who are carried along by it.

Finally, what the reader gains from The Place at Whitton is an impression of grotesque rather than ^{of} meaningful imagery. In a sense, everything is too colorful^u, too pregnant with implication, to have any meaning. Violence may be salvation or it may be damnation, but the question is not as important as the detective-story qualities of the book. Once we discover the answer to the mystery, the book loses its drive, and the end becomes a convenient way of bringing the action to a close rather than a conclusion giving events their significance. Similarly, the theology remains unassimilated, ^{an} ~~an~~ expression of points of view which ^{state} ~~express~~ their speakers' opinions but which the reader can accept or reject according to his own taste rather than according to the action of the novel. We are tempted to accept Townsend's rhetorical question, "Who wants to explore new frontiers of the soul?" ^λ and take the book at its face value as a good detective story with the added ~~advant~~ qualities of sharp, if not particularly deep, ~~exh~~ characterization and a convincing portrayal of life within a religious community. However, the theological overtones and the ambiguous ending nudge us towards a ~~deeper~~ more uncomfortable question. This question involves not only problems of freedom and choice, but also the function of violence in our makeup. Pontifex flees from the discovery of his own violence until it destroys him, and in the process almost destroys the novel, with its gesturing to larger meanings. In his later novels, Keneally has explored a series of myths which ^{embed} ~~bind~~ on the same problem.

In Keneally's second novel, The Fear, the

~~the~~ innocence which is freedom and the fear which is bondage are both summed up ~~in Keneally's second novel,~~ ^{The Fear, 6} in the image of the Cape, which provides the transition between the two parts of the book. 2

With the departure of his family from the city, Daniel, the narrator, has returned to the ~~proper~~ idyllic scene of childhood under the patronage of his Irish grandfather Finny. Finny's friend Father Mullally has given his blessing to this country when he compares it with the troubled world they had both known in Ireland. He tells Finny: ". . . it's better to be here, away from all the old ardours.

At the end of the Great War I was a fairly young man, and I can remember all sorts of strange, bloody names creeping into the Memento of the Mass. . . I say it's far better to be here. I always loved this place . . . You know, it's a damned fine coastline."

This is again the dream of a purer country, free from the human troubles of the old world, and it is explicitly associated with the beauty of nature, which by implication can cleanse the human evils which corrupt even the Mass. But this dream world is being recalled for us in the

novel by the ~~narrator's~~ narrator's memory of his ^{wartime} childhood, which contained as much nightmare as idyll. The coexistence of these two aspects of life is symbolized by the Cape, which Daniel explores with

Fy Hogan ~~after a few hours~~ a few hours after he hears Finny and the priest recalling the old days. The Cape is idyllic, but it is also where Fy keeps her pet snake, and at the top of the Cape is the monument to Maurice Archibald Stewart, who perished descending the cliff-face. The Cape is a symbol of the dark spirit which

exists in the midst of life. It was such a place as had bred
 totemism in an honest race of Stone Age men and, crawling over its
 scalp, I too felt a totemist reverence. Here you were aware of a sad,
 alien spirit, hidden somewhere ~~xxx~~ in the eucalyptus clumps like a
 prince among commoners. It was amongst the scrawny paperbacks,
 standing on one leg and ochred white. It stood close to the darkling
 trunks of she-oaks, and hid its blazing eyes behind their draperies.
 You could feel the glaring of the dark old trees which Finnie called
 mess-mates. Rounding on some red-gum, you found its maniac limbs
 in the act of hurling something. You had the intuition, even Fy had
 the intuition, that up here it was best to be reverent. ~~8~~ (pp. 137-8)

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QUOTE

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Keneally has been criticized for imposing symbolism on his action, but
 in this passage it arises perfectly ~~xxxxx~~ naturally from a child's
 perception of the particular quality of a landscape. Yet the dark
 spirit is not felt as entirely alien ~~xxxxx~~ and hostile, as it ~~is~~ ofte
^{is} in earlier writers, but rather as a part of man which must be faced
 for him to know his full humanity. It emerges ~~in the novel~~ in the
 war, which is a constant background to the events, and in the
 terrifying figure of the Comrade, ^{around} ~~from~~ whom the violence and brutality
 in the novel cluster.

