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Black and White on Black: Whiteness and Masculinity in the Works of Three Australian Writers - Thomas Keneally, Colin Thiele, and Patrick White.

Matthew Israel Byrge
East Tennessee State University

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Black and White on Black: Whiteness and Masculinity in the Works of Three Australian
Writers—Thomas Keneally, Colin Thiele, and Patrick White

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of English
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree
Masters of Arts in English

by
Matthew Israel Byrge

May 2010

Dr. Donald Ray Johnson, Director

Dr. Phyllis Ann Thompson

Dr. Karen Ruth Kornweibel

Dr. Katherine Weiss

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ABSTRACT

Black and White on Black: Whiteness and Masculinity in the Works of Three Australian

Writers— Thomas Keneally, Colin Thiele, and Patrick White

by

Matthew Israel Byrge

White depictions of Aborigines in literature have generally been culturally biased. In this study I explore four depictions of Indigenous Australians by white Australian writers. Thomas Keneally's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1972) depicts a half-caste Aborigine's attempt to enter white society in a racially-antipathetic world that precipitates his ruin. Children's author Colin Thiele develops friendships between white and Aboriginal children in frightening and dangerous landscapes in both *Storm Boy* (1963) and *Fire in the Stone* (1973). Nobel laureate Patrick White sets *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976) in a world in which Ellen Roxburgh's quest for freedom comes only through her captivity by the Aborigines. I use whiteness and masculinity studies as theoretical frameworks in my analysis of these depictions. As invisibility and ordinariness are endemic to white and masculine actions, interrogating these ideological constructions aids in facilitating a better awareness of the racialized stereotypes that exist in Indigenous representations.

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DEDICATION

For the Aborigine and Torres-Strait Islander peoples of Australia who inspired this study; and to my greatest mentor, Dr. Phyllis Ann Thompson, who has been a confidante and my most ardent supporter during my academic career.

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wonderful editor. She was an amazing professor in all of her classes that I was fortunate enough to be enrolled in as an undergraduate and graduate student.

My thesis would have never been successful without the kindness of my mentors in Australia. I want to especially acknowledge Dr. Anne Brewster, Senior Lecturer in the School for English, Media, and Performing Arts at New South Wales University in Sydney, Australia. My initial plans for this project would have had me undertake two dissertations' worth of material, but Dr. Brewster helped me to decide what was most beneficial, encouraged me in theoretical frameworks, and gave me a list of critics to examine. She helped me to further narrow the scope and focus of my project. Dr. Brewster met with me at her office in the Webster Building at the University of New South Wales, taking time out of her busy schedule and introduced me to some of the graduate students she supervises as well as her colleague, Dr. Elizabeth McMahon, a Patrick White scholar and the Immediate Past President of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature. Dr. Brewster also hosted me in Wollongong as I attended the ASAL conference with her, which has been one of the highlights of my career in academia. Dr. Brewster's own work with Aboriginal life-narratives and whiteness studies are extremely valuable to my own research and the field at large. A brilliant scholar, Dr. Brewster's work receives world-wide acclaim and recognition. A special thanks, as well, to the participants and organizers of the ASAL conference at the University of Wollongong, especially, Dr. Elizabeth McMahon, who graciously allowed a wide-eyed American graduate student to sit in on their conference and engage in conversation with some of his biggest heroes in the field of Australian literature. Many of these critics' work, including John Beston, Dr. Elizabeth Webby, Dr. Anne Brewster, and Dr. Graham Huggan, appear in this study. I would further like to recognize and give a special thanks to Dr. Robert Van Krieken and Dr. Virginia Watson who

gave their permissions for me to cite their article, “From Miscegenation to Assimilation: Rationalities of Child Removal in Australian Colonial Administration.”

There are a few others at my university who provided valuable encouragement and help in making my project so successful. I want to acknowledge the East Tennessee State University English Department and chair Dr. Judith Slagle for allowing my intense intellectual passion for literary studies to flourish in my time at ETSU. I want to mention Dr. Jill Leroy-Frazier, Associate Professor of Cross Inter-Disciplinary Studies, who read my work and took time to guide me in my use of the theoretical framework for my project. Her immense knowledge of whiteness studies was very helpful for a greater contextual understanding of the issues I wanted to draw attention to in this work. Thanks, as well, to Dr. Shawna Lichtenwalner for allowing me to use part of my thesis as coursework for her Methods of Research class. I want to acknowledge Dr. David Elliott, who also served as a reader for me and always supported me and shared my love for literature. I want to commend the Sherrod Library Interlibrary loan department at ETSU and Ms. Kelly Hensley, especially, for their unending assistance in helping me obtain a large portion of my research.

I want to extend my love and admiration to my mother, Ms. Shirley Chestine Byrge, who endured my long absence in the summer 2008 while I was traveling abroad in Australia. My mother gave me tremendous encouragement to pursue my dreams and sent me much needed money at various times while I was away. And to my late father and beloved grandmother, the Reverend Donnie Hugh Byrge and Ms. Birdie Aline Byrge, who encouraged me always to pursue my greatest passions in life, one of which was to further my education. They instilled in me the belief that everyone is equal. Their moral lessons are largely responsible for my feeling of association and admiration to the many marginalized voices in the world such as the ones

represented in this study. Finally, I would like to extend my personal admiration and deepest esteem to all of those people who have felt marginalized or disenfranchised by society. It is my most fervent hope that the future shall bring about an increased understanding to enact positive changes for future generations. As fellow human beings we can hopefully stand united and affirming to one another without making categorizations or judgments.

QUOTATIONS

“Two World One”
By Richard Frankland

I’m a two world one
I live in two worlds
One time I must have lived in one

But tears fell and a baby taken
Under some law they said
A law from one world but not the other

I’m a two world one
I walk down two roads
One time I must have only walked down one

But surely a mother’s heart was broken
At a birthing tree or birthing room
When I was taken

For a two family one
I live with two families
One is black one is white

But surely heritage is no barrier to love
Even though the papers scream
About two hundred years of hurt and shame

I’m a two world one
I can see inside two worlds
But One day I’ll only have to see in one

“Whites are everywhere in representation. Yet precisely because of this and their placing as norm they seem not to be represented to themselves *as* whites but as people who are variously gendered, classed, sexualised, and abled. At the level of racial representation, in other words, whites are not of a certain race, they’re just the human race.”

—Richard Dyer, *White*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In western literary discourse white men have predominantly been the leaders in representing people of color for hundreds of years. The literary canon has been selected on whom whites felt should or should not be considered worthy of scholarship. This bias has largely favored whites and marginalized and racialized other groups. In modern literary criticism, scholars continue to debate about who has the most reliable voice when depicting a certain people or culture. Most academics feel that when a culture can be represented by its own people, their portrayals lend themselves to greater authenticity. Not until the latter part of the twentieth century with the increase of Aboriginal authorships did a legitimate Indigenous voice emerge in Australia. White depictions of Australian Aborigines existed from nearly the beginning of colonization, including the journals of Captain James Cook. For the majority of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, Aboriginal writing was mostly seen in the form of letters, newspaper articles, and other public documents such as Aboriginal petitions. According to Anita Heiss and Peter Minter in their Introduction to the *Anthology of Australian Aboriginal Literature*, the first known text in English by an Aboriginal author was a 1796 letter by Bennelong, who had returned to Australia after three years in England, meeting with King George III and surviving as a “racial curiosity” (1). In “A National Story” Ann McGrath claims that Bennelong had been “forcibly kept in British custody with chains, bolts, and guards” (18). In many cases Aboriginal writing was glossed over by a white point of view if it was ever acknowledged at all. In “Indigenous Texts and Narratives” Penny Van Toorn states that “Aboriginal people were included in a variety of collaborative modes of textual production. Their words—verbatim or paraphrased, in traditional languages or in English translations—were

recorded and published by ethnographers, missionaries, government officials, explorers, and historians” (22). The Aboriginal voice sometimes became lost in these white representations that attempted to pass for an accurate Aboriginal point of view. Van Toorn further claims that “in many such texts, it is difficult to identify distinct and separate voice zones, where the so-called ‘native informant’s’ voice ends and the putative white ‘author’s’ voice begins” (22-23). Aboriginal representations later began to surface in the poetry and prose of white Australian writers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These depictions, for the most part, portrayed the Aborigine as “savage” or the “happy primitive,” a source of comic buffoonery. W.H. Wilde’s “The Aborigine in Australian Literature” from the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* substantiates the use of Aboriginal stereotypes like “the ‘ignoble savage,’ a depraved unattractive buffoon with neither physical nor spiritual grace” (qtd. in Goldie 132). Later depictions, although more realistic, were still essentially white representations of what they felt Indigenous Australians were like.

In the following study four depictions of the Aborigine in white Australian literature are analyzed. Thomas Keneally’s *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1972), Colin Thiele’s *Storm Boy* (1963) and *Fire in the Stone* (1973), and Patrick White’s *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976) show the Indigenous Australians at different times in Australian history from a white-male perspective. It is important to have a broader knowledge of certain historical and political events that shaped the Aborigines’ history for a deeper understanding of the issues in these texts. The historical and political events that are discussed in this chapter include the Aborigines’ fight for recognition of land rights and ownership, the atrocities committed by white Australians toward the Aborigines and their culture, and the White Australia Policy that regulated immigration of non-whites into Australia and perpetuated forced assimilations of Aborigines into white culture during the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In my study on Aboriginal perspectives in Australian literature by whites, I will use certain theoretical criticisms that I also introduce here to form my methodology. Whiteness and masculinity studies provide an important framework when characterizing Aboriginal and white relationships in Australian literature. These studies are also important in pointing out the deficiencies or successes that exist in white interpretations. Moreover, my use of whiteness and masculinity studies as a theoretical framework aide in contextualizing the racial divisions that exist in these works and makes clear the corollary of these ideological constructs.

What makes whiteness and masculinity readings, therefore, the most useful interpretations for modern scholars to examine white depictions of Aborigines in Australian literature? Global studies in the past that have been focused primarily on marginalized groups in other areas have been lacking to some degree. Richard Dyer's chapter "White" in *The Matter of Images* discusses how these studies have not been all that inclusive despite being nominally well-intentioned. According to Dyer, "Images of" studies have looked at groups defined as oppressed, marginal or subordinate—women, the working class, ethnic and other minorities (e.g., lesbians and gay men, disabled people, the elderly). The impulse for such work lies in the sense that how such groups are represented is part of the process of their oppression, marginalization, or subordination" (126). Dyer acknowledges that the overall range and fertility from these types of studies has placed those marginalized groups front and center in analysis and has called attention to their representation in political terms (Dyer 126). However, this is in itself the problem with these types of criticisms. Dyer claims that by "looking, with such passion and single-mindedness, at non-dominant groups has had the effect of reproducing the sense of the oddness, differentness, exceptionality of these groups [;] the feeling that they are departures from

the norm” (126). As for whites, who are accepted as normal, they have “carried on as if it is natural, inevitable, ordinary way of being human” (Dyer 126). Therefore, it becomes beneficial to investigate the so-called “normal” representations in order to shed light on how whites benefit from their ordinariness and invisibility. Although other race studies could be used, whiteness and masculinity criticisms are more significant in terms of the questions they raise regarding invisible markers in society that form racializations. Whites are oblivious to their privileges, which they receive primarily due to their skin color. White privileges are most noticeable when examining the white depictions of marginalized and racialized groups in literature. White writers in Australia cannot seem to separate themselves from the constructs that form these racialized divisions in their portrayals of Aborigines. The Aborigine most often becomes a caricature or image of a real Aborigine. It is my intention in this study to present the failures and successes of these white depictions by calling attention to how whiteness and masculinity functions among whites and Aboriginal Australians in the texts I analyze. By shedding light on white and masculine constructions in these novels, I demonstrate how the ordinariness and invisibility of these actions perpetuates racialized stereotypes.

A look at the historical positioning of whites among Aborigines in Australia is central to understanding the texts in this study and the Australia of the modern world. Many of these texts are based on historical events that demonstrate a concentrated effort among Australians to segregate whites and non-whites. The more contemporary depictions show how colonialism and racializations have continued to fashion Australia in the modern era in order to discriminate and separate individuals on ethnic and cultural grounds. In *Literary Formations: Post-Colonialism, Nationalism, and Globalism*, Anne Brewster argues that “contemporary Australia is a nation formed by colonisation and immigration; it is a stage for the disinheritance, displacement, and

dispossession of both Indigenous and immigrant peoples” (1). Although this study deals specifically with interactions between whites and Aborigines in white contemporary Australian novels, Australian history was molded, as well, by immigrants’ experiences in Australia. Therefore, immigrants are represented in several of these works. In many cases Australian immigrants had to prove their whiteness among white Australians and in turn exercised a racialized power over Aborigines in order to feel secure in their social positions. Australian migrants increasingly felt threatened and often resentful of any presumed “special treatments” Aborigines received. Many migrants turned their paranoid hatred onto Aborigines who were below them in the caste system of colonial Australia. These immigrants may be laborers and not at the same status level as Anglo-Australians, but at least they were not Aborigines. Such racializations are evident in Thomas Keneally’s *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, Patrick White’s *A Fringe of Leaves*, and Colin Thiele’s *Fire in the Stone*. The belief that whites were superior to Aborigines in Australia came from the many years of discrimination and violence toward Indigenous peoples, whites’ disavowal that the land belonged to the Aborigines, and that culture in Australia did not exist until the arrival of whites.

Aboriginal history is usually divided into two categories: the history before the arrival of the whites and the history after their arrival. Some estimates date the appearance of the Aborigine on *Terra Australis* (Australia) between 125,000 (University of Wollongong) and 40,000 B.C.E. (Webby xi). The Aborigine and European were separated from one another for centuries before the first white contact and eventual colonization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Divisive class systems were constructed by whites in Australia on the grounds of white skin preference from nearly the very beginning of European contact with Aborigines. With the arrival of the Dutch, including Dirk Hartog in 1616 and Abel Tasman in 1642 (Webby

xi), and the later British invasion in the eighteenth century, beginning with James Cook in 1770 (Webby xi), brutality and a concentrated effort to acculturate the Aborigines into the dominant white culture flourished for the next two hundred years. Moreover, the last two centuries have seen fierce debates on the question of ownership in Australia and Aboriginal claims to lands seized in Anglo-European conquests. To silence the voices of those who remembered a time before the white people came, whites engaged in a “white-washing” of history. To reject Aboriginal claims to the land, whites propagated the myth that civilization in Australia actually began with the arrival of the whites. *Terra nullius* was the mandated premise for the Anglo-Europeans’ claim to Australia for over two hundred years. In her Introduction to the *Cambridge Guide to Australian Literature*, Elizabeth Webby states that “in 1770 James Cook arrived to claim the eastern part of the continent [Australia] for the British Crown and name it New South Wales. He apparently did so under the impression that there were few Indigenous inhabitants and that, since these few did not use the land in the European sense of cultivating it, they did not own it” (7). Ownership debates, specifically about Aboriginal land titles, have continued throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The battle for Aboriginal ownership and a continued effort to rewrite history persisted after Aborigines were officially granted citizenship in 1967. The subsequent official renaming of Australian icons, such as Ayers Rock¹ to Uluru, its Aboriginal name, in 1993 is demonstrative of marginal progress toward reconciliation. However, as many injustices had been perpetrated on Aborigines by White Australia, such placations were insufficient in redressing all the past wrongs. One of these wrongs included the denial of Aboriginal ownership.

The Aboriginal sense of ownership was not the same as for whites and for that reason the whites did not consider Aboriginal ownership claims to be legitimate. For white men to own

land, livestock, or even in some cases women was to possess and claim them as property. In her Introduction to *Australian Literature: An Anthology from the Land Down Under*, Phyllis Fahrie Edelson writes that the British were not concerned with Aboriginal culture and, in fact, developed a very negative view of it (xxi). Furthermore, the British could not comprehend why the Aborigines did not construct dwellings and cultivate crops as did the colonials (Edelson xxi). The British, especially, resented the work ethic of Aboriginal Australians, whom they considered lazy in comparison to themselves. A “hard-working” people, the British colonials believed they were fashioning a model of England in the southern hemisphere, many, many miles from home (Edelson xxi). The British considered the Aborigines a weak people, destined to die off and not of any real concern (Edelson xxi). Whites were concerned, instead, with possession of land as white property. For the Aborigines the mode of ownership was to celebrate the land, to be a guardian or keeper of the land as Thiele demonstrates, or to share the land with others and future generations. Aborigines possessed a spiritual connection with the land in which humans and the natural world coexisted in cooperation and understanding with one another. Recognition of ownership was slow in coming to Indigenous Australians, however. Throughout the twentieth century Aborigines and white Australians battled over land titles and Indigenous Australians endured endless setbacks.

In “Backgrounds to Aboriginal Literature” Cliff Watego writes that “the period after 1967 [granting of Aboriginal citizenship] was one of frustrated waiting [for the Aborigines], aggravated by setbacks such as the delaying of the Gurindji land claim and the disillusioning Gove land rights decision in 1971” (13). In the early 1970s fragmented relations between the Aborigines and the Australian government came to a head with an Aboriginal gathering at the Australian Embassy. A peaceful demonstration called the “Tent Embassy” was erected on

Australia Day 1972 in Canberra, the nation's capital, to call attention to the grievances of the Australian Aborigines in regard to land rights claims. In a personal correspondence with Cliff Watego, Aboriginal poet Kevin Gilbert writes that Prime Minister William McMahon's decision in 1972 that "his government would only consider short term leases... not ownership for Aborigines and their land" (qtd. in Watego 12) led to his idea for an erection of a permanent camp outside the Parliament House. Gilbert "gathered together five young Aborigines from Redfern²" (qtd. in Watego 12) deciding they must act more directly with the Australian government than in the past. Gilbert had recently been released from jail and published his *The End of Dreamtime* in 1971 while still incarcerated. Watego admits the Aborigines saw Prime Minister McMahon's decision as "a flat denial of land rights" (13). McMahon's rejection of Aboriginal claims reaffirmed the patronizing view of the government in relationship to the Aborigines' legitimate claims to the land. Bitter struggles followed with very little head-way until the late 1980s and early 1990s. In his Introduction to *Take Power Like This Old Man Here*, the Director of the Central Land Council, Bruce "Tracker" Tilmouth, in 1998 writes that "land rights is a relatively new concept to white Australia, but it is a profoundly important part of Aboriginal life. Land is at the core of our existence. It is the source of our identity, culture, and spirituality" (ix). In 1992, the *Mabo* decision sent shockwaves across Australia and questioned its very foundation. The long held political premise of *terra nullius* finally ended with the *Mabo* ruling, as Felicity Collins and Therese Davis write in *Australian Cinema After Mabo*. They argue that "despite a history of Indigenous resistance to dispossession, supported at different times in the nation's past by a number of non-Indigenous Australians, the story of the nation's origin, in the occupation of land belonging to no one, remained intact until High Court's *Mabo* decision in 1992" (4). To demonstrate the significance of the *Mabo* ruling to Aboriginal land

rights, one must inspect the sustained racist fervor that consumed the Austro-Europeans' and Australian Aborigines' interactions since colonization.

In her Preface to *Indigenous Australian Voices: A Reader*, Jennifer Sabbioni argues that “armed conflict between Aboriginal peoples and Europeans began almost immediately after 1788 with the landing of Governor Phillip and the First Fleet on the shores of Botany Bay (near Sydney)³ and continued for approximately 140 years” (xxi). In “Land Rights for the First Australians: A Long Way Still to Go,” Elisabeth Strohscheidt submits that by the end of the nineteenth century 700,000 to 750,000 of the First Australians who inhabited the Australian continent when the Europeans arrived had been killed by dispossession, introduced diseases, massacres, poisoned waterholes, blankets, and food rations (9-10). Europeans' own records in fact support this claim. In 1837 a Parliamentary Select Committee in England acknowledged that genocide was in fact going on in the Antipodes (Sabbioni xxxvii). The Aborigines of Tasmania, then called Van Diemen's Land, the setting for White's *A Fringe of Leaves*, were virtually decimated from 1803-1833. William Dalrymple writes in his *Sunday London Times* article that “the Tasmanian Aborigines were wiped out by British hunting parties who were given licences to exterminate this ‘inferior race,’ whom the colonial authorities said should be ‘hunted down like wild beasts and destroyed.’ Many were caught in traps before being tortured or burnt alive” (par. 18). According to historian Robert Hughes's epic history of Australia's founding, *The Fatal Shore*, by 1835 there were only 150 Aborigines left in Tasmania (423). Hughes writes that “little by little, they [Aborigines] wasted away and their ghosts drifted out over the water” that then by 1843 there were 54 Aborigines left alive (423). Hughes claims that “three years later, amid blood-curdling prophecies of a new black war from the colonial press, the survivors were returned to the mainland and settled on a property at Oyster Cove on the D'Entrecasteaux

Channel, near Hobart” (423). The jailors provided rum for the Aborigines and “they posed impassively for photographers in front of their filthy slab huts, and they waited to die” (Hughes 423). The census of 1855 in Tasmania counted “three men, two boys, and eleven women, one of whom was Trucanini”⁴ (Hughes 423). Though some descendents of the Palawa people and Palawa culture remain, virtually all language of the Indigenous Tasmanian peoples is now lost. Trucanini, one of the last full-blooded Palawa of Tasmania, died in 1876. White’s novel makes no mention of Aborigines in Tasmania.

For Australian Aborigines mass genocides, tortures, and forced removals were some of the atrocities committed by white culture toward them. Van Toorn claims that the “arrival of the British at Sydney Cove in 1788 initiated a series of processes which, in various ways and to different degrees in different regions, brought death, displacement, and severe cultural disruption to Aboriginal peoples” (19). Violence and disease destroyed Aboriginal populations; welfare officials removed Aboriginal children from their homes; and Christian missionaries forbade the use of traditional Aboriginal customs and ceremonies and even the Aborigines’ own languages (Van Toorn 19). Whites had no recognition of the Aboriginal oral traditions or that possibly “graphic signifying systems such as sand drawings, body scars, paintings, or carvings might be viewed as forms of writing” (Van Toorn 19-20). Whites instead hoped that the Aborigines would adopt white customs and attempted to acculturate Aborigines into the white way of life.

A dedicated mission to “assimilate” the Aborigines into white society began almost immediately to disavow any Aborigines as a separate and autonomous entity. McGrath writes that “since the British invasion, colonial relations were entrenched not only by land takeover but by a wide variety of ideas and beliefs, and by the economic, legal, political, and social structures which institutionalized and perpetuated them” (2). In short, “it is deceptive to assume that

‘colonial Australia’ ended with the coming of the twentieth century, or that successful British settlement meant the end of ‘colonial’ relations between Aborigines and non-Aborigines” (McGrath 2). The personal liberties of Aborigines were threatened by colonialism, which stripped the Aborigines’ freedom of movement and choice of locations for settlement. As for Aborigines for whom freedom to move was part of their way of life, this action was especially devastating (McGrath 2). White Christian missions or the government, “who [the whites] wanted them [Aborigines] to become sedentary, or remain under control on their [white] ‘settlements,’” consistently dictated white-approved lifestyles for the Aborigines (McGrath 2). As McGrath further claims, the Aboriginal families “suffered extreme trauma of having their children taken away to dormitories or distant towns” (2). For Aboriginal children any “association with their own Aboriginal parents and kin was said to be degrading or subjecting them to neglect. Girls and boys were segregated and taught to conform to sex roles approved by an outside culture” (McGrath 2). Australian colonization, therefore, was not only about the possession of land or property but the possession of people and continued to separate families of the Aborigines for a century. McGrath states that it “broke the hearts and minds of individuals” (2) and abductions of both adults and children were quite frequent. A white-minded way of living was imposed on Aborigines and changes to the way the Aborigines had used the land for perpetuity (McGrath 2).

Deep-seated fears existed among whites that Aboriginal blood would taint the white race. Genetic experimentation of “breeding out” the Aboriginal blood was one of the solutions that whites adopted to combat this “problem.” As seen in Keneally’s *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, the “half-caste” was especially a “problem” for the dominant white culture. On the one hand, the half-caste represented the complicity of whites in breeding with Aboriginal

women, an act of white masculine power, which they believed put white blood at risk of being tainted. However, the more light-skinned Aborigines, especially girls, were seen as desirable commodities. These girls could work as house servants to white families' homes and often "pass for white."

In "From Miscegenation to Assimilation: Rationalities of Child Removal in Australia and Colonial Administration," Virginia Watson and Robert Van Krieken claim that the Australians' need to bring the half-caste "problem" under control was a major point of interest at the turn of the twentieth century (3). By the 1930s, the population of half-castes was becoming greater and as such was a major fear among white Australians that must be addressed. To counter the half-caste "problem," there were "administrative attempts to manage it, which is generally seen to be directly linked to the racist zenith in native administration in the eugenicist schemes of the administrators C.E. Cook and A.O. Neville"⁵ (Watson and Van Krieken 4). Dr. C.E. (Cecil) Cook, who was Chief Protector in the Northern Territory from 1927-39, oversaw the seventy percent increase of removals during his administrations (Watson and Van Krieken 4). Cook is also credited with the drastic steps he undertook in the miscegenation of the Aborigines. He encouraged lighter skinned Aboriginal women to marry white men and "breed out the colour" (Watson and Van Krieken 4). Watson and Van Krieken posit that "historical studies of white perceptions of Aboriginal people in Australia during the late 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries reveal a mixture of ideas grounded in firmly held beliefs about racial purity and absolute superiority of the 'British race'" (3). They go on to consider how the idea of mixing "supposedly distinct races would produce inferior off-spring, with the idea that of the infusion of 'British blood' would produce off-spring superior to the original Indigenous stock" (3). The Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities in 1937, Watson and Van

Kireken state, “effectively capture[d] the full horror of an administration intent on implementing eugenicist policies and practices based on the forcible removal of children from their families and miscegenation” (5). At the convention, A.O. Neville, the Chief Protector in Western Australia from 1915-1940, joined with Cook in promoting his own eugenic rhetoric that encouraged the “breeding out” of Aboriginal blood. Neville claimed, ““are we [Australians] to have 1,000,000 blacks in the Commonwealth or are we going to merge them into our white community and eventually forget that there were any Aborigines in Australia... I see no objection to the ultimate absorption into our own race of the whole of our Australian native race”” (qtd. in Watson and Van Kireken 5). The eugenicist administrations of Cook and Neville came to an end in 1939-1940 (Watson and Van Kireken). There was then a shift among government officials who had been arguing that assimilation should be based on eugenicist principles to one that promoted “welfare” for Aboriginal children.

Even though removals occurred from 1869 until the 1970s, the Aboriginal children who were taken from their families did not become known as the “Stolen Generations” until the late twentieth century (Read and Barrett). The horrors of forced assimilation for the Aboriginal people in the 1950s and 1960s parallels other atrocities that took place, respectively, in European and American histories. The assimilationist aims of white Australia are comparable to the forced removals of Native Americans by the U.S. government in the nineteenth century to reservations and their integration into white schools and the World War II internment of Japanese-Americans. Aborigines in the 1950s were forced to carry documentation that identified their Aboriginality like Jews in World War II Europe were expected to carry proof of their ancestry and were denied rights and freedom of movement due to Jewish heritage. Aborigines were subject to constant surveillance and profiling by police and government officials. African-Americans in the “Jim

Crow” era southern U.S. were denied rights and restricted movement, as well, based on the color of their skin. The forced removals of Aboriginal children from their homes and the whites’ attempt to strip away Aboriginal culture vis-à-vis assimilation practices was one of the saddest chapters in Australian history, so much so that these actions are still having a lasting effect on the Aboriginal Australians of the present day.

The removals and forced assimilations were also, at least for the twentieth century, part of the overall legislation known as the White Australia Policy, which as well as sanctioning the removals and forcing Aboriginal children and adults into assimilation, restricted foreign immigration into the country. McGrath calls the Policy “central to not just the takeover of land but to the self image of the new nation” (5). The inauguration of the White Australia Policy began with the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act at the time of Australian Federation. The leader of the Federation movement and Australia’s second Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin, is commonly credited, as well, to be the chief architect of the policy. Deakin worried that Chinese and Japanese immigrants might become a serious threat to Australia’s working-classes (National Archives of Australia). The Policy began, as Deakin’s speech in favor of the bill attests, as a populist message for the proletariat. Deakin’s speech did not exhibit overt racist ideology but instead, purported that the Japanese should be denied immigration due to their superior qualities that would give them an advantage over the European-Australians (National Archives of Australia). The impact of White Australia was far less commending in its *real* ambitions or the legacy to Australian history. In *Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, and Transnationalism*, Graham Huggan claims, “Whiteness emerged, it is generally agreed, in the late nineteenth century, as a function of the need to rationalize the racialized division of labour” (73). As such, Federation became a triumph for the nationalized view of whiteness expressed by

Prime Minister Deakin (Huggan 73). Deakin said, ““We [Australians] should be one people, and remain one people, without the admixture of other races”” (qtd. in Huggan 73).

Matthew Jordan’s “Rewriting Australia’s Racist Past: How Historians (Mis)Interpret the ‘White Australia Policy’” presents an analysis of the policy along with its early origins as he examines recent writings on this legislation (1). The White Australia Policy, although historically having the aforementioned labor rationale, was primarily fashioned on racial differences. Jordan argues that “national unity was vitally dependent on the maintenance of Australia’s racial homogeneity and the concomitant exclusion of races which were seen to be not only culturally but also biologically distinct from the white British-Australians” (2). Deakin seems to bear out this mind-set in his address before Parliament in October 1901. Deakin stated, ““These people [non-whites] differ from us [whites] in such essentials of race and character as to exclude the possibility of any advantageous admixture or intermarriage”” (qtd. in Jordan 2). Although White Australia began as an immigration act, the Policy extended into the federal government’s role of dealing with Australia’s own Indigenous populations. For whites, “the principle of exclusion was essential” (Jordan 2), as Deakin claimed, ““if we are to maintain the standard of civilization to which we are accustomed’ and which, by extension, ‘is bred in us.”” (qtd. in Jordan 2). Accordingly, the first major legislation by the newly formed Federal Parliament of Australia was the *Immigration Restriction Act* (Jordan 2). Jordan asserts, “It [the *Act*] allowed for the absolute exclusion of non-Europeans as migrants” (2). Extending his remarks into Aboriginal inclusion, as well as immigrants, Deakin said, Australia has ““proposed to tolerate nothing within its domination that is not British in character and constitution or capable of becoming Anglicised without delay”” (qtd. in Jordan 2). For those unable to assimilate due to their race or culture, Deakin added, ““The policy is that of a closed door”” (qtd.

in Jordan 2). For over half a century, White Australia restricted immigration into the country under this “closed door” policy and justified assimilation practices toward the Aborigines.

Much of the early rationalization for White Australia is related closely to Social Darwinism. In *North of Capricorn: The Untold Story of Australia's North*, Henry Reynolds writes about the motivations behind the early Federation fathers' implementation of the Policy, stating that it was about “race and blood. They talked over and over about the dangers of pollution and contamination. The discourse was biological rather than sociological. Any amount of alien and inferior blood was too much... Intermarriage was an unthinkable abomination and no amount of education or training could alter non-Europeans' innate inferiority” (161). Such beliefs were alive and well at the time of Jimmy Governor whom Keneally's novel depicts. The beliefs surrounding racial purity continued to flourish well into the 1930s and prospered under the aforementioned administrations of A.O. Neville and C.E. Cook. The removals of the Stolen Generations continued, as well, until the official ending of the White Australia Policy in the latter part of the twentieth century. Although formally abolished in the 1970s, White Australia saw resurgences in the late 1990s with the Howard administration's attempts to block Aboriginal land rights claims and the formation of Pauline Hanson's One Nation. The rekindling of White Australia in recent years points directly to racialized ideological constructions, like whiteness, just as it did in 1901 when White Australia was first inaugurated.

Though primarily a presence in American literary discourse in the 1980s and 1990s, whiteness studies has since appeared in many other cultural and historical contexts. As a discipline whiteness studies' chief proponents are Ruth Frankenberg (*White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*, 1993), Toni Morrison (*Playing in the Dark:*

Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, 1992), and David Roediger (*The Wages of Whiteness*, 1991); the discipline has since come to encompass many other noted critics worldwide, particularly in Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Whiteness studies, coming out of postmodernism and historicism, shed new light on the past and the implications it may have on the present. In short, the very concept of race was constructed in a way that discriminated in favor of whites. During the canonization debates of the 1980s scholars disagreed as to who should be allowed a voice. Can white writers succinctly represent a person of another race in their interpretations, or do they widen the racial divide even further? In his book, *White*, a leading critic in the field of whiteness theory, Richard Dyer, states:

The assumption that white people are just people, which is not far off saying that whites are people whereas other colours are something else, is endemic to white culture. Some of the sharpest criticism of it has been aimed at those who would think themselves the least racist or white supremacist. bell hooks, for instance, has noted how amazed and angry white liberals become when attention is drawn to their whiteness, when they are seen by non-white people as white. (2)

The assumption becomes entrenched in white cultural norms to think white equals right. bell hooks' argument is that even white liberals who consider themselves progressive in matters of race politics are equally enshrouded in their own invisibility and resistant to acknowledge or call attention to their whiteness. Therefore, some of the most fervent proponents of non-racist ideals become encapsulated into these ideological constructs.

Whiteness studies are included in the umbrella term of "critical race theory," as both critical white studies and critical race feminism came out of this movement in the late 1970s. Critical race theory interrogates how whites perceive themselves and then how whites perceive

non-whites. As a movement critical race theory comes out of critical legal studies concerning racial discrimination, racial subordination, and racism. Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado are among the noted theorists in this field. In *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, Delgado and Jean Stefancic argue that “the critical race theory movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up” (2-3). However, as Delgado and Stefancic further elaborate, this “place[s] them [the studies] in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious” (3). A central tenant to what critical race and by extension whiteness studies argues is the ordinariness of racism and “the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color” (Delgado and Stefancic 7). Furthermore, ordinariness suggests that racism is difficult to cure or even acknowledge (Delgado and Stefancic 7). Whites by being ordinary enjoy certain “white privileges” that comes with their skin color. Delgado and Stefancic write that “‘white privilege’ refers to the myriad of social advantages, benefits, and courtesies that come with being a member of the dominant race” (78). Peggy McIntosh once cited at least fifty of these privileges whites can enjoy (Delgado and Stefancic 78).

Australian interpretation of whiteness came to include the so-called White Australia Policy as a conscious effort by the Australian government to preserve “whiteness” in its culture. As asserted earlier, White Australia was a legal precedent that regulated immigration to Australia of non-white peoples and supported the forced removals of Indigenous children from their families. Delgado and Stefancic confirm that “the legal definition of whiteness took shape in the context of immigration law” in the United States and Australia (77). Roediger’s books, *Working*

Toward Whiteness (2005) and *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991), are both concerned with European immigrants who came to America in the nineteenth century and had to prove their whiteness. The effects of whiteness on the Indigenous populations by colonial British rule in Australia dictated the Aboriginals' marginalization culturally, historically, and geographically. In "Making Whiteness Visible" Belinda McKay states "Debates in Australia around native title, reconciliation and immigration demonstrate that race continues to be central to Australian culture and society even though its presence is not always explicit. In such debates the category 'race' is reserved for those who are deemed to be 'other'; whites as a racial group remain invisible" (3). Dyer argues that whites do not distinguish race among one another because they are not part of a race, only members of the human race (3). McKay asserts that "government policy, too, enshrines the invisibility of whiteness," as was the case with the election of Pauline Hanson's One Nation as Member for Oxley, which according to figures released by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, there was a sharp increase in "overtly racial incidents" (3) reported to the Commission following the election. McKay posits that "formal complaints of racial discrimination to that body increased by 90 per cent in the 1996-97 financial year. The Federal government's response was to cut funding to the Commission by 40 per cent, and to move the position of Race Commissioner to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission" (3). The repercussion of this decision was to relocate the "race problem" to the Aborigines instead of "identifying whiteness as being the centre of the 'race problem'" (McKay 3). Thus, whiteness does not include whites as a racialized group. As such, whiteness exists in its own invisibility.

In terms of Australian culture, Brewster contends that the "constructions of ethnicity by nationalist discourse is based upon a belief in the separateness of different cultures, each of

which is bounded and reified. But in fact the culture of any group is dynamic, and changes as it is redefined by each generation” (13). In respect to the evolution of Australian history, nations are often defined as against their “others” (Brewster 15). Nations then must form “dual processes of inclusion and exclusion, of remembering and forgetting” (Brewster 15). Brewster further argues that despite the appellation of “other” to both Indigenous and immigrants, their histories are divergent (16). Aborigines dislike being “drawn under the umbrella of multiculturalism on account of its assimilationist implications” and maintain a racial difference (Brewster 16). Grouping various ethnic and cultural entities together as “other” and reifying the white culture as normative is, therefore, endemic to whiteness actions.

Whiteness studies in Australia, as Brewster and Fiona Probyn-Rapsey consider in their article “Approaching Whiteness,” is now nearly a decade old since the publication of the foundational texts *White Nation* (1999) by Ghassan Hage and *Talkin’ Up to the White Woman* (2000) by Aileen Moreton-Robinson (1). Whereas American critical whiteness studies has been focused on African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans, in Australia, it has historically been defined by its exploration of Indigenous peoples and shaped by Indigenous scholars like Moreton-Robinson, Lillian Holt, and Wendy Brady (Brewster and Probyn-Rapsey 1). Brewster and Probyn-Rapsey contextualizes Joseph Pugliese’s account of Australian critical whiteness studies. Pugliese claims that whiteness studies in Australia is ““still characterized by an Anglocentricity that fails to situate whiteness within larger, transnational relations of racialised power”” (qtd. in Brewster and Probyn-Rapsey). Australian critical whiteness studies is still in transition, just as white Australians themselves must consider a new realignment of history since the repudiation of *terra nullius* and the progressions made toward reconciliation.

Defining whiteness in her book, *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters*, Ruth Frankenberg argues that whiteness has a set of linked dimensions (1). Frankenberg posits, “First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a ‘standpoint,’ a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, “whiteness” refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed” (1). Although focusing primarily on whiteness in relation to white women, Frankenberg’s study is a seminal early work in the field. Frankenberg also admits that whiteness broadens the focus, making it easier to link white subjects with history that had not heretofore been associated with racism including colonialism and imperialism and histories of assimilation in the United States and Australia (7).

In history the use of race has come to be represented in the distinct differences of color. Dyer explains that “white people are neither literally nor symbolically white. We are not the colour of snow or bleached linen, nor are we uniquely virtuous and pure. Yet images of white people are recognizable as such by virtue of colour” (42). Although not the only one, the color white is a visible characteristic that is used to determine that white people are white (Dyer 42). Furthermore, “The colour white to white people is to ascribe property to a group that thrives also on invisibility” (42). White representation is dictated, then, by the fact white people are called, and call one another, white (Dyer 42). The artwork represented at the opening of Chapter Two in Dyer’s book, *White*, is another example of how pervasive whiteness exists in western culture. The drawing by Sandy Huffaker is a depiction of a black man plastered with a *white*, skin-tone bandage on his forehead, appropriately titled: “White Is a Flesh Colored Band Aid” (41). As John Downing and Charles Husband in *Representing ‘Race’: Racisms, Ethnicities, and Media* argue, “Race categories and the meanings attached to them are not static” (3). To further

illustrate this point, in 1860, Charles Kingsley, who was visiting Ireland, wrote to his wife the following passage:

I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. I don't believe they are our fault. I believe there are not many more of them than of old, but that they are happier, better, more comfortably fed lodged under our rule than they ever were. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours. (qtd. in Curtis 84)

Kingsley's remarks are racialized by positioning himself to a level of superiority as the *white* observer viewing the socioeconomic stereotypes that existed of the Irish during the time of the famine. The passage also reflects the distinct use of color as an agent of difference, which disturbs Kingsley since to him the Irish appear as white as himself. Downing and Husband observe that such "racializations [are] an historically specific ideological process. Racial meanings have been evolved through specific historical circumstances of human relations and are currently embellished and deployed within particularly socio-economic circumstances" (4). Modern political initiatives in Australia became populist fodder in the late twentieth century to counteract perceived Indigenous entitlements and further surreptitious political ambitions.

Australia has experienced a cultural backlash since Indigenous rights began to be acknowledged in the modern era. One of the more outspoken individuals, who denied there was any inequality among Aborigines and whites, was the aforementioned Pauline Hanson. In Hanson's 1996 Maiden Speech she argued there was no such thing as a disadvantage due to skin color. Hanson said:

Present governments are encouraging separatism in Australia by providing

opportunities, land, moneys and facilities available only to Aboriginals. Along with millions of Australians, I am fed up to the back teeth with the inequalities that are being promoted by the government and paid for by the taxpayer under the assumption that Aboriginals are the most disadvantaged people in Australia. I do not believe that the colour of one's skin determines whether you are disadvantaged. (para. 4)

In respect to entitlements to Aboriginal Australians, Hanson's rhetoric, to borrow one of her more memorable catch-phrases, demonstrates that she simply "did not like it." In "Differentiating Whiteness: White Australia, White Masculinities, and Aboriginal Reconciliation," Ben Wadham claims that Pauline Hanson's One Nation emerged under the belief that all Australians were "one" and that sameness should mediate the policy by which the government would legislate entitlement programs (200). In short, white Australians, Aboriginal Australians, and migrant Australians are, simply and collectively, just Australians (Wadham 200). Such beliefs were very "Pollyanna" notions. The root to Hanson's rhetoric has more to do with color. Wadham contends that indeed color "has become a marker for difference," a difference Hanson herself believes signals that "special treatment" and "different conditions of behaviour" in the social cosmogony of Australian race relations have been instituted (200).

Socioeconomics in relationship to racial dissonance is, as well as whiteness, often an indicator of white male privilege. Masculinity functions like whiteness as a racialized construction. While whiteness frames society through a "white" lens, masculinity calls into question the idea of "white male privilege" and the function of the patriarchy in racializing groups. In "Studying Whiteness: What's the Point and Where Do We Go From Here?," Karen Brodtkin writes that "an important key to whiteness [is] the ways in which white women [are] believed to be feminine and the ways white men [are] believed to be masculine" (15). For a

nineteenth century Australian male to be considered a “man” was to own land. In the Middle Ages and even in colonial America at the time of the framing of the Constitution, the landed white male was the only person who could hold real power. Brodtkin contends that gender roles “were supposed to be different from the womanhoods and manhoods of everyone who was not white” (15). Ownership of property was one of the biggest signifiers to prove one’s manhood. The chances for Indigenous Australians, dispossessed, unable to own land, and excluded from the dominant ethnic specification, of being considered equal by any white male of the era were unlikely. In Keneally’s *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, Jimmie Blacksmith desperately tries to possess land because he is told by whites that land ownership constitutes being a man. Whereas women were expected to be the nurturing example of domesticity, the men were “competitive, citizen-soldiers and protective family providers” (Brodtkin 15). Thus, for Jimmie Blacksmith to own land and have a family, he believes, is to be a man. Colonials claimed that the Aboriginal way of life was ineffectual at taming the land in the white way (i.e. “right” way) and proceeded to place the Aboriginal male in the role a non-person and thereby putting his position as a “man” in question. The Aborigines were not even counted in any census as part of the population. In their Introduction to *Spaces of Masculinities*, Bettina van Hoven and Kathrin Hörschelmann, argue that “hegemonic definitions of masculinity receive their legitimacy from the marginalization of other forms of masculinity, such as those of different social classes, ethnicities, sexualities, ages or abilities. The latter are almost always characterized as more feminine, thus highlighting the other dynamic of hegemonic masculinity: its contrast with, and assumed superiority to femininity” (8).

The scientific community’s view of gender distinctions in the nineteenth century, as Brodtkin notes, seemed to support the claim of “patriarchal manliness and dependent, nurturant

femininity” (15). Viewing Indigenous Australians in a different way from whites that did not share the European model of gender constructions, “sociologists and the medical profession joined anthropologists in describing virtually all non-white people as lacking the gender contrasts which are the mark of civilisation” (Brodkin 16). Therefore, “non-white women and men—whoever happened to be included in this category at the time—were described as animal-like in their absence of white masculinity and femininity” (Brodkin 16). Moreover, stereotypes on race and gender were part of the nineteenth century evolutionary mind-sets that placed non-whites in the category of “savage,” as shown in White’s *A Fringe of Leaves*, and the European as “more evolved and ‘civilised’” (Brodkin 15). Furthermore, what made the Europeans “more civilized” were the differences between the sexes (Brodkin 15). For Aboriginal women, as shown in Keneally’s novel, the dominant male saw a more pleasing distraction in sexual conquests. However, from the time of colonization in Australia, gender roles were a clear separating agent between “civilized” and “savage.” For non-Anglo immigrants, who had to prove their worth (i.e. “whiteness”) through hard labor and owning property, defining themselves among their *more* “white” neighbors was especially important. Irish women, particularly, had well-defined roles assigned to them based on their gender.

In gender studies, geographers, too, have conducted research into what van Hoven and Hörschelmann term “spaces of masculinities.” In “Men, Management, and Multiple Masculinities in Organisations,” Linda McDowell argues that gender is not an attribute of women solely (McDowell 182). Gender “provides an intellectual and research challenge to the one-dimensional man, garbed in his unyielding patriarchal power, by insisting that masculinity, too, is also an uncertain and provisional project, subject to change and redefinition” (McDowell 182). Geographers tend to rely on a singular masculinity and have been slow to recognize the

challenge to entertain others (McDowell 182). Geographers cling to an unchanging interpretation of one masculinity as multiple spaces of masculinity are constructed (McDowell 182). As with whiteness, fluidity exists with masculinity and it cannot be contained in one specific construction. There are many spaces for whiteness to thrive in the world. The same can be said of masculinity. It is a naïve assumption to believe that the patriarchy can only affect women in misogynistic subordination or marginalization. Other ethnic groups are subject to the same stereotypes and power-plays from white men that also affect women.

One such appearance of masculinity is in cases of socioeconomic disharmony. Brodtkin calls “the foundational theme” at the center of whiteness to be “institutionalized privilege and psychological entitlement” (9) much like the patriarchy. Because whites enjoy certain privileges that come with their race, there is a sense of entitlement. The same can be said of masculinity. Men, who are in a position of power dictated by the ever-present patriarchy, feel invigorated by their power. Brodtkin contends that “whites do like their privileges” (19). Furthermore, lower-class white men exert their power often in denormalizing other races they consider inferior. Sure, these white men may suffer poverty, but they are still white. Brodtkin cites African-American legal historian Charyl Harris who likens “whiteness to property, as a set of socioeconomic assets available only to those who have been certified as white by the major economic, legal and cultural institutions” (9). Such ideas concerning property were a common thread throughout the “settled” nations whose original inhabitants had been pushed aside in order for whites to lay down claims of ownership.

In Daniel Coleman’s *White Civility: the Literary Project of English Canada*, Harris argues that “the legal assignment of property” is one of the key manifestations of race in American history (cited in Coleman 97). Harris expands that the dispossession of Native

Americans and forced removals from their traditional lands is clear evidence of whiteness. The parallel with Australian Aborigines is eerily familiar as the dominant whites in both instances refused to acknowledge any Indigenous claims and saw the conquest of lands and assignation of properties to be a white mandate. Whiteness, as Harris argues, from the very beginning was based on who had the right to ownership to the exclusion of those who did not have that right (cited in Coleman 97). Coleman points to the white North Americans' belief that Native Americans and Indigenous Canadians were a "vanishing race. The kind of social Darwinism assumed in the single timeline of the race of civilizations allowed settlers to fantasize that the disappearance of the Aboriginal peoples was an inevitability and therefore to mourn this necessary passing of a way of life that was doomed under the unstoppable wheels of progress" (29). White Australian beliefs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as is shown in Keneally's novel, held to the same racist outlook about the Indigenous Australians.

Positioning masculinity in the workforce and labor movement is done by, among others, David Roediger, who is credited with placing whiteness in immigration movements of the nineteenth century. Brodtkin argues that "white privilege comes from the other, working class, end of the spectrum, through recent scholarship in labour history" (11). White workers defined themselves as free, whereas African-descended bondspeople were mediated into "servile" labor and "crystalised into the notion of 'white man's job'" (Brodtkin 11). Brodtkin calls "white man's job" the jobs that required skill and were completely controlled by the worker rather than the unskilled and incredibly supervised jobs of bondspeople (11). Brodtkin states, "White men believed their work was more dignified and manly" (11). Furthermore, "Manliness, in the nineteenth century, connoted 'dignity, respectability, defiant egalitarianism, and patriarchal male supremacy'" (qtd. in Montgomery 13). As Brodtkin notes, what began as white workers

distinguishing themselves as manly independent citizens in comparison to the servile labor of African-descended bondsmen turned into whites working alongside non-whites (11). For whites to work alongside people of other races threatened their privileges (Brodkin 11). To combat the threat, white men must place themselves above the non-whites to exert their white male status. Whiteness and masculinity, therefore, work in tandem with one other in formulating the prejudiced constructs and actions that divide groups and reinforce the practice of these constructs.