Some ~~critics~~ have felt that the unreality of the Comrade as an historical character destroys the book as fiction. This criticism, however, misjudges the nature of the novel. It is not a piece of historical re-creation, but a man's memory of his boyhood. ~~Next~~
As with
~~Like~~ other Australian writers, this period has its golden glow, but *Keneally's*
 Daniel Jordan remembers also the terrors. Both dreams and terrors spring from ~~xxxxxxDaniel'sxxxxxx~~ the environment of Daniel's upbringing, with air-raid alarms and drills, the concrete visions of heaven and hell which form the content of his religious education, ~~and~~ the Communist bogeymen of Catholic Action mythology, and the precarious security of wartime families deprived of their male protectors. This imagery heightens the ~~xxxxxx~~ conflict of the novel, but the conflict arises from the book's central theme, and not merely from its extrinsic events.

The basic concern of The Fear is ~~with~~ the threat of annihilation. *comes*
 This ~~threatens~~ as much from the gaping air-raid shelter beneath the High Altar and from the death in Joseph Mantle's veins as it does from the overt violence of the Comrade or the Japanese. Against this fear is set the security of home, family and church, but these are not strong enough without the personal effort of the individual. Yet such effort, as in the attempt to destroy the Comrade's grenade, itself can lead to disaster. Moreover, the very violence of the Comrade does seem to earn him, in the ~~early~~ chapters at least, a freedom which may be shared by an individual like Finnie, *and* but certainly contrasts ~~with~~
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 favorably with the glib and equally unyielding certainties of Greg Conlon.

For all this, The Fear is ^{in the end} finally an unsatisfactory novel. It creates opposing forces, but it does not resolve them. Too little choice is left to the characters, who appear as figures in a morality from which Everyman is missing. The childhood world is fully created, but its problems are finally resolved from outside. It is only in his third novel, Bring Larks and Heroes,^{to 3} that Keneally finally succeeds in ^{fully exploring} completing his myth. This success comes partly because he sets his novel in a place and time which does not correspond exactly with any historical actuality, although in essence it is the First Settlement ^{at} in Sydney Cove. This freedom from historical accuracy ~~xxx~~ enables the author to concentrate entirely on the factors of choice and necessity which govern the fate of his characters.

Landscape plays a particularly important part in this novel. On the first page we are taken to "the world's worse end" and see the hero moving "without any idea that he's caught in a mesh of sunlight and shade".^X This image is a symbol of the action of the whole novel. Halloran is already caught, but our interest ^{in the action} arises from his ignorance of his fate. This fate in turn seems to arise not simply from the decisions of the characters in the novel, but from a malevolence in the land itself.

in the landscape

This malevolence [^]takes visible form in the plague which destroys the chaplain's son and then shifts to decimate the natives. It is a malevolence which reverses the rules of older countries, brings death instead of life, heaps dust on its own forests, destroys man's hopes of harvest and garden, crushes the hope and even the belief in the season of Advent, until "every hint of juice and fruitfulness had been ground out . . . nothing but the worm of death seemed to flourish in this obdurate land." Yet with the darkness there is also sunshine. Halloran does find love for Ann and freedom from the System in the forest, and entertains romantic visions of "seas of romance" where he and Ann are "brethren of Magellan, no less". Yet the ocean of his vision is "made of the same freakish blue that people see in fevers", and the forest which offers them freedom also mocks at their vows and ~~contradicts~~ contradicts their love, which becomes a source of danger rather than strength. Halloran feels that the "deadly, passive landscape" threatens the very oblivion which they have married to escape. His ~~walk~~ walk in the woods with his bride in Christ culminates in his futile raving against the land and all its works. 13

The landscape which both abets and mocks Halloran's ^{secret} ~~secret~~ love appears similarly deceptive at the ^{start} ~~commencement~~ of the expedition up the river, ^{a journey} which links Halloran's life with Ewers and Hearn, and thus determines his fate. This journey begins like a picnic: "They were afloat and the world sounded thereby sharper and more innocent. . . . Seventy yards from the shore, Halloran was counties away from the

timber-pits, where the sun lay kicking like a trapped bull-elephant, and the red dust of cedars ~~lepered~~ lepered the sawyers over." ~~z~~