Bob Pease in “Decentring White Men: Critical Reflections on Masculinity and White Studies” theorizes on the ways whiteness and masculinity are joined with each other in critical white studies. Pease purports that “men are [...] differentiated by their structural location in relation to privilege and power” (119). In Pease’s own studies, he takes whiteness and the centrality of masculinity as a “given” (120). Pease asks, “Why is masculinity studies so white? Why do men spend so little time talking about race and racism?” (120). As Peggy McIntosh also expresses, there are “denials men engage in to avoid recognizing male privilege and the denials that obscure the dimensions of white privilege. The most widely cited premise of critical studies in whiteness is that white people do not recognize ‘their unearned racial privileges’” (qtd. in Pease 120). Pease believes that naming non-whites as “other” is the key in the relationship that combines privilege and oppression (120). bell hooks argues that “white people’s absence of recognition of their race is a strategy that facilitates making a group, the ‘other’” (167). After all, Richard Dyer succinctly frames the belief that whites do not consider themselves a race, but engage in racializing “others” (3). Whiteness and masculinity, therefore, are joined together by expressions of privilege both white and masculine.

In Australia, white and non-white men in the relationship of privilege are not equal. However, white men are oblivious to their privileges. Michael Flood argues that “Indigenous men and immigrant men from ‘non-English-speaking backgrounds clearly do not benefit from patriarchy in the same way as other men’” (qtd. in Pease 121). In that sense, whites and non-whites at large do not benefit from the same privileges that come with their skin color. Because a disparity does in fact exist in white and non-white masculinities, non-whites often become emasculated. Pease writes, “The emasculation theory that argues racism strips away black men’s manhood has surfaced in the debates about the experiences of marginalised men in Australia” and as such, many critics have commented on the fact that Indigenous men’s “traditional power and authority have been undermined since white colonisation” (122). Furthermore, “Historical processes have devalued the Aboriginal male role in both family and the community” (Pease 122). Being transported to reserves caused many Aboriginal men to lose self-esteem and respect (Pease 122-23). As a result, it is commonly believed that many Aboriginal men have endured more suffering than Aboriginal women due to colonization (Pease 123). The suffering of Aboriginal women has come in the form of the phallus, a construct of power in which white men would use in their conquest for colonizing the Indigenes and lay claim on *their* predestined property.

The chapters in this study are organized from the least to the most successful interpretation of Indigenous Australians. None of these writers are flawless in their depictions of the Aborigines. All of the writers in this study are given to categorizations and missteps in their writing concerning Indigenous portrayals. Keneally’s interpretation in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* is the most egregious example of the works in this thesis. Keneally’s attempt to illustrate white complicity in the fate of Jimmie Blacksmith and the destruction of Aboriginal

culture as a whole is overshadowed by Keneally's own "Aboriginal" point of view, categorizations of the Aborigines, interruption by the authorial voice to segregate Aboriginal culture from white culture, and the use of inaccurate and biased source materials. White's *A Fringe of Leaves* is more successful than Keneally in that White introduces white characters who function as "other" in the white world only to be given acceptance and freedom among Aborigines. White's depiction creates a layer of white understanding in Aboriginal culture and his interpretation is not from an Aboriginal point of view. However, White is guilty of categorizations and masculine constructions that perpetuate racialized stereotypes. The most successful of the authors in this study is Colin Thiele, who in both *Storm Boy* and *Fire in the Stone* creates friendships between white children and Aborigines. Thiele's ideal of white and Aboriginal fellowship lays the foundation in suggesting a hopeful future for white and Aboriginal relations can occur. Although, Thiele is the most successful of the three authors, his novels are not exempt from the racialized categorizations and stereotypes that are endemic to whiteness and masculine constructions. None of the authors discussed are completely successful in their depictions. However, with recent strides made toward reconciliation that I outline in the conclusion, there is the hope, however, that Thiele's ideal might be possible.

CHAPTER 2

DUALITY AND PLACE IN THOMAS KENEALLY'S *THE CHANT OF JIMMIE BLACKSMITH*

Australian writer Thomas Keneally published *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* in 1972 at a time when relations between white Australia and Aborigines were troubled by the many years of non-recognition of Aboriginal ownership. The British colonials did not recognize the land as belonging to the Aboriginal people when they first arrived on the Australian continent. Moreover, Aborigines and whites had different conceptions of ownership. For Indigenous Australians ownership meant living on and caring for the land for their generation and future ones. Whites, on the other hand, saw ownership as *possession* and staking their claims. In Keneally's novel, in which ownership becomes a recurring theme, the Aborigines are dispossessed, living together on a mission settlement. Very few ever go outside to the white world. Any Aborigine who does venture from the settlement becomes a casualty to the white world, unable to assimilate and subject to vitriolic bigotry and racial prejudices. In the white world Aborigines have no sense of place or ownership as the land no longer belongs to their people, after being seized in the Anglo-European colonization of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Aborigines' lack of place in the white world becomes deeply troubling for them. The idea of *place* for the Aborigine is closely linked to their deep connection to the land. Pat Dodson posits, "When you take an Aboriginal man from his land, you take him from the spirit that is giving him life; that spirit cannot be regenerated in some other place. So you end up with shells of human beings, living in other peoples' countries'" (qtd. in Strohscheidt 9). Land ownership was unattainable for Aborigines in the white world. Whites believed the land belonged to the whites who "discovered" Australia because they brought civilization along with them to the Antipodes. Ann McGrath calls the justification for the British occupation on the

Australian continent a legally endorsed premise known as “*terra nullius*⁶ or unoccupied land” (1), which McGrath defines as the “convenient imperial fantasy [which] has long shaped Australia’s past, and history writing and teaching has provided it longevity in both law and the popular imagination” (1). However, Aborigines maintained their place on the land, which resulted in the white Australians’ continual persecution of Indigenous peoples. In this chapter, I explore the Aborigines’ conception of ownership, vis-à-vis Jimmie Blacksmith and white disavowal of Aboriginal claims, validated by the *terra nullius* doctrine; the continued acts of prejudice and intolerance by whites toward the Aborigines as shown in the novel; Thomas Keneally’s own deficiencies as the *white* authorial voice presenting *his* Aboriginal perspective; and the duality for Jimmie Blacksmith to navigate between white and Aboriginal cultures, defined by a racially-masculine power structure favoring the landed white male. I point out the white and masculine constructs that surround white treatment of Indigenous Australians in the novel as well as Keneally the white author.

The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith, set in 1900, contextualizes race relations between white Australia and Aborigines. In the novel, Keneally examines how the white world impacts Aboriginal culture. Half-caste Aborigine, Jimmie Blacksmith, tries hard to become white by marrying a white woman and aspiring to the class of landed gentry. However, as Jimmie lives on the fringes of society, the whites surrounding him push him further over the edge in their racial bigotry and false empathy. Blacksmith lives in a world of duality, being part of both worlds, yet belonging wholly to neither. Duality and the marks of whitening hegemony conspire to drive Jimmie Blacksmith to acts of desperation. In the end, Keneally is also caught up in this frenzy of racial constructs through his inadvertent juxtapositions of narrative voice, speaking to the reader as a white man, and lack of consistency in his depiction of Jimmie Blacksmith. In a

society governed by white male privilege, Jimmie, though desperate to find understanding, is destined for catastrophe in a world not of his own making. Blacksmith experiences persecution firsthand in trying to integrate into white society just as many other Aborigines were told by white Australia to conform and assimilate but were denied acceptance. In “Jimmy Governor and Jimmie Blacksmith” Henry Reynolds discusses the defiant Aborigine amidst continual domination by Anglo-Europeans. Reynolds claims that “Aboriginal resistance to European settlement... while varying in duration and intensity... was clearly one of the most important features of frontier history. Eventually overt resistance was crushed and settler and indigene reached accommodation” (16). The “accommodation” Reynolds mentions was similar to “accommodations” forced upon other Indigenous cultures in many parts of the world.⁷

However, in making accommodations, the Aborigines appropriated a white model of civilization in order to fit into the dominant culture. Jimmie Blacksmith’s desire to live in the white world is evidence of whites’ reach into Aboriginal culture. Whites must encourage Aborigines that the Aboriginal way of life was not “civilized” and they should adopt white ways. Thus, the Aborigines of 1900 were encouraged and often forced into assimilation in the white world. As Reynolds claims, the Aborigines moved into more permanent camps and cattle stations near frontier towns, reserves, and missions. Young Aboriginal men and women found temporary work in farming or in nearby towns. However, diseases and malnutrition quickly decreased the population of Aborigines (16). The fictional Aborigines at Brentwood Mission where Jimmie lives suffer from disease and the ravages of alcoholism. Although practicing some of the Aboriginal customs such as the manhood ritual, and believing some of the Aboriginal lore, “a generation had grown to maturity who had no first-hand knowledge of traditional society. Many were part-European, usually the children of Aboriginal mothers and

white fathers [like Jimmie]. Though cut off from the traditional past they found their social mobility was blockaded by a rigid caste-barrier which remained firmly in position well into the twentieth century” (Reynolds 16-17). The barrier between themselves and the white world was one that Jimmie and many other Aborigines could not hope to overcome.

Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was committed to the assimilation of the Aborigine. A purported rationale for the assimilation was a fear that Aborigines would darken the white race, thereby, tainting white culture. Jitka Vlčková in “Social Identity and Reflection in Communication: Jimmie Blacksmith in Thomas Keneally’s Novel *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*” states, “Australia was a racist country declaring the ‘white Australia policy’ (1901) by which people of other races were not allowed to immigrate, indigenous people were expected to adopt the white people’s way of life and values and gradually amalgamate” (68). The far-reaching ambitious motives of the English to normalize or colonize Indigenous peoples, as with Australia itself, were extremely detrimental in the long run. In fact, forced assimilation of Aboriginal children did not officially end well into the latter part of the twentieth century.

The Anglo-European ambitions came at a dear cost to the Aborigines’ culture. White and Aboriginal relations were embittered from the very beginning of the British colonization in the eighteenth century. By the nineteenth century, tensions had only worsened. Phyllis Fahrie Edelson explains that “the colonists’ growing hunger for land pushed the Aborigines further and farther back as white settlement expanded” (xxi). Even small resistance by the Aborigines to the colonial expansion resulted in large-scale revenge by whites (Edelson xxi). Consequently, “Group massacres and poisonings and officially sanctioned expeditions to punish troublesome Aborigines were not unusual. European diseases and alcoholism also took a heavy toll. It is no

wonder that by 1900, the Aboriginal population was drastically reduced” (Edelson xxi). Though the population diminished considerably, Reynolds notes that Aboriginal populations actually began to stabilize in the late nineteenth century (16). Therefore, racialized barricades had to be constructed by the dominant white culture, who considered the Aborigine inferior, in order to contend with the Aboriginal populations. The Aborigine, as was seen with Jimmie Blacksmith, was under a constant cloud of fear and suspicion. Peter Quartermaine in *Thomas Keneally* cites a *Port Denison Times* article on 12 June 1869, reporting:

It would be absurd under any circumstances to expect any kindly feeling to exist towards us in the breasts of the black fellows... we shall do well to bear in mind that their feelings toward us are and must be those of resentment and hostility and that however the exhibition of those feelings may be restrained by motives of policy on their part they do exist and probably will continue to while the race lasts, and that this smouldering fire will be ready to burst into flame when favourable conditions offer. (16)

Racial intolerance of Aborigines persisted throughout the twentieth century. When *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* appeared in 1972, it had only been two years since the government-sanctioned, forced removals of Aborigine and Torres-Strait Islander children had ended. In the Northern Territory the removals did not officially end until 1973. By the 1990s, the “Stolen Generations” would become part of the national consciousness and a reminder of the many past wrongs white Australia inflicted on Indigenous populations.

Many of these wrongs are exhibited in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*—Keneally’s historical time capsule of a half-caste Aboriginal man’s struggle to assimilate into white culture. Keneally’s novel was based on an historical incident involving a bi-racial Aboriginal man, Jimmy Governor, who in 1900, after enduring much racial antipathy directed toward himself and

his white wife, went on a rampage, killing four women, two men, and three children before going to the gallows in 1901. Keneally had read a book on Governor by historian Frank Clune and commenced fictionalizing his account in what became *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. Reynolds argues that “his [Keneally’s] research was not nearly as exacting as that of an historian or a strict historical novelist because he wished to tell a parable about the present by using the past, to find evidence in earlier events for the kind of society we have now” (14). Keneally depicts Jimmie Blacksmith from an Aboriginal perspective though Keneally himself is white. Keneally attempts to become a modern apologist for past wrongs despite the inaccuracies found in his source materials.

In an interview with critic John Beston in 1973, Keneally speaks to the deficiencies in his research, admitting that “in terms of telling a story it’s probably the most successful. I’d done the Aboriginal research before I went overseas. I feel I should have done more on the Aboriginal side; Jimmie seems fairly remote from the reader” (51). Similarly, in the Publisher’s Preface to the Angus & Robertson 2001 edition of *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, the publishers write that “Keneally in no way renounces the work, but acknowledges that if he were to tackle it in 2001, it would be more appropriately told through the eyes of one of the white characters” (v). Keneally considers his novel an achievement despite his lack of thorough research on the Aboriginal point of view and his later belief that if he were to write the novel today it should be from a different voice. In his own essay “My Fiction and the Aborigine” in 1982, Keneally writes:

There is in Australian writing one novel which examines the impact of the two cultures from within an Aboriginal mind, and this is my own *Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*[...] I have been assured by Aborigines that this book, despite some errors of detail, is the most

informative literary work on the impact between the two cultures as it is seen by
Aboriginals. (32)

On the contrary, though presenting an Aboriginal perspective, Keneally's novel frequently loses sight of its true Aboriginal voice. Peter Pierce in *Australian Melodramas: Thomas Keneally's Fiction* counters Keneally's own earlier remarks, stating,

Nowadays [1995] the novel appears to him [Keneally] to be demonstrably the work of a "fucking madman." This remark refers not only to personal difficulties which Keneally experienced during the time but to his judgment in hindsight that "the two cultures are so different in their maps of the world that it was reckless to do it." Although Keneally recalls that Aboriginal activist Gary Foley punningly thought that the novel was "well-meaning Uncle Tomism," it did at the time receive a generally favourable reception among Aborigines. (56)

A twenty-first century analysis could uncover many of the deficiencies Keneally acknowledges now himself. However, Frank Clune's history, which Keneally read, is not beyond its own inaccuracies. Chris Tiffin's "Victims Black and White: Thomas Keneally's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*," discussing the real-life murders by the Governors, states, "Clune's account of the Governor killings is far from a simply factual one, and he [Clune] enthusiastically condemns them as 'murderous curs—slayers only of women, children and old men.' Moreover, he specifically rejects any extenuation for the Governors on the grounds that they were blacks retaliating against racial wrongs. 'They were not really blacks at all,' says Clune, 'but half-castes'" (123). It is important to note Clune's book was published in 1959 when there was a different historical context on Aboriginal studies and nine years before Aborigines received full Australian citizenship.

There are some important distinctions between Clune's history and *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. In Keneally's account, he portrays only Jimmie as half-caste, not his brother Mort, who is full-blooded, further distancing Jimmie from his Aboriginal culture and the white world. Clune's account reads more like a novel, interspersed with Clune's own opinions of the Governor case, than a legitimate historical perspective. Furthermore, in "Stories of Race and Gender: An Unbounded Discourse," Terry Threadgold makes the important distinction that both Keneally and Clune have written their respective works from a "white, masculine position" (173). Threadgold explains that "all [examples from Keneally and Clune] involve a white male writer's projection through mental processes of what HE thinks BLACKS think" (174). In the section of the novel where Jimmie is caned, no one (the Aborigines) resented his caning; Jimmie's maternal uncle was "disturbed to get news that Jimmie had married a white girl in the Methodist church at Wallah" (1) and so on. Keneally as the white authorial voice is speaking on behalf of the Aborigine in many cases. Keneally's interpretation of the Aboriginal perspective at the turn of the twentieth century is subjective. To contextualize the Aborigines along with Keneally's own interpretation of Aboriginal culture, it is important to examine the text as a whole.

The story begins in the present, 1900, where Tabidgi Jackie Smolders—full-blooded and of the Tullam section of the Mungindi Tribe—is travelling to Wallah where Jimmie Blacksmith has married a white woman named Gilda in the Methodist church. Tabidgi is bringing the initiation tooth, which "would be a remonstrance and lay a tribal claim on Jimmie" (Keneally 1). The next six chapters serve as a "flashback," presenting the story of Jimmie's mixed parentage and an account of his education with the Nevilles, who according to Quartermaine were "a well-meaning but narrow-minded missionary couple" (32). Though serving the community through

what he would deem his Christian duty, Mr. Neville is not without temptation. Accordingly, Quartermaine explains that “narrow-mindedness can require will-power, though, and the Rev. H.J. Neville himself is not immune to that ‘distinctive slant-grinned black face’ which had produced Jimmie, though he dutifully (but hardly admirably) remains ‘faithful’ to his dull wife ‘amidst such cheap, such wantonly appealing black flesh’” (32-33). A white man having sexual intercourse with an Aboriginal woman is considered one of the worst sins by the townspeople. Jimmie Blacksmith’s full-blooded mother, Dulcie Blacksmith, “believed the missionaries more or less. They took such a low view of lying in other people that they were unlikely to lie themselves” (Keneally 2). Thus, it was commonly believed “that if you had pale children [like Jimmie] it was because you’d been rolled by white men. They [the whites] had not been told that it was Emu-Wren, the tribal totem, who quickened the womb” (Keneally 2). The extreme disconnect between what Aborigines believe and what the whites believe is apparent here. Therefore, because of Jimmie’s bi-racial lineage, Aborigines could concede “Mrs. Blacksmith had been rolled by white men” (Keneally 2), which according to *her* account was “for warmth in winter and for comfort in summer” (Keneally 2). The townspeople believed “by lying with blacks a white man was gradually reduced to impotence with white women” (Keneally 3). White culture circulated such prejudiced beliefs among the Aborigines because of a fear of contamination, wielding their white authority. Continually told they are an inferior class, the Aborigines, being the subjugated minority and lacking any power to disprove such claims, begin to accept such myths as fact. Despite believing the myths, whites of course did not discontinue the practice of sexual intercourse with Aboriginal women. Despite their belief that sleeping with Aborigines would make them impotent, white men exerted their dominance over Aborigines through sexual conquests of female Indigenes. The practice is demonstrative of an aberrant

masculinity common among white men who must exert their power by “whitening” Aboriginal progenies to look whiter. To sexualize the native culture was not only for the benefit of being with the female Aborigine but also a demonstration to the Aboriginal male of white power. White men enjoyed keeping the Aboriginal men in their place in Australian society by sexualizing their women.

Jimmie Blacksmith’s awareness of *his* place in white culture is determined early on through his experiences with Reverend Neville and his wife. When Jimmie leaves for his initiation into manhood, Mr. Neville says, “‘blasted blacks... the best of them are likely to vanish at any time’” (Keneally 3). Though constrained by white prejudices, Mr. Neville has a special affinity for Jimmie. Mr. Neville is impressed by Jimmie’s sobriety and willingness to be molded and sees in him potential. Jimmie is only half-caste, after all, and not a full-blooded Aborigine, which, conversely, makes it easier for Mr. Neville to accept Jimmie over the others at the mission school. However, despite Mr. Neville’s attestation that Jimmie Blacksmith “was a protégé and had a sobriety none of his half-siblings possessed” (Keneally 3), Jimmie is still governed by white constructs of societal mobility. Though nominally “well-meaning,” the often unintentional vocalizations of the Nevilles call attention to the ideological constructs of race and the discourse of whiteness. Mr. Neville says, “‘If a person could be certain... that he had imbued *one* of them with decent ambitions’” (Keneally 3-4) then perhaps there is some hope for the Aborigine to live among the whites. Mr. Neville’s vocalizations contextualize the white idea of separateness. If Mr. Neville sets himself apart from the Aborigine by referring to the Aborigine as “one of them,” the Aborigine is being marginalized to a space of “otherness.” Aborigines cannot be included in the same space with Neville himself but in a separate space where they alone exist. In contextual terms the idea of whiteness is a discourse of power where white equals

right or normal, thereby de-normalizing everything that is not white. Whether or not Mr. Neville is intentionally trying to be superior to Jimmie Blacksmith, upon whom he claims to place a semblance of value, Mr. Neville's preconceived ideological views about *his* place in the "accepted" cultural paradigm still positions him opposite Jimmie Blacksmith. The racial constructs are set up by whites, after all, in order to categorize the "other" and to place themselves in privileged positions. Mr. Neville is representative of many "well-meaning" but also prejudiced individuals of the time. He, like Jimmie Blacksmith, is confined by the constraints of a white-centered culture. Such becomes the role of whiteness in their interaction with Indigenous Australians.

In his book Graham Huggan theorizes on the ideological constructs of whiteness. Huggan argues, "Whiteness is less likely to be based on the perception of superiority than that of neutrality" (71), as Richard Dyer claims, whites "have always tended to 'colonize the definition of normal'" (qtd. in Huggan 71). The importance then lies not in Mr. Neville's placement of himself above Jimmie Blacksmith, but to determine Neville's being white is accepted and normal whereas Jimmie's blackness defines him as being abnormal. After all, "normal" is a truism of the white man's world. To be normal is to be white. Jimmie learns very quickly the difference between him and whites but is momentarily fooled into believing he can become part of white society. Mr. Neville is oblivious of the privileges that come from his being white. Huggan claims, "What is striking about whiteness is, paradoxically, its degree of inconspicuousness. Whiteness is often invisible to those who continue to benefit from its privileges, while at the level of representation" (71), as Dyer succinctly points out, "'Whites are not of a certain race, they're just the human race'" (qtd. in Huggan 71).

The Aboriginal portrayal by Australians in society de-humanizes them as individuals, categorizing them anonymously as “the black” or “the Aborigine.” The color white takes on a further coded implication. Huggan argues that “white is both a colour and the absence of colour, both an assertion of ordinariness and a claim to extraordinary achievement” (71). Mr. Neville does not need to revel in his achievement; his being of the white race is already determined to be both ordinary and normal whereas Jimmie has to earn normality. In order to be “normal,” Jimmie must assimilate into the white world by owning land, as the whites do, and by marrying a white girl. In this way, Jimmie is seeking power through ownership and possession, a white masculine desire that he copies from the white world. The imposed white morality of what is “normal,” conflicts with the Aboriginal culture. The way of life for the Aborigines is not to possess or own anything. The Aboriginal people all share among themselves what belongs to one another, as with Jimmie’s salary later in the novel. Although the money Jimmie earns is used to buy alcohol, Jackie Smolders saw it as *his* responsibility to claim what belonged to the tribe as a whole. Though Jimmie is not viewed as “normal” by white standards in the end, his experience with the Nevilles is most important. What Jimmie learns from whites is very different from his Aboriginal education.

Despite being a strict white educator, Mr. Neville feels a sense of understanding between himself and Jimmie. Although suspicious and controlled by white thought, Mr. Neville sees it as his responsibility to “civilize” Jimmie Blacksmith. Mr. Neville and other missionaries of the time who considered it their duty to “civilize the natives” were in effect practicing masculine control by presuming white ways were civilized and Indigenous ways were not. However, Mr. Neville regards his work as “a true evangelical vocation” (Keneally 4) and coupled with his liking of Jimmie and desire to inspire a “decent ambition,” he does not take Jimmie’s absence

lightly while Jimmie is undergoing his manhood rites. Despite Mr. Neville's aspirations for Jimmie Blacksmith, the real ambitions of Anglo-Europeans were far from decent. The introduction of alcohol and disease to Indigenous culture is clear evidence of that fact. A considerable gap in cultural understanding existed between the whites as far as the Aborigines were concerned.

Keneally discusses Mr. Neville's lack of cultural understanding about the Aborigines through Jimmie's initiation rites. Keneally writes, "If he [Mr. Neville] had been a student of anthropology he would have been less baffled... Anthropology was a word he had never heard. It was, as well, a two-way traffic, demanding a specialized white awareness and talkative natives. Jimmie felt it would have been bad-mannered to upset Mr. Neville by being talkative about initiation" (4). Mr. Neville's lack of cultural understanding illustrates the Australian conceptual view of the Aborigine. Keneally's anthropological insertion also juxtaposes his own modern perspective on Aboriginal culture. Keneally's view of the Aborigine in terms of social science sets the Aborigine apart as a case-study or an experiment. Instead of including Aborigines as their own separate entity, Keneally's need for conceptualizing Aborigines arose because the Aborigines are not part of the white world. In anthropological terms, the Aborigine is tribal and it becomes important for Keneally to view them as such. The Aborigine is in the view of white eyes, undeniably "other." Expounding on the concept of "other" in "Signifier Resignified: Aborigines in Australian Literature," Terry Goldie argues:

The white Australian looks at the Aborigine. The Aborigine is Other and therefore alien. But the Aborigine is indigenous and therefore cannot be alien. So the Australian must be alien. But how can the Australian be alien within Australia? There are only two possible answers. The white culture must reject the indigene, by stating that the country really

began with the arrival of the whites [*terra nullius*], an approach no longer popular but significant in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Or else the white culture can attempt to incorporate the Other, as in superficial examples such as pseudo-Aboriginal names for aspects of white Australian culture. (63)

Keneally's Aborigine is a representation or a fictional image that also becomes a signifier in terms of what Keneally's "Aborigine" is supposed to be. Accordingly, Edward Said in *Orientalism* explains, "In any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a *re-presence*, or a representation" (21). Therefore, Keneally's Aborigine is merely a representation of an Aborigine and does not exist on a physical level in the white world. Keneally's conception of Aboriginal culture is also dubiously constructed and not true to life. In that paradigm, it becomes easy for the dominant culture to marginalize the Aborigine to the status of "other," forcing the Aborigine to become non-present. Keneally's novel is, therefore, a fictionalized recreation of an historical event and people and is *his interpretation* of Aborigines and Aboriginal culture. Reynolds explains that "Keneally has depicted a character [Jimmie] they [whites] would have quickly recognized. He lusts after white women eventually wanting their blood, he succumbs to the uncontrollable recrudescence of savagery and experiences orgiastic exhilaration in killing" (22-23). Keneally, therefore, has produced an Aborigine who does not exist in the real world, but in white imagination. By making the Aborigine his own design, Keneally has in turn formed the Aborigine's thoughts, actions, and feelings and appropriating his own concept of "Aborigine" or "Indigene." Goldie further argues that "a literary representation might seem less absolute, but the indigene in literature is similarly a reified preservation, an unusually extreme example of the law" (59). To

combat the “other” they had reified, the white Australia must then engage in a process of acculturation to form the “other” to fit into the Australians’ “civilized” ideal.

Inasmuch as the white culture hopes to acculturate the Aborigines, the manifestation for the normalization of the Aborigines cannot be wholly complete. Therefore, the mode of white skin preference must find an arbiter through the systematic or unconscious utterances made by whites. Being white, juxtaposed with anything that is not, restricts the non-white presence to a liminal space. Mr. Neville functions as one of the proponents of white privilege, even at the expense of Jimmie for whom he admits a fondness. Mr. Neville and the other whites of the novel are the arbiters of white privilege in Jimmie’s world. Jimmie is being denied access to the white world through the utterances of racial constructs that subjugates him to the role of permanent outsider.

Furthermore, Jimmie’s own Aboriginal history intersects with the dominant white culture. Jimmie, although half-caste, gains access to Aboriginal history through his use of customs such as the initiation ceremony. However, even Aboriginal customs have become appropriated by white histories. Moreover, the Aboriginal legends have been stolen and made white by the enculturation of Anglo-histories into Aboriginal chants. The “theft” of the Aboriginal history speaks to the recurrent motif of ownership in the novel. While running away from the mission school to participate in his initiation ceremonies, Jimmie sings an Aboriginal song about an ancient raid. The song is about an historical raid of the past but is taken from the white man’s history. As Keneally writes, “The woman-stealing it recounted had taken place during the English civil war, two and a half centuries previously” (4). Jimmie’s memory of Aboriginal history has become intermixed with English history. Although the conception of a tribal memory is strengthened in the act of singing, thereby validating Jimmie’s Aboriginal

history, the history itself has become Anglicized. As Anne Brewster in “Remembering Whiteness: Reading Indigenous Life Narrative” notes, “Memory is a powerful tool to counter white disavowal of Indigenous histories and of the mutual entanglement of white and Indigenous subjectivities since white invasion of Indigenous lands” (85). Aborigines’ memory and history in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* are slowly being whitened into a caricature that has melded Aborigine and Anglo histories.

The melding of two histories might also allude to Jimmie’s deep confusion in being subjugated and unable to make sense of his role in the white colonizer’s world. In his dissertation, “From Solidity to Fluidity: On the Theme of Identity in Thomas Keneally’s Fiction,” Zhou Xiaojin argues that “Jimmie’s experience is often politically interpreted as that of a colonized black. But in fact it is a process of cultural transformation in which Jimmie is successively the colonized [and] the colonizer” (136). Jimmie’s pull between the Aboriginal and white worlds is also demonstrative of this duality. Jimmie is a stranger in the white world, the colonized “other” who must make sense of his existence. Jimmie’s desire to become white manifests itself through his taking on some of the colonizer’s aspirations such as owning property and marrying white. In accordance with adopting white ways, Jimmie becomes the colonizer and the colonized. Jimmie’s use of the “women-stealing” chant and its inspiration in the English civil war also foreshadows the massacre Jimmie commits later in the novel against the whites. Jimmie’s proclamation of war on the white world is what he has learned from the whites. Throughout the novel the antagonism Jimmie suffers and the constant need for whites to hate him so intensely manifests in him the belief that being white also means being violent. The mode of violence and physical confrontation throughout white man’s history is clearly being copied. Jimmie’s discipline by Mr. Neville for truancy teaches him an early lesson.

When Jimmie returns to Brentwood blacks' camp after his rites of initiation into manhood, Mr. Neville is at first quite "happy to see him. God must love those who greet mere absentees with so much ardour. It was as if the boy had come back from the dead" (Keneally 6). Mr. Neville could not surmise the stature Jimmie now held among the Aboriginal people due to his maturation. Mr. Neville wondered, Keneally writes, "if he might get a sensible explicit answer from a black" (6). When Mr. Neville's query regarding Jimmie's whereabouts is received by the supercilious response, "'catchin' possums'" (Keneally 6), Mr. Neville then commences to cane Jimmie for truancy. Keneally writes, "No one had resented it [the caning]" (6), just as "No one had hindered Mungindi elders from gathering to make Jimmie a man" (6). Accordingly, "It seemed no unworthy usage that their [Aborigines'] new buck should now be lashed on the arse by a Methodist minister. For the truth of Mr. Neville and the truth of Emu-Wren ran parallel. Mr. Neville had his place, as did the poor-bugger-white-fella-son-of-God-got-nailed" (Keneally 6). The Mungindi elders respected the bounds between themselves and white culture. They went about the ritual of Jimmie's initiation but did not object when Jimmie was caned. It was not their place to intercede with white man's customs anymore than whites should intrude on their tribal beliefs, despite the fact they were responsible for Jimmie's truancy. Mr. Neville was an example of the nineteenth century mission schoolteacher whose main objective was to prepare Jimmie and others to become part of the white world.

This episode in Keneally's novel is a reminder that the true goals of the nineteenth century mission school for Aboriginal children were forced assimilations into the white world and bodily control. As Penny Van Toorn writes,

Schools were institutions through which colonial authorities imposed regimes of cultural assimilation, surveillance, and bodily discipline on Aboriginal children. While the

teachers filled the children's minds with the four R's—reading, writing, arithmetic, and Christian religion—the routines of the school life confined the children bodily in one place, doing prescribed activities for certain fixed hours of the day. (23)

The fact that Jimmie Blacksmith left the mission school for his initiation into manhood demonstrates his inability to remain static. Confinement and restrictions in one place were a foreign concept among Aborigines. Throughout the novel the various people Jimmie works for fear that the “black man” will not stay and finish the job but simply leave at any time. White culture cannot understand freedom of movement because it is so anti-establishment and atypical to their idea of civilization. Thus, Jimmie is caught between two worlds: the world of his Aboriginal ancestry with its cultural ties and the world of Mr. Neville and whites where there is a hope Jimmie might possibly gain a semblance of tolerance. However, the aim of the mission school was also to exert its masculine dominance over the Aborigine to “educate” and “Christianize” them. The hope was then to normalize the Aborigine into the white world. Whites were after all colonizers of what was normal (Dyer 127).

The duality of Jimmie's own name can be seen as a pull or tension between the two worlds. “Blacksmith” connotes “black” Aboriginal whereas “smith” is the marker of an Anglo-European construct. The name also conveys anonymity (i.e. “Mr. Smith”). Jimmie is lost in the cultural milieu of two worlds, both with their fiercely strong pulls. To that end, the Nevilles aid in Jimmie's naïve belief that if he only marries a white girl, he might in turn become white. Though perhaps unintentional, the Nevilles speak to Jimmie in the white utterances of social constructs: “If you could ever find a nice girl off a farm to marry, your children would only be quarter-caste then, and your grandchildren one-eighth caste, scarcely black at all” (Keneally 7). The belief in the dominance of white traits when miscegenation took place was a commonly

accepted theory denoting the racialized ideologies at turn of the twentieth century. The evolutionary term for this is *swamping*—the idea that white traits will progressively overtake others. When the Nevilles refer to the decrease of Aboriginal blood with each consecutive generation they are participating in the accepted eugenic beliefs of the dominant society in colonial Australia. These constructs are indicative of the mode of white privilege that determines the white position as the one to aspire. Furthermore, it is incumbent on whites to “save” the Indigene from the squalor of their lives by exposing them to the white way of life. The harsh condition of the Aboriginal settlements, which was contributed to by the white world is further aided by the degradation of the Aboriginal community. The hope of the Nevilles to “save” Jimmie from being “black” is indicative in the break-down of the Tullam community.

Keneally illustrates that the Tullam is now where “tribal men [are] beggars puking Hunter River rotgut sherry in the lee of hotel shit-houses. Tribal elders, who [care] for initiation teeth and [know] where the soul-stones of each man [are] hidden and how the stones could be distinguished, [lend] out their wives to white men for a suck from a brandy bottle” (7). The consumption of alcohol, a white man’s “gift” to the Aborigines, carries its own form of masculine control as Aborigines must continue to obtain alcohol from whites and are subject to its addiction. In this sense, whites are using the Aborigines’ addiction as control. The alcohol itself is a white introduction, delegitimizing the Aboriginal male by forming a new initiation ritual with a product from the white world. Contextualizing the influence of alcohol consumption in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, Louise Gray’s “Thinking Love Withdrawn in the Process of Becoming Australian,” claims that Keneally describes the “Emu-Wren tribe as ‘hawking up its living tissue,’ under the inescapable conditions imposed on the indigenous. So potent is the ‘superiority’ of Western culture that displacement and disposition is extensive” (23).

The consumption of alcohol becomes the new rite of initiation among the men of Emu-Wren. Despite his wanting to be white, Jimmie does not embrace this Anglicized form of initiation at first. Keneally explains, “Most men who weren’t old enough had become a little skeptical of the tribal cosmogony, even if they were not as clear headed about it as Jimmie. The very height of tribal manhood for some was this gulping of cheap wine in pub yards. That activity itself was a tortured questing after a new world picture for Mungindi men” (23). The old ways associated with tribal customs were being replaced for the overwhelming draw of *white* booze.

Jimmie leaves the Brentwood blacks’ camp when Mr. Neville is awarded a pastorate at the Methodist Church in Muswellbrook and they ask Jimmie to come with them “as some sort of servant or houseboy” (Keneally 8). Keneally writes, “Earlier in the year, before the Nevilles and Jimmie came [to Muswellbrook], the valley had flooded, enriching the top soil of the lower flats to a pitch of improbable green. The sweet pastures and vineyards resounded in Jimmie Blacksmith’s nervous system, conveying the fact of tidy white ownership, dislodging Tullam and Mungara” (9). Jimmie longs to be a white man owning land and having a white woman, which supersedes all his Aboriginal roots. Jimmie’s hopes for a farm of his own and a white wife become paramount. The idea of a black man owning land is an all-encompassing dream for Jimmie and one of the chief recurring elements of masculinity—to be landed. The white man was the owner of the land and exerted his superiority through his ownership. In order to continue his role as the dominant ruler, it was incumbent on the white man to put down any outside force such as the Aborigines who hoped to similarly become landed. The white man also had to diminish the Aborigine and bargain on his failure, an action Jimmie cannot understand throughout his dealings in the white world. The white man needed to retain his own identity at the expense of dehumanizing the Aborigine. Gray writes:

For whilst the preservation of identity, as Europeans, requires dehumanization of the indigenous, this has already been camouflaged not by the law which does not recognize them but the unwritten law of racial hatred within the orders of signification that give it sanction, and intensify its resolve. Sanction here is unmarked, which, when put into practice, signs and signifies unwritten “law” that activates the sign that is signified of racial hatred and makes acceptable that crime as “honourable,” “Christian,” and “perfectly legal.” (23)

When the Aborigine is not included in the white world’s law, it becomes morally accepted by the white world to enact its own moral code on them vis-à-vis racialized sentiments and marginalization. The whites do not recognize the Aborigine as having any ownership under the law. Although Jimmie Blacksmith desires to possess land and in the process, “normalize” himself, the white world’s dominant control stands in opposition to Jimmie’s dreams. The whites cannot allow Jimmie to become entrenched fully in their world by owning land or taking a white woman. The white world must, therefore, use racial differences to justify their claims.

If owning land was one of the biggest masculine conquests for Jimmie, then equally significant was the idea he might possess a white girl from a farm. Reynolds considers the historical Jimmie Blacksmith (Jimmy Governor) in terms of his marriage to a white woman. Reynolds states, “The most unusual feature of Jimmy Governor’s life was his marriage to a white girl. Casual interracial sex was commonplace; more permanent liaisons were not unknown. But practically all sexual contact was between white men and black women” (19). The domination and demonization of the Aboriginal women is common among the possessors of privilege, having to exercise their masculine power. The Aboriginal man being relegated to subservience among white men cannot obtain a white woman so easily. However, the pull for ownership the

white man enjoys becomes stronger for Jimmie Blacksmith as he begins to fantasize about becoming white and the near-impossible desire to become the husband of a white woman. Jimmie sets out to learn how to assimilate into the white man's world. Mrs. Neville teaches Jimmie to cook chicken with seasoning, as Mr. Neville teaches him geography and speaks to him about the size of the Earth. Jimmie thinks a lot about finding a white woman from a farm and decides that "it would be better to have children who were scarcely black at all" (Keneally 8). Jimmie is becoming ashamed of his blackness. The great expanse of the Earth and Jimmie's place in it are expressed in the following passage by Keneally. He writes, "His [Jimmie's] index finger would jab at a point on the *orbis terrarium* [the World globe], understanding that that finger could not be pointed sharply enough to indicate the small places where Tullam and Mungara were prescriptive. Not that Jimmie assumed anything was right or wrong merely by size. Still, the large earth indeed swamped them" (8). Jimmie Blacksmith, away from his home, sees the enormity of the world. He feels quite small in the immensity of it all. The comparison here between the vastness and supremacy of the white culture with the marginality and remoteness of the Aboriginal people is quite telling.

Anne Rutherford's "Re-appraisal of a Myth: *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*" contextualizes the Aboriginal plight by 1900 at the time of Australian Federation. Rutherford writes, "The fact is, that by the time of the Federation, when *Jimmie Blacksmith* is set, the white man had done much towards fulfilling the fate he had predicted for the Aborigines. Those who hadn't been shot, poisoned or massacred were decimated by the white man's diseases" (108). The survival of Indigenous Australians comes up when Jimmie goes to the Department of Agriculture to acquire a leaflet on fencing. He becomes caught in the middle of an argument between two office workers, one Australian-born and pro-Federation and the other a Loyalist

English opposer to Australian Federation. Considering the possibility of a civil war in Australia like the American model, the proponent of Australian Federation argues, “‘It’d never happen here. Could yer imagine Australians shooting at Australians?’” (Keneally 16). The Loyalist responds, “‘I could imagine people who are mean-hearted, narrow-minded, and uncultivated committing every conceivable brutality if the cap fits... And you seem to forget, my friend, that there’s no such thing as an Australian. Except in the imagination of some poets and at the editorial desk of the *Bulletin*’” (Keneally 16). The question of who is really an Australian calls into question the “‘imagined communities’”⁸ concept involved in nation building. A nation or country is a construct created to group various individuals under a single affiliation of patriotic allegiance. Patriotism, too, is an ideological construct of the white world. Jimmie listens as the argument between the two continues. The Englishman submits, “‘Here there are only New South Welshmen, Victorians, Queenslanders, Vandemonians [Tasmanians] and so on. But there is no such thing as an Australian. The only true Australians are... [seeing Jimmie] Aborigines’” (16). The Federationist claims, “‘He’s [Jimmie’s] an honest poor bastard’” (Keneally 16) and “‘almost extinct’” (Keneally 16). The belief Jimmie or any Aborigine were “‘true Australians’” was not a very common one in Australia of 1900. Aborigines were exposed to so much mockery and disdain that they were not even treated as people.

Rutherford adds that “‘dispossessed of their [Aborigines’] tribal lands, they were more caricatures of their former selves, figures of their [whites’] fun, scorn and degradation, curiosities in their own land’” (108). The curiosity among whites toward the Aborigine is seen in an exchange early in the novel in which Jimmie and Wongee Tom observe a farmer’s family outside the local draper’s establishment. Keneally writes:

The mother of the three girls passed both black men without a glance. All of these were

sucking with a varying degree of blatancy and a half-pound bag of boiled sweets was secure in the possession of the eldest girl. Only the youngest, perhaps four, blue-eyed beneath a sailor's cap on which was printed *H.M.S. Sugar & Spice*, delayed at the door to look full at Wongee Tom. Already, it seemed, she knew that she must take whatever chances of direct gazing came to her, since her mother would soon have her taught to observe such people only obliquely, in a manner that did little for *one's* knowledge.

(11)

The passage is important for several reasons. First, there is the *innocent* stare of a child at an individual who is the appellative "other," unlike her family. The incident also presupposes that the youngest girl's parents have begun to instill fear or abnormality about this Aboriginal man due to the non-recognition among the mother and older girls. However, her parents have not begun to teach her to treat the Aborigines as if they are not there, unlike the child's older siblings. Under this rationale the discourse of whiteness reoccurs through the white adults' non-recognition of the Aborigines. It becomes convenient to pretend the Aborigine and the whites do not coexist together. Second, the fact Keneally calls Jimmie and Wongee Tom the "black" men as the girls pass is important to the mode of whiteness as well. Keneally, therefore, is caught up in the same racialized constructions that categorize and determine non-whites as "other." It is not important to mention the girls were white, but it is important to signify that Jimmie and Tom were not, by labeling them "black." Dyer argues, "The sense of whites as non-raced is most evident in the absence of reference to whiteness in the habitual speech and writing of white people in the West" (2). Therefore, the invisibility of whites and the racialization of non-whites is the pervasive mode of white privilege. It only becomes important to identify a non-white person by the appellation of a label, not to acknowledge the existence of the white race. Again,

as Dyer explains, “It is not the white race, but the human race” (3). This passage summarily points out the racialization of Aborigines by whites.

In *Revealing Whiteness: the Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege*, Shannon Sullivan analyzes the mode of white habits in present-day Western culture. Sullivan writes, “It can be tempting to think that today most white people are racist primarily because of an inadvertent lack of knowledge about the cultures and lives of people of color. Many white people in the United States and other white privileged countries do not personally interact with people of color, and when they do, such interactions often are of the trivial sort found in consumer exchanges” (17). It is easier to ignore people of color than admit their presence, as they become a non-presence and whites safe from being overtly racist. Conceptualizing the Aborigine as a non-person illustrates another reoccurring theft in the novel that makes the Aborigine an alien. Gray writes, “The alien is the very ideology which has been transported from offshore and justifies the *grand larceny* of foreign space” (22). The Australian Constitution of 1900,⁹ drawn up at Federation, “buried alive” the Aborigines by “declaring them dead whilst still breathing” (Gray 22). By non-recognition in the white world as a person, Jimmie Blacksmith is being subjugated further under white man’s unofficial laws. Gray contends, “The enemy of the indigenous people is not so much laws which are absolutely silent and deny their existence, but the unwritten laws of racial hatred which disallowed them a dignified existence. As a non-people they could only exist as and in the underworld created of them and for them” (22). Jimmie’s inability to obtain a foothold in the white world is shown by whites’ refusal to fully accept him. The removals of Aboriginal children from their homes to mission stations and islands designated for half-castes were further disavowals of Indigenous Australians’ existence. The removals also hid the “curiosity” of half-castes that, ironically, the white patriarchy had a hand in creating.

The duality of being half-caste further separates Jimmie as a “curiosity to his own people.” When Wongee Tom visits, Tom’s constant barbs of “paley bastard” to Jimmie are consistent with Jimmie’s place in Aboriginal culture as a half-caste. However, Jimmie is certainly aware of his blackness despite his desire to be white. Keneally’s description of Jimmie as having a “black soul” (8) is reflective of Jimmie’s internal struggle between white and Aborigine, which to Jimmie, connotes his bad side. It also demonstrates Keneally’s own inherent racialization by the white author. Sometimes an aloof authorial voice, Keneally is just as subject to the trappings of white utterances as his characters. In viewing Keneally’s commentary to the reader, Quartermaine writes, “Keneally’s stance here [in addressing the reader] is that of the omniscient author, quick to speak directly to the reader, if only for witty purpose. He feels free, for example, to gloss a description of Anglo-Australian antipathies with the authorial quip: ‘To say it more clearly, it could make them peevish’” (34). Later in the novel when Jimmie’s world has collapsed into ultimate catastrophe, Keneally sets himself apart by aligning his narrative voice with that of the plurality of “our.” Keneally writes, “In our world, the delusions that killers let into their bloodstreams are the stuff of newsprint and videotape. A reader should be spared” (78). Keneally sets himself, and by extension non-Indigenous people, apart from the Aboriginal account by affirming his place in “our world,” be it the world of the 1970s or 1900. For Keneally, “our world” represents the “civilized” world. Thus, Keneally is also caught up in the promulgation of whiteness constructions. Jimmie tries hard to fit into these white constructs by going into the white man’s world for employment.

Jimmie Blacksmith tells the Nevilles that he wishes to find work at the open-cut. They agree but must first ascertain “as religious people always need to—that his motives were correct” (Keneally 14). When Jimmie is arrested at one point for intoxication, Mr. Neville, who had

previously admired in Jimmie a “sobriety which none of his half-siblings possessed” (Keneally 3) warns him about his association with the wrong crowd who may be given to drink. Jimmie says he is sickened by such behaviors, but needs to spread his wings and prove he can become successful. When Jimmie unsparingly washes himself at the water pump behind the jail, Keneally writes that Jimmie Blacksmith is “baptizing himself a white man” (13). Mr. Neville finally gives him a letter of reference that is not even looked at by Jimmie’s potential employers. Jimmie says he will “not descend to muttered black curses” (Keneally 14), an example not only of his anger but also an effort to disassociate himself from his Aboriginality. Jimmie finally secures a job putting up fences for an Irish farmer, Mr. Healy, up the river. His time with the Healys is just as important in his development as the Nevilles had been. However, the Healys are far more overt with their racist sentiments. The Healys are Catholic, in contrast to the Protestant Nevilles. Keneally writes, “The Irishman was always delivering ultimatums and stepping up close to Jimmie” (14). Healy asks, ““Yer have any religion? Other than nigger?”” (Keneally 15). Jimmie says he is a Methodist. The authority Healy exerts over Jimmie is a reflection of the constructs of masculine control. Healy uses racist discourse to put down Jimmie and make sure he separates Jimmie from himself and whites. It is not enough that Mr. Healy, the white landowner is in charge, he must also exert his power, requiring Jimmie to ingratiate himself to his employer. Christianity carries its own white dogma of which Healy wholeheartedly affiliates. Dyer argues, “Not only did Christianity become the religion, and religion of export, of Europe, indelibly marking its culture and consciousness, it has also been thought and felt in distinctly white ways for most of its history” (17). Healy says, ““Then I give yer me Christian promise that I’ll cut yore bloody black balls out if yer mess this job. And every post that’s out of place an inch, I’ll dock yer a shillin’”” (Keneally 15). Genevieve L’Aigle in

“The White World and Its Relationship With the Aborigines in Keneally’s *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*” discusses the role of religion in the novel. She writes:

[In the novel] since they are of European descent, nearly all the white people are Christian, which does not mean that a spirit of love and brotherhood prevails among them. Catholics in particular are looked down upon by Christians of other denominations who contemptuously refer to them as “Papists” and rumour that they are “dense, unwashed, and subject to witchcraft.” For Mrs. Neville, “Papists are not to be stoned but pitied” on account of their errors; they confess their sins to a priest as if a priest could mediate between God and man. Being Methodist, Mrs. Neville believes that Christ is the only mediator and she consequently considers that the Catholics are straying from the right path. (103)

The Catholics in the novel are most notably the Irish Healys. Being Catholic and Irish, Mr. Healy must reconcile his own status in Australian class structure. As the Irish in Ireland and the British Isles were experiencing marginalized statuses in their own countries, it was especially hard to make the case for inclusiveness in this new country of Anglo-colonization. Furthermore, the Irish had limited ownership rights to land in their own country. Another Irishman in the novel, Toban, says, ““Don’t you worry! Our grandparents all had the arse out of their trousers. Out here we live like kings in Australia. Who did that for us—the Queen? My grandfather farmed an acre and a half in Kerry. Now my father runs sheep on twenty thousand acres. And we can afford t’ ride out like this, like knights, and hunt”” (Keneally 108). Although there was more opportunity in Australia for them, the Irish and other non-Anglo peoples of Europe had to prove their whiteness when coming to Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

David R. Roediger discusses the Irish having to prove their whiteness, along with the creation of the American working class in both *The Wages of Whiteness* and *Working Toward Whiteness*. Australia too, was similar in its cosmogony to the United States by 1900. The same fervent optimism that immigrants greeted Ellis Island with a desire to assimilate in pursuit of the American dream¹⁰ was found among the waves of Australian immigrants at the end of the nineteenth century. John Frow's "The Chant of Thomas Keneally" contextualizes the Irish of the novel. Frow writes:

It is worth noting that the name "Healy" rhymes with "Keneally"; and it is perhaps significant that Healy is unable to write. The relation of Healy's forbears to Anglo-Irish landlords is in some ways comparable to that of Jimmie to Healy; domination is never shaken off, it is passed down the line. On the other hand, the Irish in Australia are a minority culture, and this fact complicates the model by setting up a provisional equation between the two cultures. (297)

The cycle of domination manifests ultimately in the masculine constructs that combine race with the patriarchy. For the Irish settlers, it was important to become part of the dominant culture and adopt their beliefs and racialized prejudices.