The imagery again links the heat and dust of the land with disease, but on the river there seems a promise of freedom, and Halloran dreams that he is in fact a victor who will escape from this prison, and have "his own house and wife on a sane coast." ¹⁴ Again, however, the promise proves deceptive. Ewers points to the contrast of appearance and reality when he explains his refusal to paint the scene before him. "If I painted this landscape . . . those who ever saw it would think that the forests behind the beaches were teeming with fruit and game. They would think that this river led to a kingly town, that Eden lay at the headwaters." ~~z~~ In fact, we know that the country is suffering a famine, and we are soon to discover towards the headwaters the cruelty and degradation of the convict hospital. Even before this discovery, however, the ~~picnic~~ picnic promise of the voyage is destroyed by the talk of scurvy and of the convict system, and by the heat and the insects with which the land itself ~~oppresses~~ oppresses the voyagers.

The malevolence of the land is not, however, confined to these petty discomforts and ~~men~~ omens. Although passive, the land is the trap which destroys Halloran's aspirations to love and freedom. The land is the prison to which both Halloran and Ann have been removed, ~~the land~~ ^{it} produces the famine which afflicts the settlement and thus ~~leads both to~~ ^{leads both to} ~~creates the~~ Halloran's crime and the ~~extremity~~ extremity with which it is punished.

This spirit of the land crystallizes in the latter part of the book in the figure of Hearn. Hearn represents a development of aspects of the figures of Pontifex and the Comrade in the earlier novels. All of these characters seek a freedom for themselves which they find through the destruction of the evil around them, but they also threaten destruction and dissolution to all who become entangled in their schemes. Their place in the novels is more symbolic than dramatic, for they give concrete form to the unconscious terrors which must be encountered before ~~they can~~ man can win his way to freedom. In the ^{first} ~~first~~ novel, Pontifex both encounters these fears himself, in his involvement with the ~~black~~ black rites of witchcraft, and embodies them as the unknown fear within the safe walls of Whitton. One of the weaknesses of the novel is Keneally's failure to reconcile these two functions within the same figure, and in fact we tend to lose interest in Pontifex, ~~and~~, he loses his ~~own~~ conviction as a character, once we learn that he is also the murderer, ↓ In The Fear, ~~Keneally's~~ the appearance of the Comrade gives the ^h ~~great~~ concrete form from the first chapter. Because we see the Comrade through the consciousness of the narrator, the struggle for freedom becomes a struggle against ~~the~~ a particular person, rather than, as with Pontifex, a struggle within a single person. In separating the elements of the drama, however, ~~Keneally~~ Keneally also destroys the reality of the Comrade as a person. He represents both threat and freedom to the children around him, but we can never believe in the reality of his own inner conflicts or ⁱⁿ the pathos of the loss he brings on himself.

(NP)

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Hearn, however, is fully ^{adequate} ~~realized~~ as both symbol and character. His first appearance in the novel, tending a man flayed and poisoned to protect the System, establishes him as a man of commanding and disturbing personality, ^{a man} ~~with his own pride~~ and laboring ^u under injuries to his pride and his sense of justice, ^{injuries} which have kindled the germ of fanaticism. ^{to} It is this fanaticism which both frightens and fascinates Halloran, who is also a victim of injustice and who is separated from his God in this new and hostile land. When the plot to steal the provisions is conceived, ~~his~~ Hearn's ability to suggest that he speaks with a special knowledge of God's purposes ~~which~~ works on Halloran's guilty feeling that the fates cannot allow his unchurched union with Ann to flourish, so that Halloran surrenders his own will to Hearn's certainty. By this time Hearn has fled from the settlement to the surrounding bush, where he displays an uncanny ability to survive. His ability to persuade Halloran does not come just from his ~~own~~ words, although these are powerful, but from his apparent union with the spirit of the land.

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Whenever there was argument, he'd say, "You are not your own man nor am I mine. We hold each other. The earth holds the trees as we hold each other. We cannot offend each other any more than the earth offends the trees." ^(pp. 46-7)

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(NP)

Although ~~we~~ we are told that Hearn's plot is motivated by a revolutionary ardor ^u generated from the French Revolution, ^{to} this motive does not seem nearly as important to Halloran as ^{does} his sense of Hearn's mission. This sense is reinforced when the whales appear in the bay as a sign. ^{to} ^{the} This sign appears to free Halloran from his oath

allows him to and accept his destiny. *And this* ~~This~~ acceptance frees him from any further *agonizing* ~~agonizing~~ of decision.

John Beston has ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ argued that Halloran's problem is a fear of freedom. 4
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I think it is certainly true that Halloran would prefer to be enveloped by some comforting institution - the church, the marines, or Ann ~~the~~ Rush - and that he carries within him a self-destructive urge which ensures that he will be ~~punished~~ betrayed and punished for his role in the theft and Hearn's escape. I think it is wrong, however, to imagine that Halloran finally avoids the demand^s of freedom. Whatever we may think of the reality of his passion for Ann, his union with her is his hope of warding off oblivion, his guarantee of his own identity. It is also the seal which ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ determines that his fate will be resolved in this land, *and* which prevents him seeking escape to America with Hearn. His commitment to Ann is also one of the links in the chain which Hearn fashions to bind Halloran to his will. The choice before Halloran is therefore not ^{between} freedom in America ^{and} ~~or~~ death here, but between surrender to the ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ demands of society and surrender to the demands of Hearn. In choosing the latter he chooses truth to his innermost self, and thus asserts his value as a person against the worst that the System can do to him. The only freedom is the choice, but by taking it he completes himself. To have done otherwise would have been to acknowledge the System, deny his bride in Christ, *to have* ~~to have~~ become a Byrne or Rowley.

The novel which followed ^S ~~ed~~ Bring Larks and Heroes, Three Cheers for the Paraclete, ⁵ is perhaps Keneally's most satisfactory in its craftsmanship, but it is of lesser scope than the earlier books. It deals with the same problems of freedom and conscience, but in a more social setting of a seminary ~~and~~ ⁱⁿ contemporary Sydney. Keneally is interested in the interplay of personalities and in the deceptions of society rather than in the individual's struggle with his own demons and in the ultimate threat of oblivion. Even in this novel, however, we are reminded of the depths beneath our social conduct in the person of Hurst, the student with the castration complex, whose agonies are pushed aside by mature priests too concerned with their own advancement or with maintaining an institution to allow themselves to become involved with the truly terrifying.

~~The~~ Keneally's next two novels represent ~~ed~~ his private wrestling with nightmares of cannibalism, incest and metamorphosis. ⁶ Despite some effective social satire ^H which repeats the continuing theme that most Australian society is trivial and self-deceiving ^H and familiar nightmare images, neither ~~satisfactorily~~ discovers a satisfactory shape for its concerns. This shape does appear, however, in ^{the following} ~~his latest~~ novel, ~~which~~ The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith, in which the man seeking his freedom becomes himself the agent of terror. The freedom sought in this novel has, moreover, a definitely social as well as ^a metaphysical meaning.

^{On}
~~At~~ one level, the story of Jimmy Blacksmith is the story of
 a half-cast^a who finds himself ^{caught} ~~caught~~ between two worlds. The book
 opens with Jimmy's initiation into a dying tribe, but he is then
 taken into the home of ~~with~~ a white missionary who imbues him with
 the protestant ideals of ambition, hard work and a white wife.
 Jimmy accepts these ideals and attempts to win acceptance from the
 whites through his own efforts. His first attempts are thwarted when
 he returns to his parental settlement and his savings are dissipated
 by his relatives, following tribal customs of sharing, in the debased
 atmosphere of the black camp, where ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~
 the "very height of tribal manhood for some was this gulping of wine
 in pub yards." ^{2d} His loyalty to the tribe has been sapped by both
 missionary teaching and by the evident degradation of the blacks, so
 he turns his back on them entirely and tries to live solely among the
 whites. Eventually he marries his white wife. ~~However,~~ acceptance
 eludes him, ^{however,} and in its place a sullen anger grows. To even obtain a
 job with a white he has to endure insults and accept short payment.
 His brief appointment as a blacktracker requires him not only to
 repudiate but to betray his fellow ~~blacks~~ Aborigines. When he marries,
 he discovers that a white man was the father of the child he had
 believed his, and despite savage ^{love-making} ~~putting~~ he does not succeed in
 begetting another. Meanwhile, his own kin rejoin him, bringing with
 them the initiation tooth which ties him to the tribe without making
 him one of them. When eventually he is refused ~~even~~ the food which
 he has earned to support the wife and child for whom he accepts
 responsibility, he goes berserk and slays the white women who represent
 the bounteous world from which he is excluded.