Mr. Healy left it up to Jimmie how he would acquire the tools to put up the fences. Jimmie's theft of the Nevilles' shovel speaks to his attitudes concerning ownership. Keneally says, "Possession was a holy state and he had embarked on it with the Nevilles' shovel" (15). The shovel represented the object of the white man's labor. The masculine enterprise of not only owning but possessing was important to Jimmie. To possess or have ownership was to be white. Jimmie was beginning to learn very well that being white confers power and superiority, which he exerts at different points in the novel. Jimmie Blacksmith is a snob thanks to the Nevilles,

and “In the mind of the true snob there are certain limited criteria to denote the value of a human existence. Jimmie’s criteria were: home, hearth, wife, land. Those who possessed these had beatitude unchallengeable” (Keneally 15). Terry Sturm’s “Thomas Keneally and Australian Racism: *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*” illustrates Jimmie’s unsuccessful attempts to obtain his set criteria. Sturm posits:

The first [of the events which Keneally relates] traces Jimmie Blacksmith’s initially confident but increasingly disillusioned attempts to enter white society by indentifying himself with the white goals of “home, hearth, wife, land,” and cutting himself off from the sustaining relationships and values of the older tribal ethos, into which he had been initiated. Confronted, in his actual experience, by the brutal facts of Aboriginal dispossession and the squalor of the blacks’ camps that exist on the fringes of white townships and provide brothels for the whites, he is unable to see the surviving structure of tribal myths and rituals except as crude superstitions, and rejects the values and practical codes they embody as irrelevant to his own situation. (261)

Jimmie’s hope of becoming white is doomed nearly from the beginning, but he is unwilling at first to admit he cannot be accepted wholly by white society. Healy subsequently cheats Jimmie out of part of his pay in order to exert his authority. Jimmie begins to lust after Mrs. Healy, longing to be in possession of a white woman and land. When Healy refuses to write Jimmie a letter of reference, Jimmie mocks him by saying he does not know how to write anyway at which point Healy knocks Jimmie to the ground. Healy cannot stand the idea of a “black” lording anything over him, so he becomes not only physically combative but also more verbally abusive and racist in his dialogue with Jimmie. Healy lies that he had left his glasses elsewhere and could not write a reference at that time. Jimmie, aware that Mrs. Healy had read to Mr. Healy

bills of sale, realizes Healy's dishonesty. Healy's status is always in question, Healy fears, and the fact Jimmie has an education and he does not threaten his manhood but also his place among the whites. Jimmie sees that what he needs to become white is to be landed and to possess a white wife. Mrs. Healy becomes the model for Jimmie's ideal wife.

Jimmie's search for an ideal "white" wife and job serves as one of the masculine drives in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, which unite to bring about Jimmie's eventual failure. From his experiences with the Healys to his later employers, Lewis, the Scot, Farrell, the policeman, and Newby, the patriarchal landowner Jimmie experiences the bitter reality of his place among white men and believing that possession will make him a man. The Aborigines at large suffer the penalty of white-masculine dominance in Keneally's description of Verona, an Aboriginal community that also runs a brothel for white men to exert their will over Aboriginal women. Keneally writes, "White voices could be heard as burlap door-flaps were flung open. Shrieking welcomes were sung to the white phallus, powerful demolisher of tribes" (20). Keneally's use of the term "phallus" is most important due to the implications of power it raises, not a sexual act. At the Verona blacks' camp Jimmie feels bad omens associated with the place, later concluding, "It seemed that an eye—God's eye—had ceased to see Verona squarely" (24). When a fracas results in the stabbing and death of a white boy, Jimmie reluctantly helps dispose of the body. Keneally's description of the boy as "a lovely dead white boy with his well-sown hare-lip" (25) contrasts greatly with the ugliness of his murder and Verona itself. Jimmie considers his part in hiding the body of the white boy to be a truly bad spirit. As Keneally writes, "Not only did Jimmie feel that Verona, its chaos of black-white meanness, was off God's globe, if God had a globe. But worse, that they had hurriedly buried the animal of their true totem propitiatory rites and out of a necessity that should not have arisen" (26). When a hut goes

up in flames one evening, Keneally describes it as the “purest thing in Verona, this diverse squalor refined to the clean unity of a tongue of fire” (24). Verona becomes the center for white male domination in the novel. Therefore, if Verona is the place of masculine convergence, then the living, breathing arbiter of white masculine fear can be found in a half-caste, such as Jimmie.

The role of a half-caste was especially troubling for the colonials, who faced a real danger in allowing Aboriginal blood to mingle. The half-caste was a sign of the white man’s inability to abstain from sexual contact with Indigenes, a shame among their white women. Thus, the white colonial built up racial blockades to distinguish themselves from the Aborigine. Annette Hamilton in “Fear and Desire: the Aborigines, Asians, and the National Imaginary” contextualizes the half-caste in Australian society. Hamilton argues, “An essential aspect of racist discourse was the need to prevent ‘cross-breeding,’ to maintain the purity of the white race in Australia, as Britons. Thus, the highly visible part-Aboriginal segment of the population stood as a glaring reminder that ‘racial purity’ had been breached” (20-21). After all, whites were quick to forget their part in the creation of the half-caste. However, any constant reminder of their lack of will-power, an obvious chink in their masculine armor, was considerably problematic. Hamilton expands that “Australian (British) racism is articulated in the danger of the ultimate merger between self and other, in the form of the dangers of the primitive, and of sexual contact and the production of the ‘half-caste’” (19). The half-caste is not merely Aborigine but also white European, and evidence of the conflict between temptation and restraint. However, the white Australian never overtly admits half-castes are part white.

As problematic as the half-caste reminder was to the white colonials, the threat of Aboriginal advancement carried an equal worry. Jimmie’s dealing with Healy who cheated but also took tremendous interest in Jimmie’s failure is evidence of this fear. When Jimmie is

similarly cheated by the Scotsman Lewis, his exasperation and confusion are evidenced. Lewis found fault, often fictive, in Jimmie's work. Keneally writes that "Jimmie, once more, did not know Scottish history [or Irish vis-à-vis Healy], or reasons why people called Lewis should relish so their ferocious bookkeeping" (29). The arrival of Jimmie's half-brother Mort is an increasing worry for Lewis, who questions, "'Yer nae gunner turn me property into a blacks' camp, are ye?'" (27). The fear of the Aborigines' presence making Mr. Lewis look bad was a dominant belief among the whites at large.

The plight of the Australian Aborigine was one of considerable degradation. The breakdown of Aboriginal culture, as Hamilton explains, was especially harsh for the Aborigine but also a reminder to the whites of white's culpability and temptation. Hamilton contends it was

An utterly negative picture of Aborigines, derived from their "detrribalization," the loss of their essential cultural attributes, and their desire to "ape" whites by attempting to improve themselves. This negative image was applied to "Mission blacks" and "educated blacks" who didn't know their place, as well as to half-castes [like Jimmie] and fringe-dwellers, who seemed to embody the worst fantasies of white Australians—drunkenness, vagrancy, despair, and disorganization. (21)

The Aboriginal vices that ran rampant in their world were similar temptations to whites. To see the Aborigines intoxicated and at the mercy of booze, compelled the whites to, again, forget their complicity. As Hamilton explains, "Their drinking, gambling, fighting, 'promiscuity,' and 'laziness' were, of course, precisely those elements which whites had to struggle against within themselves. And many of them were the product of the union between white men and Aboriginal women" (20). Therefore, it became necessary to pretend such things were not their

faults by demonizing the Aborigine and especially half-caste through white propagation of racist behavior.

No other individual possessed the propensity for such racial intolerance as Policeman Farrell. When Farrell hires Jimmie as a tracker, Jimmie is at first excited to have such a “white” job until he is given the outfit of the former tracker, who was obviously a different size and Jimmie feels like “a comical abo in other blacks’ clothes” (Keneally 35). Farrell uses the white language of domination, saying that “I got other darkies in mind and if yer don’t come, Jacko, yer kin go begging” (Keneally 35). Jimmie’s position, however, does give him a semblance of white power. He uses some of that power on a raid at the Verona blacks’ camp where he and Constable Ferrell exert their will on the inhabitants. When the young white boy, Jack Fisher, who disappeared a year before is reported missing, Jimmie and Farrell go to Verona to find out what has happened to him. The fact Fisher and his mate visited Verona did not come as a surprise to Farrell. It was after all, part of the masculine drives of the white world, and a shame they had to conceal. Keneally writes,

Farrell knew that at the tail-end of sprees in town whites often took off to Verona to lie with gins. There was many a town elder who had reason to cringe at the sight of some trachoma-eyed half-caste child who had his jaw or nose or forehead. It was always the white man’s good luck that the lubra knew nothing so obscene as blackmail. If you were an alderman who had gone with a gin, the worst you had to fear was that the woman might call out a greeting to you in the street, even within sight of the superior architecture of the municipal offices or School of Arts. (36)

Farrell was aware, as Mr. Neville had been, of the temptation to whites “amidst such cheap, such wantonly appealing black flesh” (Keneally 4). However, as Keneally states,

For their part, men never boasted about their love-making with gins. Perhaps the sport was too easy for that. And no one willingly admitted that there was an especial pull in the easy, slack-mouthed lubras. Certainly, they provided a free whore-house just beyond the limits; but everyone suspected that there were degenerates who actually preferred black flesh, whatever economies were involved, and men were pointed out in whispers whose taste for black flesh had so sapped them that they no longer wanted any white.

(37)

The existence of the brothels at Verona was further evidence of the aberrant masculine drives exhibited by whites in the novel. Jimmie's drive is for vengeance against his own people and eliminating the blackness within himself. Knowledgeable of the identity of the murderer, Jimmie forces an Aborigine into "exposing" the guilty party, Harry Edwards. He beats the Aborigines and talks to them in the white way of addressing the Aborigine. Keneally says "Jimmie was in a vindictive state of mind. The Verona people were to be punished for their vulnerability. There was lust in him to punish the race [Aboriginal] through the man who had done the knifing" (38). Jimmie wants to punish the entire Aboriginal race and in his quest to renounce his own Aboriginality.

Meanwhile, Farrell was not right, as Jimmie had realized. The demonstration of masculinity for Chief Constable Farrell came in the form of repressed homosexual desires. Keneally writes, "Of course, Jimmie knew, Farrell was not normal and had once begun to caress him, before deciding it might be bad for authority. Farrell enjoyed putting terror into lusty boyhood" (38). Farrell's masculinity is exerted in ways that Farrell can have control and wield power over another, not merely for his own sexual satisfaction. One night in a drunken revelry Farrell sang Irish songs in the jail while only in his underwear. Keneally writes that "His

[Farrell's] phallus became erect. Jimmie, who knew Farrell's weakness and the tradition of jailhouse sodomy, decided to escape to the stables" (43). Again, the use of the word "phallus" is representative of power, not sex. That night Harry Edwards is hanged in his cell by Farrell. Although Jimmie is told the next morning that it was Harry who hanged himself, Jimmie lays Farrell's belt on the table before leaving, as if to inform Farrell that he is aware of his complicity in the hanging. Farrell tells his junior constable "'Yer can't trust 'em... Yer just get one of 'em into shape and they go off on bloody walkabout'" (Keneally 41).

Jimmie's next job was as helper to the cook on the Hayes's sheep station. Jimmie meets Gilda, the "wayward girl" who works as the Hayes's maid and forms a friendship and sexual relationship with her. Eventually, Gilda tells Jimmie that she is pregnant with his child. When Jimmie and Gilda are married at the Methodist Church at Wallah and Jackie Smolders arrives with Jimmie's initiation tooth, the flashback narrative that introduced Jimmie's life up until his marriage to Gilda now comes to an end. Jimmie's interaction with the parson's wife, Mrs. Treloar, however, leaves him further confused about the ways of white people and their distrust of him. Mrs. Treloar exemplifies another form of masculine dominance in the novel. After making sure Jimmie's money was as good as any other *white* man's, Mrs. Treloar tells Jimmie to chop and stack firewood. Jimmie is hesitant, saying "'Missus, it's a ton an' a half'" (Keneally 55). Mrs. Treloar exclaims: "'It's two ton. It will do your soul good. If you stop, I'm fetching the police'" (Keneally 55). Jimmie hesitantly capitulates. Jimmie's acquiescence fulfills his role to white society who must exert their masculine dominance. Mrs. Treloar exerts her own "masculine" dominance through her interactions with Jimmie. As with whiteness, masculine control is not always overt in its nature.

Ben Wadham states, “A common theoretical thread between the studies of masculinities and those of whiteness is the understanding that dominance retains its authority through its invisibility, by being accepted as ‘natural,’ taken for granted” (193). Furthermore, Wadham asserts this is because masculinity is a “universal, homogenous, and cohesive, subjectivity” (193). If one inspects the way Jimmie interacts with the whites throughout the novel, his own level of complicity in the continuation of this masculine construct is most evident. The fact that he bows to Mrs. Treloar’s demands to cut and stack her wood and his vocalizations of authority to white men as “boss” or white women as “missus” is white masculinity at work vis-à-vis Jimmie’s obedience. Jimmie never uses those honorifics when addressing his own people, even tribal elders. Jimmie’s attempts to marry a white woman, aspire to land-owning, and fit in with whites violate the white masculine constructs that must keep non-whites apart and suppressed. Jimmie Blacksmith is a direct threat to white hegemony. However, again, as with Healy and Lewis, Jimmie does not understand the continued animosity to which he is subjected. Keneally writes, “After seeing the guinea in her husband’s hand and pocket, Mrs. Treloar moved back into her house. Her shoulders held broad in an overly-masculine way. She was tense with hatred, as others had been. It baffled Jimmie, with his simple hopes, that they should all be such dedicated haters” (54). Mrs. Treloar is taking on the masculine role in this passage, as she verbally abuses her husband and makes certain Jimmie knows his place. Keneally’s description demonstrates also his inability to fully make Jimmie consistent as a character. Reynolds claims, “Keneally has difficulty in drawing a sociologically consistent picture of his main character. With his “simple hopes” Jimmie is baffled by Mrs. Treloar’s tense hatred; he does not “know Irishmen.” Yet he goes to the Department of Agriculture to get a pamphlet on fencing, scarcely a common practice

in rural areas at turn of the century” (24). Keneally’s lack of understanding is in keeping with his mode as a white author.

After Jimmie works for four hours, Mrs. Treloar sends him away without pay and instructs him to “pray every night” (Keneally 56). Jimmie’s time with the Newbys, his next employers, lays the groundwork for Jimmie’s cathartic moment when he finally realizes that he cannot become white and initiates the actions that signal his ultimate calamity. Newby makes sport of Jimmie’s knowledge about politics and ideas on Federation, as if Jimmie was not entitled to be a patriot because of his Aboriginal blood. His treatment convinces Jimmie something else is at work in Newby’s intense interest in his success or failure. There must be a conspiracy among the whites, Jimmie deduces, as to his failure in their world and whether or not his true Aboriginal self is to emerge. Keneally writes, it is “as if they all conspired, Mr. Newby—like Healy and Lewis—seemed to have made a sport out of waiting for Jimmie Blacksmith to behave in what he would have considered character” (51). Jimmie is caught up in hegemonies that epitomizes white tyranny and subject to isolation and unabashed narrow-mindedness. Jimmie’s importunate hope to become white is affirmed in his kindness toward Gilda. Keneally writes, “Jimmie found himself making white promises about the land they would come to own and people who would call him [Jimmie] *sir* or *madam*. He was desperate to soothe this girl he did not love, without knowing why he tried. Perhaps he did not want to be caught in the momentum of her despair, which became more explicit the more she wept” (59). Jimmie indeed did not love Gilda. Jimmie had assumed his act of wedding a white girl would bring him the privilege he sought. However, the white world does not view Jimmie’s marriage in a favorable light. Instead, there is scorn in the pairing of a white girl with a “black.” bell hooks in “Reconstructing Black Masculinity” posits, “The portrait of black masculinity that

emerges... perpetually constructs black men as “failures” who are psychologically “fucked up,” dangerous, violent, sex maniacs whose insanity is informed by their inability to fulfill their phallogentric masculine destiny in a racist context” (70). To counter a sexual ferocity among the black man, whites must exert their superiority.

Consequently, the white men of the novel seem all too comfortable in using sex as a mode of power to exert their masculine dominance as seen in the following examples. One day, Mr. Newby exposes himself to Jimmie’s wife, Gilda. Keneally writes, “Gilda always avoided him [Mr. Newby], if she could, but he rolled up to her on his horse, vaulted out of the saddle and exposed his patriarchal blunt genitals, slug-white and sitting in his hand for her information” (69). Mr. Newby exclaims, ““When yer find a bigger’n than that on a nigger, Mrs. Blacksmith, let me know”” (Keneally 69). The way Keneally describes the incident is most important. “Slug-white” and “patriarchal blunt genitals” convey not a sexual description, but one of masculine power. Later, “Gilda could not understand why it was that if she spoke of the day the patriarch had shown off his phallus, it would shame *her*, and no one else” (Keneally 73). Again, Keneally’s language is important here. The use of the term “phallus” and “patriarch” connotes power, not sexuality. Gilda’s shame also shows masculine influence at work. Later in the novel, Dowie Stead, fiancé of Petra Graf, the schoolteacher who lives with the Newbys, visits with “gins” at local whorehouses. Keneally writes, “If now there was anything he {Dowie} wanted to pay the black race off for, it was not killing Miss Graf, canonized already by the people of Wallah and rendered remote in the process. It was for bringing his father and himself, both unbuttoned and grotesquely ready for the same black arse, face to face” (92). In both cases, of Mr. Newby’s exposing himself, and Dowie Stead’s “rolling of lubras,” the masculine constructs

are distinctly outlined. Dowie's encounter is blatant domination, whereas Mr. Newby must exert his phallogocentric desires by denigrating Jimmie.

The father of Jimmie and Gilda's child is ultimately revealed not to be Jimmie but the Hayes's cook, a white man. Due to Gilda's deception, whites have stolen from Jimmie again and denied him a place in their world. His dreams of becoming white and having a child that is "scarcely black at all" are shattered. After having Jimmie wait outside, as all the Newby men go in to see the child before him, Mrs. Newby finally says, "I want to show yer yer son. Can you behave yerself, Jimmie?" (Keneally 62). Jimmie responds, "Christ, missus, I ain't a savage" (Keneally 62). When Jimmie finally sees the child, he says, "Orright. Yer kin all laugh now. He ain't my baby" (Keneally 63). Though Gilda swears she thought it was Jimmie's child, Mr. Newby tells Jimmie, "There isn't a grain of native in him. He looks like a Supreme Court Judge" (Keneally 64). Newby's family and the schoolteacher, Ms. Graf, who lives with the Newbys, are especially cruel to Jimmie. Ms. Graf conspires to take Jimmie's wife away with her as a maid when she is married to Dowie Stead. With the bitter racial bigotry of his employer, Newby, who refuses to accept Jimmie's marriage to the white woman, especially with the arrival of Jimmie's half-brothers, Mort and Peter, and uncle Jackie Smolders, Jimmie finally snaps. Newby withholds the Blacksmiths' rations for the week, despite the fact Jimmie claims to have worked and already earned the groceries. Keneally writes, "Healy, Lewis, now Newby had each staked his soul on Jimmie's failure. If they were so supreme on their land that they didn't need to be political, why should they yearn so for Jimmie's mistakes; and when mistakes were not made dream them up? He [Jimmie] had even begun remotely to wonder if a man's only means of treating with them was to 'declare war'" (52). Jimmie Blacksmith's "war" on whites has been appropriated by Keneally from the real-life exploits of the Governors in Clune's book. M.A.

Goldsmith in “Thomas Keneally’s *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* and Frank Clune’s *Jimmy Governor*,” argues that “Keneally’s dramatization of Jimmie Blacksmith’s ‘war’ on the world seems almost certainly to have derived from Clune’s observation that “Ned Kelly had declared war on the police, but Jimmy Governor had declared war on the people” (45). Clune neglects to mention the war in question was against “white” people, but after all, “Whites are not of a certain race, they are just the human race” (Dyer 3).

Finally at the breaking point, Jimmie, along with his maternal uncle, Jackie Smolders, takes an ax and kills Newby’s wife, children, and the vain schoolteacher, Petra Graf. Keneally writes, “Jimmie felt close to a mandate to heap coals of fire on Newby’s head” (76), thus he “chopped Miss Graf leisurely between hips and ribs” (79). The brutal details of the Newby killings and the later killings of Mr. and Mrs. Healy are very explicit. Jimmie blames Newby, Healey, Miss Graf, et al. for giving him “license to run mad” (Keneally 76) and fulfilling his destiny to “turn native” (Keneally 77). Remarking on Keneally’s violent depictions, Tiffin writes, “The recurrence of casually treated violent death in Keneally’s novels is too pervasive for any single instance to be satisfactorily accounted for by contextual explanations” (130). Furthermore, critic John Beston famously called for Keneally to renounce ““the violence within himself”” (qtd. in Pierce 58). The killings signal a change in the narrative flow of the novel to one of flight as a lot of the momentum that led to Jimmie’s catastrophe is lost. Ramson argues, “It is noticeable, the simple black-white opposition with which the novel begins, its usefulness outlived once the murders have been committed and the primary narrative thread becomes that of flight and pursuit” (340). Furthermore, the Newby funeral, as Ramson claims, is like a “stock scene from a western” (342). Jimmie’s desire to be white has ultimately ended and the rest of the novel shifts to Jimmie’s desire for revenge and evading capture.

Having involved Mort, Jimmie's half-brother and full Aborigine in the killings at the Healys, both brothers now attempt to evade the police for the remainder of the novel. At the Healys's farm, as Jimmie is inside killing Mrs. Healy, Mort accidentally shoots Mr. Healy outside. Jimmie's disappointment at Mort having shot Healy demonstrates the ultimate unraveling of Jimmie Blacksmith and his degradation. Keneally writes, "Healy cheated once more. The big harsh man died touchingly as a saint" (102-3). Jimmie scolds Mort for killing Healy before he had the chance to see what he had done to his wife inside the house. Jimmie says, "Yer stupid bastard... I wanted him to see what he bloody caused" (103). Jimmie has now become judge, jury, and executioner to the whites he feels have wronged him. Jimmie has lost any hope of becoming land-owning and white, denied his place, and denied ownership of a child he had hoped was his.