On this level, the novel is effective both socially and psychologically. The white women, hardened into viciousness by their fear of the primitive, and their husbands, driven by guilt stemming from ~~their own guilty lusts for black women~~ their lusting after black women, ^{are} effectively portrayed. Similarly, we share Jimmy's aspiration and the bitterness which grows from the repeated rebuffs he suffers. In this respect he is like Halloran in Bring Larks and Heroes, a man ~~doomed~~ ^{doomed} by the injustice of the world in which he is imprisoned. This world is so thoroughly dominated by the whites, and particularly ^{by} their women, that ~~it is~~ they have a monopoly even on aspirations. ~~Yet~~ ^{by} they must, ~~but~~ ^{by} their very nature, deny ~~any~~ to Jimmy Blacksmith ~~any~~ possibility of fulfilling the ~~very~~ aspirations with which they have imbued him. This female-dominated world, ⁱⁿ symbolized by the homes of Mrs Neville, Mrs Healy, the Newbys, denies ~~identity~~ identity even to its own menfolk, who therefore swagger about the countryside on horseback, till the land with their sweat, and ~~put~~ ^{sleep} with the black gins at night. The black world, with its compliant women and complaisant men, is the antithesis of the white, but it is doomed ~~by~~ not only by ~~its~~ disease and debauchery, but by the hostility of the very men it entices. They have no code which can reconcile their pleasure with their morality, so their lust becomes evil in their own eyes. As the minister, Mr Neville, expresses it, "The only anodyne, the sole apology for one abomination becomes a second, and so on." ^{So} So the policeman hangs the black prisoner he has bugged, Healy and Newby

cheat Blacksmith, and the murdered girl's fiancé and his friends hunt down the ~~murderer~~ the Blacksmith brothers to salve their own conscience.

This social and psychological realism is, however, only the content of the novel. The true subject is expressed by the schoolmaster, ^{McCreadie} ~~McCreadie~~, whom the brothers take with them as a hostage, or an oracle. He attempts to restore the continuity and the wholeness which has been destroyed by the invasion of the whites. The Blacksmiths and their actions represent the consequences of this destruction, ^{destruction} which is symbolized in the ^{desecrated} initiation ground of the lost tribe of the north coast to which ~~McCreadie~~ leads the brothers. This ground, holding the tchuringa, the external capsules of the souls of departed generations, has been destroyed by ~~the~~ parties of white picnickers, so that it represents the ^{settled} history of the country.

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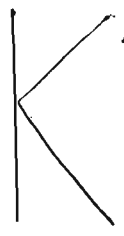


And here the history of mean death and lust for booze and acquiescence to the white phallus, gun, and sequestration and all the malaise of black squalor, here it was, legible in the fracture lines of soft stones. ^{24 (p. 150)}

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(NP) McCreadie makes a vain attempt to restore the ground, and in doing so he comes to the belief that :

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... if the Taree footballers had not fallen ~~far~~ to celebrating their skill on the consecrated stones of another race, there would have been no killing at the Newbys'. It seemed to him almost a principle of law, viable in a courtroom. He would state it when the Blacksmiths were taken. ^{25 (p. 150)}

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(NP) At this level, then, the novel goes beyond its predecessors. Guilt does not merely produce phantoms from its own imaginings, but ~~from~~ concrete

creates its avengers through quite substantial social and mental processes. Whereas Hearn could be seen as merely the spirit of a malign land, the Blacksmiths are the product of white actions on that land.

The story of Jimmy Blacksmith is not, however, a social and political allegory, but the pilgrimage of one man, the half-caste Jimmy Blacksmith. It becomes the ~~story~~ story of Aborigine and white man only as this is his story, the conditions in which he has to find his own freedom. The murders are a way of avenging himself on and freeing himself from the white society which has shackled him with aspirations for a life it will not allow him to achieve. In cutting himself ^{off} from white society, however, he puts himself under the curse of blood guilt according ~~both~~ to the laws ^{both} of his Aboriginal tribe and of human nature. The act of murder, however logically it may flow from events, is nevertheless that of a madman. Jimmy Blacksmith chooses to recognize his delusions, and thus preserve his sanity at the cost of his peace. We are told that "he was to spend the rest of his life in tenuous elation and solid desolation between self-knowledge and delirium." ²⁶ In fact, he spends the rest of his life in flight, at first with his whole family, then with his brother Mort, and finally with his brother and the schoolteacher, until he discards everyone else and eventually gives himself up to delirium or salvation [↔] and the confusion is characteristic [↔] in a nunnery.