There is irony in Mr. Newby's acknowledgment of Jimmie as being inexorably associated with the land and Australia as well. Keneally writes:

Through the fog of sympathetic liquors, he [Mr. Newby] remembered and wondered how he had ever forgotten that when he had first come to the west as an eighteen-year-old from Dorset he had seen and been numbed by its air of withdrawal, as if it had vast dispassionate and random devilries beneath its crust. Yet, it had become his home, nearer to him than his heart's blood. He did not know how he had ever settled to it. He knew he would sell up now and perhaps go into business in Sydney. To his mind, the earth and Jimmie Blacksmith had become suddenly allied. (88)

Newby is resolved to booze and the bitter reality of what has happened to his masculinity. It is fitting, therefore, that the Aborigines' claim to the land would now be offered by Mr. Newby, if only in a capitulatory acknowledgment. The character of Jimmie Blacksmith, however, seems

relegated to newspaper articles throughout the rest of the novel as he and Mort elude the authorities. One article from the *Mail* draws a new dimension to Jimmie's bitter hatred toward whites. The article was in reference to Jimmie's wife, Gilda, who gave testimony during the trial of Jackie Smolders. The *Mail* reports: "She is a thin girl who looks more fourteen than eighteen. She displays a considerable compunction for the time she spent with her black husband and says she was often afraid" (Keneally 127). Jimmie is angered at the reference to the term "black" and in regards to being afraid, "They [the newspapers] didn't say what of [Gilda's fear of Jimmie], that was the point. And *black husband* was unfair, he thought. The white seed might have been the bad seed" (127). Jimmie's desire to be white has now been utterly redefined into considering the fact his being part white may have resulted in Jimmie's murderous actions, not the Aboriginal side of him. The newspaper depictions are often comical and extend the mythologizing of Jimmie as a crafty bushranger in the same league with Ned Kelly, feared and even revered by some.

The kidnapping of McCreadie, the schoolteacher, results in an evasion of responsibility on the part of Keneally. Keneally uses McCreadie as the sympathetic pseudo-anthropologist who condemns white oppression in Australia. Frow argues, "The more important representative of the narrator is McCreadie, who acts substantially as a mouthpiece for that part of Keneally which is a liberal intellectual. He is strongly idealized in that that he gives Mort and Jimmie 'room to speak to their true selves'" (296). Consequently, McCreadie's voice often overshadows Jimmie and Mort. Frow claims, however, that McCreadie "acts as a convenient medium for the transmission of information and moral generalizations concerning the oppression and destruction of the aboriginal Australians" (296). Jimmie, Mort, and McCreadie journey to the sacred Aboriginal site, the "womb," to find it has been desecrated by white picnickers. The passage is

an overzealous attempt by Keneally to point his finger at not only whites, who have seized and destroyed Aboriginal lands but also neophyte white intellectuals who have attempted to bring a cultural awareness of “real” Aborigine to the white world. The irony is that *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* is Keneally’s attempt to do that very thing. To show his sympathy for the Aborigines’ predicament, McCreadie says,

I can understand you being angry... Oh, I can imagine it, Jimmie. I mean, settlers still talked about *marauding blacks*. Only ten years ago they did. How many whites ever got killed by aborigines? No one knows. I bet it wasn’t more than four or five thousand. If that. Then, you might ask, how many aborigines did the whites kill? The answer is a quarter of a million. Two hundred and seventy thousand have gone. I can understand your being angry. (Keneally 143).

Keneally’s juxtaposition of modern sympathies into the world of 1900 is noticeable here. The likelihood that a “McCreadie” would actually understand or sympathize with the Aboriginal plight is far-fetched for the time period. Similarly, the invocation of Andrew Lang seems another ploy by Keneally to connect with the Aboriginal side. McCreadie asks, ““But don’t you believe your totem... your animal spirit... that’s what makes children come?”” (Keneally 144). McCreadie details how he learned of Aboriginal customs by reading the books of Andrew Lang. Angered at another theft from the Aborigines, now of their own cultural secrets, Mort exclaims, ““I’d teach him t’ write if I got a hold of him”” (Keneally 144). Keneally further elaborates, ““Mort was frightened and angry about Andrew Lang’s writing. God knew what secrecies of his heritage were written down for whites to read” (144).¹¹ This passage demonstrates another example of theft from the Aborigines by white culture. It is also indicative in the mode of white

culture to conceptualize the Aborigine in terms of “other” in identifying their separateness to form whiteness actions.

McCreadie’s, Jimmie’s, and Mort’s sojourn at the “the womb” is a bitter foreshadowing of the fate of Indigenous people in Australia. The stones had been defaced and destroyed, strewn with graffiti and litter. Keneally writes, “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” (150). The masculine domination, recurrent throughout the novel, is exhibited here in a visually horrific scene that summarizes the plight of the Australian Aborigines. The naming of the sacred site as “the womb” is as a female-coded space. The desecration of the space has been literally destroyed here by the power of the white phallus. A rhetorical schema in post-colonial studies is positioning the white colonial as the male and the Indigene as the female whereby the colonial male “rapes” the Indigene female. At the “womb,” Jimmie separates from Mort to venture out on his own. Mort is later killed. As Jimmie unleashes his justice on whites, Mort and Jimmie’s ultimate comeuppance comes at the hands of white justice. Eluding capture across a river, Jimmie is shot in the mouth. Jimmie seeks refuge in the guest room of a church where he “slept in hell” (Keneally 173) and is captured the next morning. The report of Jimmie’s capture is relegated to newspaper headlines. With Jackie Smolders now hanged, Jimmie’s fate rests with the hangman, Hyberry. Keneally writes, “Jimmie saw an eye he was not used to, peering full, blinking rarely, at the Judas window. A new warden? Jimmie wondered. A politician? Jimmie, on the second last day of life, had the prisoner’s thirst for novelty and eye for small changes” (178). Jimmie Blacksmith’s executioner had arrived.

Unable to obtain any sort of satisfactory fulfillment or acceptance from the white world, Jimmie is an outsider and a criminal trying to evade capture, only to be delivered into the hands of those who caused his ultimate tragedy. The novel ends with a foreshadowing of Jimmie's execution. Veronica Brady in "The Most Frightening Rebellion: The Recent Novels of Thomas Keneally" writes that "Jimmie was destroyed precisely because he had learned the ways of white Australia so well. For him, typically Australian, 'possession was a sacred state' and in effect the women he kills are sacrifices offered up at this shrine" (75-76). Jimmie is taught that to become a white man is to possess a white woman and own land like the white man. In his quest, Jimmie is "unable to possess them [land and white women] or the propertied beatitude which that possession entails, he sets his mark on them by killing them, only to be hunted down in his turn so that society's complacencies may remain unquestioned" (Brady 75-76). Jimmie Blacksmith, part of neither the Aboriginal nor the white world, is confined to the role of permanent outsider, becoming a casualty to the white world's racist and masculine constructs. As Brady claims, "When he [Jimmie] comes on the profaned sacred place of his Aboriginal people [the "womb] he is no longer at home there. 'Lost beyond repair somewhere between the Lord God of hosts and the shrunken cosmogony of his people,' he thus represents the end of the struggle which Keneally sees as central to the work of making an Australian culture" (75-76). The struggle, as Keneally sees it is "'to become spiritual possessors' of the land and of what it represents" (Brady 75-76). For the permanent outsider there is no place for him in Australian society. Jimmie, like the desecration of the "womb," has been violated by white colonization. The white world that would not accept Jimmie Blacksmith, leading to his catastrophic decline, punishes him one final time.

Constrained by white hegemonies and racial constructs that determine his destiny, Jimmie Blacksmith becomes entangled in the battle for acceptance in the white man's world. *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* presents a duality in Jimmie, destined to catastrophe because he cannot gain the acceptance he seeks. Jimmie is deprived of a place in the white man's way of life. The idea of ownership, tied to the denial of Aboriginal land rights set forth by *terra nullius*, and Jimmie's own desire to possess and own like the white man, motivates him to attempt to seek acculturation into the white world. Though well-meaning, but confined to the constructs of whiteness, the Nevilles serve as educators but conversely lead Jimmie to the false hopes that if he marries a white girl he can become white. The racialized utterances of whites in the novel confine the Aborigines to categories that isolate them from whites. Gray claims, "They [Aborigines] could not return to their way of life, and they were prevented from entering that way of life introduced by the Europeans, rendering them equivalent to a blank space; that is, they lived as disposable through a conspiracy of signs. Put simply, they were dehumanized to the extent that they no longer seemed human" (22). Jimmie becomes disillusioned in this world of white privilege and masculine domination. On the one hand, Jimmie is told to become white, but in the end whites deny him access to their world. Jimmie Blacksmith is no longer able to fit in either the white world or the Aboriginal world. He is betrayed over and over in the white world by those who bargain on his failures. Unable to deal with white subjection any longer, Jimmie becomes murderous. Jimmie sees the violence that whites employ as the only feasible alternative to obtain satisfaction and makes his "declaration of war" on the white world.

CHAPTER 3

LIVING AMONG ‘SAVAGES’: CONFRONTING RACIAL STEREOTYPES IN CAPTIVITY—PATRICK WHITE’S *A FRINGE OF LEAVES*

Even before publishing *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976), Patrick White was the most prominent man of letters to come out of Australia. Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973, White’s writing career began with a private publication of *13 Poems* (1930), of which only two copies are known to still exist. *The Ploughman and Other Poems* (1935) followed and later his first novel, *The Happy Valley* (1940). In his literary career White would publish two books of poetry, three collections of short fiction, twelve novels, two collections of plays, one screenplay that was turned into a film, his autobiography, plus numerous single print versions of his drama and collected speeches. Since his death in 1990, White’s collected letters and an authorized biography by David Marr have also been released. The awarding of the Nobel Prize distinguished White as a serious literary artist and gave Australian literature a greater significance in the world. Before White’s recognition, Australian writing was seldom read or discussed outside the Southern Hemisphere. Australian popular writer Neville Shute had a sizeable American fan base due in large part to Hollywood screen adaptations of some of his novels (*On the Beach*, 1959, *No Highway in the Sky*, 1951, and *The Pied Piper*, 1942), although the more serious writers were still unknown to American readers. Even among Australians, British and American literature were more widely read and preferred than native authors, who remained unknown to most Australians. Any authentic Indigenous literature was even more limited. White used his Nobel Prize money to promote young Australian writers and draw further attention to Australian literature. Many scholars and readers outside of Australia credit White for their introduction to Australian literature.

A Fringe of Leaves, one of Patrick White's later novels, includes two examples of the Australian mythos of the nineteenth century—the Indigenous Australians and the convicts. Although having some historical basis, White's novel fictionalizes the events in the life of an aristocratic woman of the late 1830s who identifies more with the marginalized members of society than her own class. White compares the life of Ellen Roxburgh (née Gluyas) with the convicts and Aborigines in *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976) to show the wider similarities found among the lower and upper classes. The question of who functions as a "savage" is important in understanding White's larger objectives in the novel. Distinctions appear to blur between the "savage" and "civilized" groups in *A Fringe of Leaves*. The gentry often engage in more savage behavior than what is attributed to the convicts and Aborigines. While white Australians in the nineteenth century consider the Aborigines to be "savages" and themselves to be "civilized," White believes these groupings are not so easily delineated.

Ellen Roxburgh's story is based on the real-life captivity of Elizabeth Fraser in the 1830s. In *A Fringe of Leaves* White uses the captivity theme in both the "civilized" world of the upper classes and the natural setting of the Aborigines. Various characters in the novel undergo some sort of captivity or confinement. The more obvious examples of captivity are Ellen's literal captivity among the Aborigines and the convicts' confinements at Van Diemen's Land and Moreton Bay colony. However, White's characterization of Ellen demonstrates that she, too, is "imprisoned" in her marriage to Austin Roxburgh and society's role for her as a woman. After Ellen's return to "civilization," White frequently describes her as a convict. Ellen must continually face her expected societal obligations instead of following her own course of action. The irony is Ellen does not feel free while in "civilization" and only gains freedom during her captivity among the Aborigines. Whites, too, remain imprisoned by their racial ideologies.

Some feminist scholars have commented that men who practice misogyny are harmed by their actions. Men become imprisoned to the confining ideological constructs that rule their misogynistic behaviors, thereby limiting any active or cohesive mobility that might transpire among members of the opposite sex. The same can be said of whites in respect to Aborigines in *A Fringe of Leaves*. Whites do not perceive the Aborigines as people, only exotic “savages,” too foreign and “other” to be understood. In this way whites remain captive to their prejudices. On the other hand Ellen develops greater understanding of the Aboriginal people during her captivity and is able to bridge cultural barriers that exist between the white and Aboriginal worlds. Perhaps this is because Ellen is also regarded as foreign and different. However, unlike Thiele’s children, who display acceptance and even warmth for the Aborigines, White’s characters can only go so far in their acceptance. Ellen is a flawed character, unlike the Thiele ideal. Ellen’s acceptance of Aborigines is not complete, although she makes the best effort of understanding the Aborigines of anyone else in the novel.

The questions then become who is really a “savage” and who is really in captivity? In this chapter, I explore the dichotomy surrounding “savage” in order to question who functions as most “savage” and who in *A Fringe of Leaves* is “civilized,” if indeed anyone. I also investigate White’s theme of captivity and confinement to shed light on those who are imprisoned either literally or metaphorically or both. *A Fringe of Leaves* is also heavily influenced by whiteness and masculine constructions that White uses in ways to separate groups but also to identify certain white characters like Ellen as “others.” My analysis of white and masculine constructions in *A Fringe of Leaves* serves to point out what White is doing in the novel in regard to Indigenous Australians. Whiteness in *A Fringe of Leaves* categorizes more than white Australians and Aborigines. Class distinctions and distinctions within classes become an

important part of the way whiteness functions in White's novel. One can be part of the upper class without ever fully being accepted as shown with the treatment of Ellen Roxburgh. Through this analysis, a fuller picture of what Patrick White is attempting in terms of class distinctions and racializations can emerge.

A Fringe of Leaves came late in White's literary career. White first became interested in the story of Eliza Fraser, upon which the novel is loosely based, in 1958 when White met Australian artist Sir Sidney Nolan¹² who had released three series of paintings detailing the Fraser story. Marr quotes White in 1963 stating, "One can no longer imagine Mrs. Fraser apart from the Nolan paintings" (413). In the early 1960s, White proposed an opera based on the Fraser story that would have Nolan designing the sets, Benjamin Britten penning the score, and White writing the libretto. The project fell apart and not until the 1970s did White return to the story with his novelization of *A Fringe of Leaves*. Although fictionalized, White often referred to his work as the "Fraser" novel, borrowing upon details from the real-life events.

The historical Elizabeth ("Eliza") Fraser was a Scottish woman who was returning home on the *Stirling Castle* from Sydney in May 1836 when her ship ran aground on a reef near an island off the coast of what is now Queensland. The island was subsequently named Fraser Island in honor of Eliza Fraser and her infamous shipwreck. Fraser's husband had been captaining the vessel that ran aground. However, in White's novel, Austin Roxburgh is the invalid husband to Ellen and does not captain any ship unlike the historical Mr. Fraser. Eliza Fraser was rescued by the Indigenous people of the island, her husband being killed in a skirmish, and Eliza was taken in by the Aborigines. White's version has the Aborigines enslave Ellen as opposed to any "rescue." One historical version recounts how Eliza Fraser was later freed from the Aborigines by an escaped convict, John Graham, who was hoping his actions

would potentially reward him with a pardon. White's version includes an escaped convict, Jack Chance, who similarly brings Ellen to safety. However, the historical account can not be totally substantiated because there are competing versions of how Eliza Fraser was actually brought back to "civilization." Records do show Fraser returned to Moreton Bay colony in what is now Brisbane and later returned to England where she used her notoriety and wrote narratives of her "adventures."

The shipwreck of Eliza Fraser and subsequent captivity by Aborigines has been the source of countless retellings. In "Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*: History and Fiction," Jill Ward argues that the story of Eliza Fraser "has been the subject of much biographical reconstruction" (402). In fact, the Fraser incident has settled deeply into Australian mythology (Ward 403). Thus, White had a plethora of resources to draw upon for his novel. The fact that White's novel can be attributed to source material is in itself rare in respect to White's larger literary canon. Critics are unclear, however, about the chief source material that White chose to use in his novelization of Eliza Fraser. The Nolan paintings, as already asserted, were very important for White in how he visualized the incident. Ward also cites Robert Gibbings' *John Graham, Convict 1824* (1937), Henry Stuart Russell's *Genesis of Queensland* (1888), and Michael Alexander's *Mrs. Fraser on the Fatal Shore* (1971) as other possible sources that White may have consulted. Alexander's book seems the likeliest of the works that Ward lists in her article that states, "The date fits comfortably into an incubation period of *A Fringe of Leaves*" (403). The Fraser story appeared to be an important historical event for many writers and White's version most likely included multiple sources.

A Fringe of Leaves is unique for a White novel due to the narrative style White undertakes. As the novel is set in the late 1830s, there are many textual features that closely

resemble a Jane Austen novel. In *Patrick White's Fiction*, William Walsh writes, "*A Fringe of Leaves* appears to derive from a part of White's nature descended from Jane Austen rather than John Webster" (118). These features include dialogue as well as many of the period mores among the gentry. Austen predates the events of the novel, however, by a few decades. At other times there are hints of Romanticism that fit in the same time frame for the novel.

Although White's novel has roots in historical fact, it is important to note that the novel is a work of fiction. Similarities and differences, therefore, are inevitable and exist in White's version of the Fraser story. The authenticity of the historical events in *A Fringe of Leaves* is less important, however, than White's depiction of the Aboriginal and white Australians. Veronica Brady's "A Properly Appointed Humanism: Australian Culture and the Aborigines in Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*" argues that White's novel "shows more clearly what the Aborigines mean for White's imagination, showing on the one hand the impotence of white culture, and on the other the liberating effect of contact with the 'savage' domain which they represent and inhabit" (61). White's attempt in the novel is not to be entirely faithful to history but instead to present his version of the darker side of colonial life in white and black Australia alike. What White does offer that Keneally and Thiele do not is a main character who is a white upper-class woman. One of White's goals in *A Fringe of Leaves* is to portray the upper-class Anglo-white woman of the nineteenth century by paralleling her plight to that of the convicts and Aborigines in an unforgiving and harsh land.

A Fringe of Leaves depicts life in colonial Australia in the late 1830s among free white settlers, convicts, and Aborigines. The first half of the novel describes Austin and Ellen Roxburghs' visit to Austin's brother Garnet in Van Diemen's Land¹³ and leads up to the Roxburghs' eventual shipwreck off the Queensland coast. Though the novel is 405 pages long, it

is not until page 236 that White introduces the Aborigines. The first part of the novel deals with the other Australian character, the convict, in Van Diemen's Land and describes Ellen and Austin's history up until the present. White introduces the novel with a group of minor characters, the Merivales of Sydney and Miss Scrimshaw, as they see the Roxburghs off on their voyage aboard the *Bristol Maid*. Mrs. Merivale and Miss Scrimshaw conspire in their mutual disdain for Ellen Roxburgh. Miss Scrimshaw says, "I would never trust a silent woman" (White 17). Even before Ellen Roxburgh is introduced, White is already setting Ellen apart from the other characters. Ellen is from Cornish stock and White describes her as being dark. White writes, "In contrast to the dark complexion deplored by others, the eyes of a grey probably bred from blue were candid or unrewarding according to the temper of those who inquired into them. This no doubt was what aroused suspicion in the ladies [Mrs. Merivale and Miss Scrimshaw] whose visit was just past" (27). Miss Scrimshaw admits that all of her [Scrimshaw's] family was fair and she has never been acquainted with any Cornish people. Ellen is not by definition non-white; however, Ellen functions in the role of non-white or "other" throughout the novel. White further describes Ellen as possessing a mouth "on which circumstances had forced a masculine firmness without destroying a thread of feminine regret or its charm of colour" (27). White portrays Ellen as "other" by this description of her skin color and masculine features. Later, on the deck of the *Bristol Maid* in a conversation with Captain Purdew, Ellen "shouted manfully" (White 46). Ellen's presence on the deck is her attempt to "test her courage in a man's world" (White 46). Foreshadowing future events, White writes later that when Ellen takes off her nightgown, her "skin appeared already to have darkened in warning of the bruise [captivity] to come. It [the nightgown] made her body look too white, too full, too softly defenseless, though in normal circumstances her figure would not have been considered noticeably ample" (44). In

regards to the “bruise to come,” White is preparing the reader for Ellen’s later captivity among the Aborigines. White’s description of Ellen’s skin “darkening” foreshadows her integration into the Aboriginal tribe. White also foreshadows Ellen’s pregnancy that is not revealed until much later by calling attention to her ample figure. Due to White’s characterization, it seems most appropriate that Ellen would be the one character in the novel who shows any type of empathy or understanding toward the Aborigines and convicts.

The first demonstration of social snobbery among the gentry and a foreshadowing of later events occur in this short preliminary chapter. The Merivales stop at the home of Delaney, an Irish free-settler who has become wealthy since immigrating to the colony. The encounter with Delaney illustrates the socially isolationist attitudes among the upper-classes. Delaney can never be truly accepted among the gentry due to his Irish background and his emancipist leaning. White demonstrates the idea of white masculine power among the upper class whites who do not want outsiders to enter their world. White masculine power does not, by definition, have to be exhibited strictly by men. White women can also feel threatened by the outsider who would enter their world to take power from themselves and their husbands. Mrs. Merivale and Scrimshaw remain in the carriage to allow the men to conduct their business. They further refuse Delaney’s request to come inside, Mrs. Merivale stating, ““Oh dear, no!”” and that Delaney’s wife will ““stuff us with plum-cake. Before our dinner. And get us tipsy on her ginger wine”” (White 19). The stereotypical view of the drunken Irish is being exhibited in this passage by Mrs. Merivale. White further states, ““Here Mrs. Merivale looked to Miss Scrimshaw, who responded with a wicked pursing of the lips”” (19). The affable Delaney ignores the upper-class snobbery. As a successful landed settler himself, Delaney believes he is part of the club. However, White’s description of Delaney’s true feelings toward the women demonstrates some

awareness. Delaney “examined these two females, the fat, soft, satiny thing [Mrs. Merivale], and the stringy, craftier one in brown whose beak was raised to parry what was only a playful blow on the surveyor’s [Mr. Merivale’s] part. They would never admit him [Delaney] to their world, but it amused the emancipist to regard them as being of his” (22). Despite Delaney’s success, he serves the role of the outsider. As with the convicts and the Aborigines, the aristocratic whites would never accept him into their circle.

White’s acknowledgement of the Aborigines sets up the later incident with Ellen Roxburgh in the forest at the Aborigines’ camp. Delaney relates a story he had heard about two shepherds who “had fallen foul of the natives” (White 23). Delaney says, ““To cut a story short and come to the point however tragical, the two men—honest fellers both of ‘em—had just been found, their guts laid open [...]. Stone cold, they were, an’ the leg missin’ off one of ‘em—a mere lad from Taunton, Somerset”” (White 23). The connection of the Aborigines to cannibalism reappears later in the novel. However, as White further demonstrates, cannibalism is not an exclusive practice among the Aborigines. This scene also includes the first utterance of “savage” by whites in the novel. Mrs. Merivale exclaims, ““It is what some—not all of us—have chosen. To live in this country. Suffering is often a matter of choice”” (White 23). An equal opportunity bigot, Mrs. Merivale directs her comments toward the convicts who were brought to Australia in chains and did not choose to willingly embark on “suffering” among the Aborigines or Australia’s harsh climate like the free-settlers. During their departure, Mrs. Merivale calls the Aborigines (or perhaps the convicts as well), ““loathsome savages!”” (White 23). White’s characterization of Mrs. Merivale is especially significant in how unlikable she appears. In ““A Lady Only By Adoption’: Civilization in *A Fringe of Leaves*,” Dennis Haskell amusingly points out that Mrs. Merivale “is a kind of nineteenth-century, upper-class Edna Everage,¹⁴ who is

cheaply patronized by her author, then dismissed” (435). White ends this first chapter by writing, “The occupants of the carriage [the Merivales and Miss Scrimshaw] rolled on into the deepening afternoon, and finally, like minor actors who have spoken a prologue, took themselves off into the wings” (24). In what is very typical of White, he sardonically demonstrates his dramatist side in this last observation of Scrimshaw and the Merivales.

The Roxburghs are introduced in the next chapter as they sail on the *Bristol Maid* for home. A good part of the novel is related through Ellen’s journal entries and flashbacks that give the reader information on how Ellen and Austin Roxburgh met, married, and ended up in the colony. Ward argues that *A Fringe of Leaves* is “set within a framework of complex time-shifts which involves the memory, not only of Ellen herself, but also those of her husband and his brother” (404). Through her memories, the reader learns that Ellen Gluyas was a young Cornish girl who first met the much older Austin Roxburgh when her family opened up their home to boarders. The Gluyas family’s poor circumstances put them in the position of having strangers stay at their home, which embarrassed Ellen’s more well-to-do relatives. Ellen’s upbringing teaches her to work hard. Under her father’s influence, Ellen becomes more *au fait* in the mystical areas concerning nature over any significant Christian devotion. However, a physical attraction exists between Ellen and her alcoholic father that considerably retards Ellen’s maturity into womanhood. This is especially ironic considering Ellen’s aunt disapproves of any incestuous concupiscence existing among family, particularly blood cousins, as she quickly squashes a potential romance between Ellen and her cousin Will.