^{His} The final flight of Jimmy's completes his vengeance, but it is

also apparently intended to represent his progress to the freedom of self-discovery. At first he is dependent on others, and in fact has to implicate Mort in his own guilt, damning his brother in order to keep a ~~reference~~ ^{shield} against the naked confrontation of his true self. ²⁷

Eventually, however, he retreats completely inside himself, and abandons his companions to their own freedom. This flight or quest occupies more than half the book, but its precise significance remains uncertain. Jimmy is both returning to his Aboriginal heritage, as indicated by his ~~cleaving~~ ^{clinging} to Mort, and rejecting it, as suggested by his indifference to the ~~XXXXXX~~ initiation ~~ground~~ ^{of} and his

eventual attempt to leave ~~Mort~~ ^{his brother}. The role of the schoolmaster, McCready, also remains obscure. ^{He is perhaps a sacrifice to Jimmy, but he} ~~On the one hand,~~ ^{also} ~~he is~~ the commentator,

who ~~eventually~~ reveals to Jimmy his essential loneliness and so drives him away. This final ~~divorce~~ ^{high} is both an act of self-knowledge and an act of love. As ~~Mort~~ ^{McCready} realizes, "Jimmy had left him native. ^{let Mort}

Mort did not see that - he would not be Mort and native if he could. All he could sense was the love and Jimmy's death. ²⁸ It is in fact

Mort's death which follows, but this does not matter, for Mort, by being freed from Jimmy, is able to die as himself. Jimmy, on the other ~~hand~~ hand, continues his flight until he reaches a convent, where he collapses and is eventually captured. He feels that his

surrender in these surroundings could be a matter of "special merit," ²⁹ but the nature of the merit is never spelled out. Keneally obviously has a feeling that his central character has ~~accomplished~~ ^{achieved}

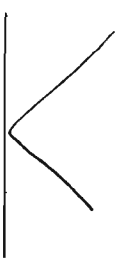
some ~~wisdom~~ ^{wisdom} through his flight and surrender, but the wisdom is never shared with the reader.

If the personal significance of Jimmy Blacksmith's death remains obscure, the author does achieve a clearer success in using Blacksmith's attacks, flight and death as a symbol of the guilt which is inherent in the very being of modern Australia. The fear and hatred which Blacksmith ⁱⁿ ~~aspires~~ is rooted in the guilty relationship between the white citizens and the original inhabitants of the land. His attack is in part vengeance ^{once} ~~one~~, but his flight is a retreat to the spiritual heart of the land, symbolized in the initiation ground. This ground brings no healing to Jimmy, but it does bring a certain understanding to the schoolmaster who is his hostage. McCready, by understanding the enormity of the crime of white Australians, and the depths of the heritage they have displaced, may do something to recover this heritage for future generations. Through him, as the heir of Jimmy Blacksmith's death, Keneally stakes a claim for white Australians to inherit, not just the land, but its spirit.

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The ~~book's~~ actions of the book are, however, set against the background of the coming of Federation, which is seen as marking the coming of age of a new nation. The crimes of the ~~Black~~smiths are an ^{unpleasant} ~~unfortunate~~ reminder to the white Australians of a past they wish to disown.

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- People laughed in their state of grace, the old crimes done, all convict chains a rusted fable in the brazen Arcady and under the roar of buskers in temperate April 1901.
- And the other viciousness, the rape of primitives? - it was done and a past report. ³⁵ (p. 172)

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Keneally counterpoints this forgetfulness with the aspirations of the

young nation to a future of prosperity and social justice. The shallowness, ~~and~~ the guilt and the injustice of most of the white characters in the book makes it plain that these aspirations are likely to prove vain until the nation returns to its past and to the past before that, until it hears ~~the~~ and acknowledges the pain of the chant of Jimmy Blacksmith and tries to listen again to the older song which Mort and McCready vaguely sense among the ruins of the initiation ground. The success of the novel is in making this mythological past accessible to a new generation through the very guilt which separates us from it.