Ellen and Austin’s “romance” commences when the two correspond with one another after Austin’s stay at the Gluyas’s home. Austin says that he admires Ellen’s strength of character and Ellen responds, ““Dear life! [...] *Strength*—yes! That’s about all I’ve got to my

name. And must depend upon it” (White 59). When Ellen’s father dies she agrees to marry Austin, who proceeds to assimilate her into his more patrician Cheltenham world. Ellen says throughout the novel that she loves Austin, although her love is more out of obligation than a genuine romantic affection. White writes that Ellen feels “an indifference born out of obedience” toward her husband (156). Under Austin and her mother-in-law’s influence, Ellen is introduced to religion and although she does not really consider herself a Christian, she goes through the motions to please her new family. Ellen reckons that “the whole of her uneventful life has been spent listening to men telling stories and smiling to encourage them” (White 156). In “The Hatching Process: The Female’s Struggle for Identity in Four Novels by Patrick White,” Phyllis Fahrie Edelson claims, “Guilty about her feelings toward her seductive father, discontented with her husband who represents, perhaps, an idealized father, seeking her buried self, Ellen finally embarks on her principle act of rebellion—the first phase of her hatching process” (233). Ellen’s infidelity to her husband, Austin is the act of rebellion that Edelson cites.

Austin’s back-story is also told through a series of memories and flashbacks that expose more details about his character. Austin has a close relationship with his brother Garnet. However, Garnet has always been successful and ““some say [more] attractive to women”” (White 41) than Austin. Garnet has also enjoyed good health. Austin, however, is perpetually suffering from one illness or another for which his doctor prescribes him a tincture of digitalis. White intimates that Austin’s “ailments” are more psychosomatic than serious medical conditions. However, to make up for his lack of physical ability and exercising his “manhood,” Austin throws himself into serious intellectual study, often trying out Latin phrases on his wife, knowing she has had little opportunity for education. Austin enjoys humbling Ellen (White 99). He says, ““You do not always understand,”” when she cannot share the esoteric humor of the

Latin version of Virgil he is studying (White 34). When Ellen expresses regret in not being able to relate to her husband's literary knowledge, the fickle Austin remarks, "I would not have it otherwise" (White 35). Austin must keep his wife submissive to him through her lack of knowledge in intellectual subjects. In this way, Austin Roxburgh exerts his "manhood." Although Austin lends Ellen some books, she had scarcely read them because they were "gentleman's books" (White 35). Ellen is jealous of Austin's Virgil (White 90) but also feels that Austin is all talk and a "scattering of dictionary words and useless knowledge" (White 57). Austin's quest to achieve "manhood" through his intellect seems to have failed in Ellen's estimation. Austin at one time possessed an aesthetic endearment for his wife, even having a painting commissioned of her likeness. Austin was disappointed, however, upon seeing the artist's rendering of Ellen and his fancy subsides. Austin later admits that Ellen has become less valuable for having belonged to him (White 96) and returns to his Virgil.

Austin sees Ellen "not only as his wife but his work of art" (61). As a "work of art," Ellen becomes more of a possession for Austin Roxburgh than an individual or lover. Edelson claims that Ellen "is everything but an individual" (232). Ward further argues that Ellen "had been essentially the creation of her husband and mother-in-law" (409). Austin views his wife's training as a "project [...] to create a beautiful, charming, not necessarily intellectual but socially accepted companion" (White 61). Austin's "work of art," he believes, is the construction of Ellen. In a display of Shavian accomplishment, Austin says, "Who would have thought that a crude Cornish girl could be made over to become a beautiful and accomplished woman!" (White 121). Ellen admits she was crude but does not feel much accomplished. In "Capture of the Body or of the Mind?: Reconnecting Fraser's Narrative with *A Fringe of Leaves*," Antara Mukherjee contends, "Mrs. Roxburgh [...] is a construction of her husband, against her own

nature” (93). As Ellen becomes her husband’s possession she is essentially in confinement to their marriage. Confinement becomes a recurring theme throughout White’s novel. The painting of Ellen is in itself proof of this confinement as its frame represents her prison. The painting is framed on all sides by golden barriers to keep Ellen inside. White states that although Austin did not find Ellen’s portrait a revelation, others “found it a telling likeness, were awed by the gold frame, and paid respectful tribute to this materialization of the husband’s wealth” (146). The painting, therefore, is an extension of Austin’s possessions, one of which is the living, breathing manifestation of his wife Ellen.

Old Mrs. Roxburgh, too, had been an agent in Ellen’s imprisonment. Despite the overbearing influence her mother-in-law holds over her, Ellen does reveal special esteem for the old Mrs. Roxburgh, who first encourages Ellen to put forth her thoughts in a journal. Mrs. Roxburgh had said, “It [the journal] will teach you to express yourself, a journal forms character besides developing the habit of self-examination” (White 47). Ellen’s memory of old Mrs. Roxburgh and her instructions to her reappears throughout the novel. The journal is the one early source of freedom that Ellen possesses in her marriage to Austin. It is ironic that this freedom would be given to Ellen by one of the same people who helped to confine her. At first reticent and inconsistent in keeping up her writing, Ellen becomes more liberated in her self-examination in the sojourn to Van Diemen’s Land. Ellen considers her journal to be “a source of self-knowledge and an instrument for self-correction” (White 73). The journal allows Ellen’s true thoughts to emerge, although even she could not transcribe her future dalliance with Garnet Roxburgh.

An incident that could harm the Roxburgh name propels Garnet’s family to send him away to Van Dieman’s Land. It is on a visit to see her brother-in-law that Ellen undergoes what

Edelson claims is her first action toward freedom. Ellen does not like Garnet Roxburgh, though she is seemingly drawn to the younger brother of her husband. Garnet frequently badgers Ellen to “try out” his black mare, which is Garnet’s euphemism for sexual relations between himself and his brother’s wife. Ellen writes in her journal, ““At dinner Mr. G. R. introduced the subject of the black mare. He is a man who will not be put off. My good husband yawned and said I might ride the mare if I felt inclined and she was not a mad-headed runaway. Garnet said he would ride her at the mountain a few times till she recovered from a spell of unemployment and too much oats”” (White 95-96). One would be remiss in not mentioning the similarity here with Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* where Mr. B, too, is not easily deterred from his lecherous attempts at winning over the virtuous virgin as Pamela frequently recounts in her own journal. Garnet’s servant, Holly, claims that she sometimes “tries out” the black mare herself and later it is revealed that Dr. Aspinall’s wife used to frequent Dulcet to “try out” the mare, the repetition of the phrase transforming it into a euphemism for Garnet Roxburgh’s paramours.

In his book, *Laden Choirs: The Fiction of Patrick White*, Peter Wolfe confirms that the mare, Merle, represents the results of Garnet Roxburgh’s many conquests. When his last conquest, Ellen, escapes from his clutches, killing the mare is Garnet’s only recourse. Wolfe states that Ellen “sees in Holly, a pretty emancipist servant girl at Dulcet, another embodiment of herself. Like her, Holly, who is named for a tree with sharp, pointed green leaves, rides Merle” (207). Garnet impregnates both women, but neither gives birth at Dulcet (Wolfe 207). Like Garnet’s horse and the larger implications of white subjugation of the Aborigines and convicts, Garnet puts Ellen and Holly “through the same paces, as the mare itself” (Wolfe 207). Wolfe argues that just as Garnet “trains Merle so that Ellen can ride her, so he had already taught Holly.

A third woman, Maggie Aspinall, wife of a Hobart physician, also [rode] Merle. Judging from a conversation that Ellen overhears, Maggie, too, belongs in Garnet's stable of lovers" (207).

As the black mare comes to remind Garnet of Ellen, Garnet, as already asserted, shoots the animal. Garnet is in a sense "killing" Ellen or at least trying to erase her from his memories. Ellen later learns that Holly, one of Garnet's other conquests and a former embodiment of the black mare, has been sent back to the women's factory¹⁵ "for reasons" (White 138). These "reasons" are because Holly has also been impregnated by Garnet. Ellen considers both the horse and Holly Garnet Roxburgh's victims (White 138). The color of the mare, which is black, is significant due to Ellen's distinction as "other" and her description of being dark. This distinction is noteworthy because of Ellen's integration into Aboriginal culture later in the novel where she in a sense could be said to "become black." Ellen, though not non-white literally, is still marked as such.

The Roxburghs' visit to Van Diemen's Land is also significant in White's description of the convicts and the larger question of savagery. White calls the convicts in Van Diemen's Land, "unfortunate human beasts" (84). White creates a parallel between the plight of the convicts and Ellen Roxburgh's marriage that make it impossible for her to be herself among the aristocracy. Ellen demonstrates a willingness to reach out to the "other," which she records in her journal. Ellen writes, "Most of the poor wretches [convicts] are "prisoners" and what have they to rejoice about beyond the prospect of getting drunk in the course of the day? I would like to talk to them, but there is a gulf between us, and I have lost the art of common speech" (White 103). Because Ellen has entered the Cheltenham world, she is now unable to be herself. The old Ellen would have been able to converse easily with the convicts. Ellen is as much a prisoner among the upper-class set as the convicts she observes in Van Diemen's Land. Even Austin

considers that Van Diemen's Land is like a prison. Austin says, "How long, Ellen, do you suppose we ought to stay before we can decently escape [...]?" (White 96).

Confinement, thus, becomes an important theme in White's novel. Ironically, it is the people in Van Diemen's Land who are confined, whereas the animals are free. Ellen immediately connects to her old life on the farm. Upon Ellen and Austin's arrival, White notes, "Hens were allowed the freedom of the streets, and an ambling cow almost graze[s] a wheel of the buggy with her ribs. The scent of cow's breath, the thudding of her hooves, and the plop of falling dung fill[s] Ellen with an immeasurable homesickness" (White 82-83). Ellen's affinity for this farm life represents a modicum of freedom for her. Ellen cannot help but be reminded of her former life before she became imprisoned in the Cheltenham world. Ellen is uncomfortable among people, but is at ease in the countryside (White 92). White writes, "On the one hand lay fields divided by timber roughly piled to form barriers rather than fences and divide crops from herds and flocks; on the other, forest which neither invited nor repelled those who might feel tempted to investigate a passive mystery" (92). The barriers that separate the forest from "civilization" do not deter Ellen. However, the borders seem to discourage the "civilized" from entering into the darkness of the forest beyond. Aboard the *Bristol Maid*, Captain Purdew sensed that Ellen "had an instinct for mysteries that did not concern her" (White 46). Ellen's curiosity inevitably leads her into the forest to acquire a small taste of freedom. The convicts, on the other hand, cannot cross the boundary like Ellen into "freedom." Ellen, in the same way, cannot enter into the convicts' world despite the empathy she feels for their suffering. However, both are essentially in confinement, literally and metaphorically.

Garnet Roxburgh feels little empathy for the plight of the convicts, whom he calls "miscreants" (White 89). Ellen writes, "The twenty odd-men employed by my brother-in-law

are all assigned servants. At dinner he referred to them as his ‘miscreants,’ which I expect they are” (White 89). However, White questions the notion that savagery exists merely among the convicts. Ellen writes, “‘How much of the miscreant, I wonder, is in Garnet R.? Or in *myself* for that matter? I know that I have lied when necessary and am at times what the truly virtuous call “hypocritical.” If I am not all good [...] I am not excessively bad. How far is the point where one oversteps the bounds?’” (White 89). Those bounds are certainly tested, if not crossed, by Garnet Roxburgh. Ellen wonders how much evil dwells inside people such as her brother-in-law. Ellen writes, “‘Whatever bad I find in myself is of no account beside the positive evil I discover in others. I do not mean the instinctive brutality of the human beast, but the considered evil of a calculating mind. When I say “others” I mean An Other (and no fiend imagined on the moor at dusk in my inexperienced girlhood)’” (White 138). Garnet is “An Other” that Ellen is referencing in her journal. Savagery, therefore, can exist among the upper-classes. Although Garnet resides in “civilized” society, civility can hardly be applied, Ellen feels, when regarding a man who would kill a horse in such a brutal fashion. White writes that Ellen hears “the cry of that other victim of her brother-in-law’s displeasure, the little mare who, conveniently, had staked herself” (138). Garnet’s savagery can be linked to the animal world. Wolfe argues that White “creates a running parallel between human motives and animal impulses” in many of his novels (200). However, a larger comparison exists between Garnet’s cruel treatment of the black mare and the Aborigines and convicts by white society.

As for Garnet Roxburgh, the animal assassin, Wolfe further contends that Garnet may have in fact “sinned worse than the prisoners confined near his property” (200). An ambiguity exists about what became of Garnet’s late wife. Wolfe submits, “Sin may have won him [Garnet] the property, which had belonged to his older, widowed wife. The property comprising

Dulcet came to Garnet, his wife's sole heir, after the wife fell from a gig Garnet was driving" (200). The land may have been acquired by Garnet's late wife under similar suspicious circumstances (Wolfe 200). White does not "rule out a long regress of foul play" and his characters, as well, "do not bear close moral scrutiny" (Wolfe 200). While in Van Diemen's Land, Ellen witnesses the abuses of the convicts by their captors that make "nonsense of moral distinctions" (Wolfe 200).

As the events in Van Diemen's Land are part of a flashback, it is through Ellen's memories that the first signs of her true self begin to emerge. Ellen is left unfulfilled in her marriage to Austin Roxburgh. Her mother-in-law had taught Ellen to choose "sense over the sensual." Ellen's much older spouse, whom she has always called "Mr. Roxburgh," uses his physical weaknesses to refrain from satisfying his obligations as a husband. As already discussed, his manliness is being exerted through his intellectual side. Through Austin Roxburgh, White is able to illustrate the death motif that seems so prevalent in his depiction of this unforgiving continent. Ellen Roxburgh finds a native flower while in Sydney Cove as she and her husband are "waiting for the breeze which would carry them home" (White 29). The flower becomes a symbol for death with the illusion of life that would "blaze and intrude" on and off (White 29). The flower appears to keep well as the Roxburghs embark on their journey or so it seems to Ellen. White writes, "There was only the native flower to trouble memory, or illuminate human frailty" (33). The frailty in this case is Austin Roxburgh, whom White parallels with the flower in its outside appearance, though it is dying from within. Ellen announces to Spurgeon, the steward on the *Bristol Maid*, "Look, Spurgeon, my flower is still alive" (White 39). Although a cut flower can hardly be judged as alive, it begins the process of fading away at the moment the knife severs the flower from the stem. Spurgeon replies, without

looking, “I wouldn’ know that [...] there’s a lot in this part of the world that looks alive when it’s dead, and vicey versy” (White 39). In a flashback, Ellen had almost said on one occasion that she brought Austin back to life but instead replaced “life” with “home” (White 58). Wolfe argues, as well, “At times Ellen exists only marginally” (201). Ellen is the summation of what Austin and old Mrs. Roxburgh have attempted to create through their instruction. Because Ellen is suppressing what her true nature yearns for, she exists, but only as an embodiment of her true self.

Although Austin Roxburgh believes he fulfills the part as a “good husband and man,” his role in both is in doubt. White refers to Austin as a “gelding” (35). At one point Ellen goes off on a ramble and tells Austin there is no need for him to follow her. Austin exclaims, “I am not impotent!” (White 30). However, Ellen and Austin have been unable to produce a child. Ellen’s short pregnancy ended in a miscarriage and their later child died shortly after being born. Austin is also unable to protect Ellen later in the novel when the Aborigines attack the crew of the *Bristol Maid*. Ellen’s latest pregnancy is most likely the result of her misalliance with his brother, Garnet, not Austin. Thus, yet again Austin has failed in his duties as a husband to Ellen. Garnet, too, is among those who on the outside may seem alive but are really dead within. Even old Mrs. Roxburgh once commented, “Garnet is as good as dead. What use is a boy to his mother or anybody else, living down there in Van Diemen’s Land?” (White 78). Her comment is ironic, considering that it was the family that had “killed” him. Therefore, Garnet was sent to Van Diemen’s Land to spare the family scandal and thereby becomes dead to his old life and family back home. If those who were sent to Van Diemen’s Land are not “dead” when they arrive in Van Diemen’s Land, they become dead soon after arriving.

Garnet Roxburgh also becomes the embodiment of Ellen's dead father. Garnet Roxburgh is, according to Edelson, the seaminess that "answers well to Ellen's guilty attraction to her own father, with whom she identifies him" (233). No two could certainly be more opposite than Garnet and Austin Roxburgh. If Ellen regards her husband as "good," as she attests many times, "her unsavoury brother-in-law" (Edelson 233) represents the savagery that can exist in human behavior. Ellen's retreat from her mother-in-law's doctrine to regard "sense over sensual" is part of Ellen's own "savage" nature emerging. In "*A Fringe of Leaves: Civilization by the Skin of Our Teeth*," Veronica Brady claims that *A Fringe of Leaves* is an "echo locked up within our culture, about the savagery implicit not only in the individual but in society, a savagery which is today perhaps less a matter of memory than of anticipation and must be tamed if we are to survive humanly" (125). It becomes important then for old Mrs. Roxburgh to train her daughter-in-law to suppress those savage instincts that can take root in an unfulfilled girl. Ellen is not so dimwitted as to believe that she can have any real future or romantic affection for Garnet Roxburgh, who by modern standards would incur the label of "player." However, Ellen can hardly be described as an untarnished woman herself. White writes that when Ellen first rides the black mare, she has had past experience atop horses. Ellen "had often bounced bareback for fun on their own hairy Cornish nag" and the mare responds to Ellen, "perhaps sensing the hand of experience" (White 98). Ellen may have had some modicum of sexual experience before her marriage to Austin. However, experience here might in fact be more of a euphemism for Ellen's sexual inexperience. Surprisingly, White reveals later that Ellen has never actually seen a naked man.

The reality of what goes on among the established upper-classes is perhaps not as hidden as they would imagine. Brady believes that Ellen learns to survive and "come to terms with that

savagery which, White suggests, is not just a feature of life in so-called primitive societies but is endemic to the human condition even to ‘highly civilized’ Australia” (124). The encounter in the forest between Garnet and Ellen is in some ways ambiguous and might point to a more “savage” nature exhibited among the aristocrats. White’s style in narration is often to combine dreams or thoughts that characters reveal amid the action of the story. Ward calls the result of White’s treatment to be the “shifting states or reality and with the larger question what is reality” (404). Ellen often describes her union with Garnet as “adultery.” However, the sexual coupling can, on the other hand, be interpreted as an act of violation.

Although Ellen repeatedly repents for her “adultery,” evidence in the novel also suggests that Ellen may not have been as willing a participant as even she would acknowledge. There is no doubt that White’s characterization of Garnet Roxburgh is one who possesses sinister motives. White calls him a “lapsed gentleman” (32). When Ellen first met Garnet, he sensed her mistrust of him. While riding with Ellen one day, Garnet says, ““You [Ellen] have never, I think, found me in the least congenial [...]. You had decided against me long before we had so much as met”” (White 101). However, Ellen lies and claims he is making false accusations. White writes, “The black mare whinged and jumped on experiencing her rider’s [Garnet’s] whip” (101). Ellen represents the mare in this passage as Garnet attempts to cajole her through his candor. Pleasantries seem to have failed Garnet thus far in securing Ellen into his stall. As Holly represents one of the lower classes that Garnet exerts his power over, Ellen can in some ways be viewed in much the same way. Ellen comes from humble beginnings before she marries Austin Roxburgh, as Garnet knows all too well. Garnet feels within his rights, therefore, to take from what he considers the subservient lower classes even if she is his brother’s wife. As old Mrs. Roxburgh notes early in the novel during a flashback, she “was convinced that this honest and

appealing girl [Ellen] would never be admitted to hers [Mrs. Roxburgh's class] except in theory, and her [Mrs. Roxburgh's] heart began to bleed for her [Ellen]" (White 72). Unable to continue an affair, Garnet grows embittered toward Ellen, who persuades her husband to depart Dulcet and go to Hobart-town "for his health."

While Ellen sojourns in Hobart after leaving Dulcet with her husband, she is nearly assaulted on a late-night stroll at Battery Point.¹⁶ Garnet happens to be passing and saves Ellen from her impending ruin. Garnet says, "'You court disaster, Ellen. Remember this is Van Diemen's Land. An infernal situation won't be improved by your blowing on the coals'" (White 136). To relate Garnet's remarks to a modern context, one can see similarities that are often exhibited among men who violate women. Garnet is essentially saying that Ellen is asking to be a victim. Earlier, when Garnet runs after Ellen into the forest for the sexual encounter, Garnet could not decide "whether to secure the horses first or succour his brother's wife. He decided on the horses, seeing them tamed and exhausted by the chase. They were easily caught and tied to saplings a few yards apart; it was Ellen who offered difficulties" (White 115). Approaching Ellen, Garnet asks if she is in pain. Ellen says, protesting, "'Don't, please! I'm not obliged. It's nothing—Garnet'" (White 116). Ellen cannot fully give her consent to Garnet because she lacks any real power. On the other hand, Garnet exudes power because he is an aristocratic white man and wields his masculine phallus for gratification and objectification of Ellen. Although Ellen acknowledges her encounter as an "indiscretion" and a moment of temptation giving way to sensuality, there is also evidence suggesting Garnet is more of a "miscreant" than a rescuer of damsels in distress.

On the other hand, it is indeed too easy to label Ellen wholly as a victim. During her encounter in the forest with Garnet, White writes that Ellen "was again this great green, only

partially disabled, obscene bird, on whose breast he [Garnet] was now feeding, gross hands parting the sweeping folds of her tormented and tormenting plumage; until in opening and closing, she might have been rather, the green, fathomless sea, tossing, threatening to swallow down the humanly manned ship which had ventured on her” (116). The first part of White’s description implies that Ellen may not be a willing participant in this tryst. However, the last part puts Ellen in the position of aggressor, “swallowing down the humanly manned ship.” Ellen’s dalliance with Garnet is described as some sinister action within her. Wolfe posits, “Love’s savagery takes a responsive chord in Ellen. Her exposure to Garnet’s lust [and] to that of her would-be rapist [...] has taught her to suspend judgment” (206). Therefore, Ellen cannot accept Garnet as a rapist and must acknowledge her participation in the encounter as “adultery.” White writes, “If she had been drawn to a certain person it was because some demoniac force had overcome her natural repulsion” (133).

White’s description of Ellen as “green” signifies her sexuality. Wolfe argues that the green shawl that Ellen wears on board the *Bristol Maid* is a symbol for her “repressed eroticism, green being the color of both the jungle and the sea” (204). J.R. Dyce believes, as well, that green represents fertility to White (Wolfe 204). Ellen tells her husband in a flashback that her aunt believed “green made a woman look trumpery,” when Austin suggests she wear a green skirt (White 60). Garnet is wearing a green coat in the forest when he seduces Ellen and later in Hobart when he rescues her from the would-be attacker, who is also dressed in green. Green is also the color of the “fringe of leaves” that Ellen wears during her time with the Aborigines and is reminiscent of the fringe on Ellen’s shawl embroidered with green leaves. Green is further suggestive of Ellen’s allegiance to Pan, or more generally, nature.

In many ways White displays an element of Romantic idealism through his representation of nature in *A Fringe of Leaves*. The forest is where Ellen and Garnet have their encounter. The forest reappears later in the novel's most climactic scene during the secret Aboriginal rites. Nature represents another outlet for Ellen to seek out a sense of freedom from both the bonds of matrimony that she literally breaks through her tryst with Garnet and her obligations to "civilized" society. If Ellen is in confinement among the "civilized" upper-classes, escaping to nature is her attempt to become free. Ellen's later experience among the Aborigines demonstrates that although she is enslaved to the Aborigines and must engage in daily chores expected of a slave, she is still receiving greater freedom among the "savages" than among her own people. Perhaps that is the point White intends by his portrayal of Ellen, by separating her from the designated class that she never felt she really belonged to anyway.

Nature appears to embrace Ellen as ardently as she embraces it. White writes, "Clumps of low-growing shrubs were draped with parasite flowers as white and lacy as bridal veils. Fronds of giant ferns caressed her, and in turn caressed the brown fur which clothed their formal crooks" (92). White's description of white parasitic flowers is the one destructive element in the forest. The description serves two purposes. Ellen is represented by the greenery of the shrub. The whiteness of the flower is linked to the white culture that sucks the life out of Ellen and like a parasite keeps her in confinement to its host. The implication of "lacy bridal veils" is a further parallel to Ellen's marriage to Austin, which is the other source of Ellen's incarceration. Even in the forest with a momentary freedom, Ellen cannot escape these reminders.

The Romantic ideals seem to conflict with white Christian values. However, another difference between Ellen and the upper classes is her interpretation of religion. Although Ellen's husband and old Mrs. Roxburgh instilled Christian values in her, Ellen seems to embrace a

spiritual connection through nature instead of any deity. There is more pagan about Ellen Gluyas than true Christian conviction. White often refers to Ellen Roxburgh as “Ellen Gluyas,” employing her maiden name when she is exerting her independence. Toward the end of novel after Ellen has returned to “civilization,” Mr. Cottle, the chaplain, attempts to spread the gospel to Ellen. Cottle asks her if she is a Christian, to which Ellen replies, “I don’t know what I any longer believe” (White 385). There is evidence to suggest that Ellen never fully believed or embraced Christian doctrine. Ellen does what is expected of a “proper lady and wife” in nineteenth century Australia. However, as White demonstrates on the Christmas day service in Van Diemen’s Land, Ellen “could not give herself to prayer this morning” (White 107). Instead of focusing on the service, Ellen is more aware of her sexual longing for Garnet Roxburgh. White writes that Garnet “tended to overflow against her. As he leaned forward in prayer, she could hear the cloth stretched to crackling across his shoulders, and when he eased himself back in his seat, she felt his thigh pressed inescapably into her skirt” (107). In this description, White is writing more like Eliza Haywood than Jane Austen.

Garnet and Ellen’s coupling in the forest awakens Ellen to the fact that her marriage to Austin is lacking. White writes that Ellen looks at her husband in a “bungling attempt to prove their love for each other, their lips as bitter-tasting as the leaves they had torn from exotic trees on arrival in an unknown country, their cheeks freshly contoured to fingers which might have been exploring them for the first time. She prayed it would remain thus; she was afraid of what she might find were she ever to arrive at the depths of his eyes” (32). Austin seems oblivious to any impropriety between Ellen and his brother and actually encourages her to spend time with Garnet. Ellen, though submitting to lust in the forest and defying old Mrs. Roxburgh’s edict of “sense over sensual,” has a strong abhorrence for Garnet Roxburgh. Garnet has already

impregnated Holly and later on board the *Bristol Maid* Ellen admits to her husband that she, too, is with child. Although Austin does not question his wife's fidelity and she does not admit otherwise, this progeny is most likely the result of her association with Garnet.

As the earlier narration had been told in past tense, Ellen and Austin's story is now told in the present, aboard the *Bristol Maid* bound for England. Ellen spends a large portion of the voyage in her cabin below fighting off morning sickness. Life on board the ship demonstrates White's further attempt at illustrating class structures within classes. Although Ellen and her husband are the only "passengers" on board the ship, some of the crew resent their presence. The Roxburghs and the crew of the *Bristol Maid* represent the same ethnicity, but in terms of class are different. Aboard the *Bristol Maid* it is the Roxburghs who function as "other," not the working-class seamen.

In this world the seamen represent the status quo and the Roxburghs are the minority. Austin attempts to study the workings of the ship and fancies himself an apprentice sailor. He hopes that he can form some sort of commonality between himself and the sailors by learning the workings of the ship. Austin does form a pseudo-friendship with the steward, Spurgeon, who is suffering from a boil that eventually leads to his death. However, Mr. Roxburgh is not able to charm everyone. Mr. Pilcher, the second officer, is especially bitter toward the Roxburghs, who Pilcher feels represent wealth. The Aborigines, too, are a potential threat to Pilcher's quest for privileges. Pilcher inhabits the lower socioeconomic status of white male and must display vitriolic racism in order to feel secure of his *own* social position. Mr. Roxburgh asks Pilcher if he had ever travelled into the interior of the continent. Pilcher says that he has not travelled into the outback and he would not do so even if he were paid because there is *nothing* there (White 151). Pilcher adds, that "only dirty blacks [...] and a few poor beggars in stripes who've bolted

from one hell to another. The criminals they found out about! That's th'injustice of it. How many of us was never found out?" (White 151). Pilcher sympathizes with the plight of the convicts and admits that even among "civilized" society criminals may exist, though they are not in chains. They are concealing their crimes. Pilcher's comments, as discovered later in the novel, have more to do with his own propensity for robbery. The Aborigines, on the other hand, are not worthy of Pilcher's sympathy, as he must not only label them based on skin color but also attach an adjective that places them beneath him. In this way, Pilcher is fulfilling his masculine impulse to discriminate. Pilcher's use of the pronoun "us" also extends to White's belief that savagery does not exist merely among convicts or Aborigines but also among free men and women, rich and poor.

The wreck of the *Bristol Maid* brings out a sense of honesty in the crew. With the ship now "turned over on her side," different opinions toward the Roxburghs emerge from them. Ward posits, "Physical defenselessness leads to an immediate lessening of their [the Roxburgh's] habits of authority—from wealthy travelers, to be treated, at least outwardly, with respect, they become, to the captain and crew, 'the inferior beings, or unwanted pets, his passengers'" (404). The upper-class Roxburghs are now in the hands of fate and must depend upon the abilities of the lower class seamen to save them from destruction. As the first-mate Mr. Courtney attempts to make the passengers feel safe, Austin wonders "whether the mate had been concealing from the beginning a streak of that contempt which members of the lower classes often harbour against their betters" (White 172). Mr. Pilcher is the most antagonistic. As he does earlier with Mr. Eoxburgh, Pilcher will later unleash his severe opinions on an unsuspecting Ellen.

After the shipwreck the crew and Roxburghs abandon the *Bristol Maid*. The long boats are put out to sea in the hope they can find their way back to the coast. During the journey, Ellen

bonds with a young sailor Oswald Dingum who becomes infatuated with her. Oswald speaks with a common English dialect and is shocked to discover Ellen, too, is capable of such vocalization. Ellen's relationship with Oswald is as kindred spirits, and she becomes friends with the young man. Oswald, on the other hand, falls in love with Ellen. Austin is aware of the connection between the two but seems unfazed or uninterested. When Oswald is swept out to sea by a wave while on an expedition to locate some shellfish for a starving Ellen, she is overcome by guilt. Austin, however, is too caught up in trying to "cure" the steward of his boat to notice the boy's absence or his wife's grief.

Meanwhile, Ellen takes one of the pannikins to collect rainwater and is discovered by Pilcher, who requisitions the pannikin from her and empties its contents on the ground. Pilcher snidely remarks to Ellen, "'the gentry foragin' for 'emselves, eh?'" (White 221). Ellen responds that she is merely gathering rainwater for her infirm husband. Pilcher says, "'like your old man, with all time on 'is ands, can afford to enjoy imaginities'" (White 221). Though Pilcher's comments are in a way light-hearted, he has a severe disdain for what Austin Roxburgh once called, his "betters." Ellen informs Mr. Pilcher that she is familiar with hardships. Pilcher attempts to make Ellen his servant, but she remains defiant and accuses Pilcher of being embittered. Pilcher responds, "'not embittered—practical—for seein' what the likes of you [upper classes] persuade 'emselves don't exist'" (White 221). Pilcher asks Ellen to give him one of her rings "'as a memento'" (White 222). Ellen stretches out her hand and says "'Take it! [...] I no longer have any use for them. For that matter, I've never truthfully felt they were mine'" (White 222). Before departing, she calls Pilcher a capitalist. The ring that Pilcher appropriates is, significantly, Ellen's "garnet" ring. Just as she refuses to wear the "garnet" gown later in the novel, the ring represents to Ellen her past association and "failing" with Garnet Roxburgh. The

ring is also an example of her confinement to the upper class. Coming from provincial upbringing, Ellen never really feels she is part of the club.

After the respite on the coral reef, the long boats continue on their trek to “civilization.” Austin tells his wife, ““We can thank God, my dear, for bringing us a few yards closer to civilization”” (White 224). A disagreement between Mr. Courtney and Pilcher results in the separation of the two boats. The Roxburghs, Captain Purdew, and Mr. Courtney are among the passengers of one boat, as the other boat carrying Pilcher, among others, sails off a different way. When Ellen delivers her baby prematurely aboard the separated long boat, it is stillborn. She later asks Austin if he noticed who the baby resembled and before he can answer, she quickly reminds him that children often take after their grandparents as opposed to their parents. Austin says he only had a small glimpse of the child but possibly observed what could have been a touch of himself in the child’s face. The crew uses the dead Oswald’s “glory bag” as a shroud for the lifeless child. Austin seems unaffected with the child’s death as if he has become immune to the pain of disappointment and loss. The steward also dies and the crew buries him in the water.

The impulse to feed upon bodies of expired humans is considered a mark of savagery by white standards. Early in the novel, the Aborigines are linked to cannibalism in the story that Delaney shares with the Merivales and Miss Scrimshaw. However, cannibalism surprisingly is first contemplated among the whites. When Spurgeon dies and is thrown overboard from the long boat, Austin Roxburgh thinks “how the steward, had he not been such an unappetizing morsel, might have contributed appreciably to an exhausted larder” (231). Later, Austin happily dreams of feeding on Spurgeon’s corpse. White writes that Captain Purdew whispers to Austin Roxburgh as the crew sleeps, ““This is the body of Spurgeon which I have reserved for thee

[Austin], take eat, and give thanks for a boil which was spiritual matter' ... Austin Roxburgh was not only ravenous for the living flesh, but found himself anxiously licking the corners of his mouth to prevent any overflow of precious blood" (231). The very explicit scene, though Austin's dream, still speaks to the savage nature that is not limited to the "uncivilized" members of the world.

Cannibalism is also recorded in Alexander's *Mrs. Fraser and the Fatal Shore*, in his account of the real-life Eliza Fraser. Alexander writes, "At this stage the more experienced members of the crew started talking about 'drawing lots,' a reference which was all understood except by Mrs. Fraser to mean that the unsuccessful drawer would be available as food for the rest" (30). In *A Fringe of Leaves*, cannibalism reappears during Ellen's captivity as well as her return to civilization. Hena Maes-Jelinek's "Fictional Breakthrough and the Unveiling of 'Unspeakable Rites' in Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves* and Wilson Harris' *Yurokon*" argues that cannibalism is, for White, "a universal phenomenon for there are other forms of it in the novel" (39).

Thoughts of turning cannibal now subsided, Austin Roxburgh spends the remainder of the novel fretting over his *Elzevir* Virgil. Ellen was right, perhaps, to be jealous of Virgil. When the *Bristol Maid* had run aground, Austin risked his life to return to the flooded cabin to recover his soaked *Elzevir*. Later in the novel, Ward claims, "The water-sodden book [*Elzevir*], which he [Austin] clutches for the brief time before his death, is used symbolically as a means of clarifying the danger of life lived primarily through the intellect" (406). As Austin is impotent to any physical love between himself and his wife, the volume of Virgil becomes his surrogate lover. When they landed on the coral reef to replenish supplies before the indeterminate journey was to be resumed for the mainland, Austin's only thought is how he can find a way to be alone

with his book. Austin carries his Virgil close to him as they finally reach land. In the end, Austin Roxburgh dies on the beach, clutching his *Elzevir* to his chest with a spear stuck through his neck. In “Abjection and Nationality in Patrick White’s *A Fringe of Leaves*,” Briar Wood contends that Austin’s “precious copy of Virgil is lost with his body but pastoral themes resurface in the course of the novel” (87) as Ellen is led off into the bush by the Aborigines.

White’s description of the “white” beach had appeared welcoming to the survivors of the *Bristol Maid*, though not the “dark” forest in the distance. Ellen now enters the forest, enslaved by the Aborigines who have killed her husband and the remainder of the men from the separated long boat. White’s description of the Aborigines is significant as he never attaches any names to them. At various instances throughout Ellen’s stay with the Aborigines, White alternates with the generic labels, “blacks,” “natives,” or “savages” but rarely Aborigines. Depending on which character is involved in the action or through their thoughts, White uses these distinctions. In *Life in the Fringes: the Aborigines in Patrick White’s Voss, Riders in the Chariot, and A Fringe of Leaves*, Saroj Kumar Mahananda argues:

In White’s fiction the native characters [...] form and hence contrast with the other group [...] by way of their colour, behaviour, culture, and lifestyle. But the thing that is most noteworthy is that, while almost all white characters are ‘individuals’ with their own individuality and specific character traits; on the other hand the aboriginal characters have no individuality; they are part of the ‘blacks.’ (38)

As asserted earlier, Ellen, interestingly, is not an individual. To her late husband and mother-in-law she had been property, an embodiment of her husband’s wealth. To Garnet, she is merely a mare to be whipped and “killed.” Among society, she is a woman, and has no real power like the

men. Only among the Aborigines, who White gives generic individualisms, does Ellen finally become an individual.

The color black takes on many manifestations in *A Fringe of Leaves*. For example, “Black” becomes a pronoun for the Aborigines. The sea is often described as black. As water invaded the sinking *Bristol Maid* and flooded the Roxburghs’ cabin, White writes, “There it [the water] was lying before their eyes, oozing and lapping, an antithesis of ocean—a black, seeping treacle which the plush table cloth failed to stand, while a teasel-shaped flower they [the Roxburghs] had brought back on an afternoon at Sydney Cove was too light and withered to have been sucked under yet” (169). Interestingly, the “dead” white flower is the one item in the cabin that is not sent underneath the gushing black liquid. Later, White describes the rain, as well, with a description of blackness. Ellen “allowed the rain to drench her. It seemed a natural occurrence that the black rain should be rushing at them. She gave herself up to it inside her clothes” (White 197). Ellen’s consent in allowing the black rain to overtake her foreshadows her later acculturation into the Aboriginal tribe. For Ellen, in this instance, and as she discovers later, blackness is natural to her.

White’s treatment of black in the novel is also demonstrated in terms of evil. The much coveted rum in the pannikin at first repulses Ellen Roxburgh. White writes, “Had she [Ellen] not realized that Captain Purdew had refilled the pannikin, and was holding the object, black and horrid, under her nose” (203), Ellen might have suffered a breakdown in front of all these strangers. Later, however Ellen “was amazed and mortified to find she could swallow so much of the stuff—almost to the bottom of the cup” (White 203). As with Ellen’s eventual revitalization among the Aborigines, “She could feel blood streaming through her veins, into fingertips and sodden toes” (White 203). In Van Diemen’s Land, although Ellen experiences a

kinship to nature, White describes her surroundings with negative associations. As the sun had expired in the clearing, Ellen is “surrounded by a black and hostile undergrowth” (White 93). Under the cloak of darkness, nature appears hostile for Ellen because it represents the unknown. Later, White writes, “Holly had recovered from her black thoughts of the same morning” (95). Black is being used here in a negative way that describes Holly’s sinister thoughts toward Garnet. Ellen recalls the material possessions that she shares with her husband back home. They are rejected by Ellen, especially the cabinets full of “black” Wedgewood. White writes, “she [Ellen] positively hated the black” (198-99). The china is a reminder of her confinement under Austin’s rule and not the source of fulfillment that the black rain and Aborigines offer. Although china is ordinarily described as white, black takes on a negative connotation here due to Ellen’s confinement under the yoke of Austin Roxburgh and thus it seems fitting that the Wedgewood would be described as such. Instead of material possessions, Ellen’s fondest memories were of the “flurries of pear blossom, and wasps burrowing in ripe pears” (White 198-99). In contrast, Austin recalls Nurse Hayes who looked after Garnet and himself as children. Austin remembers that Nurse Hayes “had stood on the floor against the fender, the white flesh took on its worth in gold” (White 198). Ellen’s reverie boasts the beauty found in nature, whereas Austin Roxburgh is more moved by his memories of whiteness and wealth.

Austin Roxburgh is not only attracted to white skin tones. When White first introduces the Aborigines on the island, Austin admires their “dark” flesh. White writes that Mr. Roxburgh had begun to find the whole matter a most tedious one after exhausting “his surprise at the black intrusion, and disposed of a dubious aesthetic pleasure in their muscular forms and luminous skins” (236). Austin’s admiration is short-lived when he receives a spear through the neck; however, his death is merely a formality since he is already metaphorically dead. The island has

become a very different one from when the whites first arrived and the “Almighty ordered trumpets to herald their arrival on this white beach” (White 233). The “white” beach can be attached to the *terra nullius* premise of the early explorers who felt that Australia belonged to no one except themselves and whose arrival initiated civilization in the Antipodes. In Austin’s last gasp, he pleads for Ellen to pray for him. Ellen, however, will never pray again (White 239). With the crew and Austin dead, only Ellen remains to become the captive of the Aborigines. As Austin Roxburgh had taken pleasure in observing his killers’ physiques, Ellen, too, is moved by carnal delight in admiring the Aborigines while in her captivity. Ward posits, “During her [Ellen’s] time with the aborigines it is suggested that she finds the ‘physical splendour’ of the males attractive” (416). White writes, “During the night she [Ellen] returned to her body from being the human wheelbarrow one of the muscular blacks was pushing against the dark. There was no evidence that her dream had been inspired by any such experience” (249).

Ellen’s admiration of the Aborigines is not the only feeling she exhibits toward her abductors. Ellen’s initial job is to be a nurse to a sick Aboriginal child who cries incessantly. Ellen cannot let the baby suckle, as the sustenance in her breasts has retreated since the death of her own baby and lack of nourishment. The “surrogate mother” begins to hate the baby and wishes at one point that it would die and finally free her of this unwanted responsibility. When the baby does finally die, Ellen feels a sense of remorse at having thought such things. Ellen eventually becomes more and more used to the daily routine of life with the Aborigines but she is also unable to communicate with her guardians, much less know any of them by name. White is purposely vague in his naming of the Aborigines. If Ellen does not understand the Aborigines’ language, then the reader cannot either. White does not rely on translated dialogue. Most of what Ellen derives from the Aborigines is trial and error as well as her own intuition. She soon

is accepted more and more into the clan, however, bonding with the females of the tribe. The Aboriginal women are inferior to the males in the social order, but their roles are important ones. It is the male Aborigines that Ellen wishes she could connect with though.

It is important to address White's depiction of the Aborigines and how whiteness becomes expressed in his depiction. When the Aborigines first appear, they are called "savages." As it is the whites on the beach who spy the Aborigines and already consider them to be "savages," White is not necessarily being negative in this expression. Colonials of the era have been historically documented as expressing contempt for the Aborigines. In "The Necessity of Nobility: Indigenous People in Canadian and Australian Literature," Terry Goldie writes, "The established image of the Aborigine was [...] extremely debased" (132). Captain James Cook, for example, has been quoted as saying that Indigenous Australians were "The most wretched people on earth" (Goldie 132). Therefore, the white reaction is consistent with the white dogma of the time. White writes that "one, three, half-a-dozen savages, not entirely naked, for each wore a kind of primitive cloth draped from a shoulder, across the body, and over his private parts" appear. Captain Purdew calls on the name of God in his initial reaction, saying, "Christian advances should meet with Christian results" (White 236). The whites then commence to load their muskets. Ellen considers such actions to be the games that "men-as-boys" must play and calls Mr. Courtney's men, "henchmen" (White 236). Later when the Aborigines remove the men's clothing, White describes the men as "glaring white" (242). Interestingly, the sight of a naked Mr. Courtney causes Ellen to look away because she had never seen a naked man before. Despite being married to Austin, Ellen had apparently never seen her husband unclothed. The Aborigines then march the whites off into the forest. White describes the Aborigines as "driving their white herd into the hinterland" like animals (242). Although the

Aborigines massacre the group of whites, save Ellen, White later reveals, vis-à-vis Jack Chance, that the whites had in fact been the first to fire. During the “game,” even Mr. Roxburgh made a confrontational assault in doing “only God could know. Here he [Austin] was, bestirring himself at least, in the manner expected of the male sex. Into action! He felt elated, as well as frightened” (White 239). One might feel sympathy for Austin Roxburgh, if his “assault” had not been described so comically by White. White is showing that the whites are displaying stupidity in their dealings with the Aborigines and, in that sense, probably deserve to be killed.

Despite justification for the Aborigines’ slaughter of the whites, White still feels the need to categorize and point out racial distinctions. The first mention of the Aborigines is followed by a description of their skin color. White also refers to their talking in “gibberish,” like “animal gibbering” (235), not recognizing it is their language. One of White’s principle classifications for the Aborigines is simply “blacks.” Throughout the whole captivity of Ellen Roxburgh, White calls the Aborigines “blacks.” A color becomes a substitute for a people. Brady submits that White “has been criticized for perpetuating the racist stereotype that Aboriginal culture is both degraded and degrading” (63). White’s depiction of a degraded people comes in the form of the cannibal rites in the forest where Ellen later stumbles. Maes-Jelinek explains that “in White’s treatment of the aborigines we get a juxtaposition of the stereotyped view which dismisses them as ‘loathsome savages’ and ‘dirty blacks’ and, on the other hand, an unprejudiced apprehension of the characteristics of an alien people” (37). White’s bi-polar characterization of the Aborigines happens gradually through Ellen’s observations. Ellen begins to see among the Aborigines glimpses of people she has seen in the outside world. Through Ellen, White’s representation becomes more sympathetic and “savagery” it would seem is not strictly a product of the “uncivilized” ones.

White's characterization of Aborigines is significant because he had no real experience with Aborigines in his own life. White's biographer, David Marr, writes that where White lived "They [Aborigines] were not allowed into the town [Walgett], unless, they were going on an errand. The rule was straight out with no loitering. Blacks were not allowed to drink [...]. White did not meet an Aborigine; they were everywhere but did not cross his path" (108). The observation has made some critics, Mahananda among them, question why White would not have had any contact with Aborigines if "they were everywhere?" Mahananda claims that the Aborigines are not allowed any freedom. They live the life of a prisoner, "not given any of the rights and duties that a human being deserves. When that is the condition of life in a society and when one belongs to the master race [...] as Patrick White does here, one is not likely to 'meet' the member of so called lower race" (24). Along with *A Fringe of Leaves*, White had made other attempts at portraying the Aboriginal experience in Australia including *Voss* (1957) and *Riders in the Chariot* (1961).

Despite a lack of experience with Aborigines, White successfully opens Ellen to the freedom that she had been denied in the white world. When she is first taken away by the Aborigines, Ellen is stripped of all her clothes. When the Aborigines remove Ellen's corset, White writes, "She was finally liberated" (244). Ellen's past confinements in a controlling marriage and from the societal obligations imposed upon her are now stripped away leaving her naked and exposed. With the removal of her clothes, Ellen has removed all the burdens of her former life. Ellen now puts on her sensual green "fringe of leaves," as a sign that she has found her true self. Ellen's transformation is never more realized than in the discovery she makes in the forest and succumbs to her deepest craving.

One morning Ellen stumbles upon a group of Aborigines involved in some type of secret “rites” in the forest. On closer observation, Ellen sees that the Aborigines are practicing cannibalism. White writes that Ellen is drawn to “a most delectable smell mingled with the scent of drifting smoke. She altered course in the direction of the voices, and eventually came upon a party of blacks whom she recognized as members of her own tribe” (271). The Aborigines are surprised and unhappy at Ellen’s intrusion and she realizes that she had stumbled upon some secret rites that she was not supposed to witness. However, Ellen’s self-identification as a member of the tribe is significant and her integration into the tribe becomes complete in this scene. Ellen feels the Aborigines seemed like “communicants coming out of church looking bland and forgiven after the early service” (White 271). The atmosphere becomes an “unexpectedly spiritual experience” for Ellen until she spies a corpse in the dying fire. The Aborigines gather up the skin and “the head and what she [Ellen] saw to be a heap of bones. It was easy to guess from the greasy smears on lips and cheeks how the flesh had disappeared” (White 271). The Aborigines angrily confront and frighten Ellen and then hurry away. Ellen follows, trying to “disentangle her emotions, fear from amazement, disgust from a certain pity she felt for these starving and ignorant savages, her masters” and catches sight of a thigh bone that had been dropped by the retreating Aborigines (White 272). At first Ellen is tempted to kick the bone away until she spots “one or two shreds of half-cooked flesh and goblets of burnt fat still adhering to this monstrous object” (White 272). In what is the climactic moment of the novel, White writes that Ellen “raised the bone, and was tearing at it with her teeth, spasmodically chewing, swallowing by great gulps which throat threatened to return. But did not. She flung the bone away only after it was cleaned, and followed slowly in the wake of her cannibal mentors” (272). Ellen’s actions are an abomination to her and something she must

never think of again. However, Ellen almost believes that “she had partaken of a sacrament” (White 272). As she had done in the forest with Garnet much earlier, Ellen again has defied the old Mrs. Roxburgh’s edict of “sense over sensual.” Ellen has chosen to be initiated in this sensual act that marks her transformation into “savagery.” Later White writes that Ellen “might have come to terms with her darkness” (274). Ellen would not admit her cannibal rites in the forest to anyone “just as she would never have admitted to others how she had immersed herself in the saint’s pool, or that black waters had cleansed her of morbid thoughts and sensual longings” (White 273). However, Ellen’s action is her initiation into the tribe.

To illustrate Ellen’s transformation among the Aborigines, Terry Goldie’s “Contemporary Views of an Aboriginal Past: Rudy Wiebe and Patrick White” is informative. Goldie claims, “Part of the means of incorporating Ellen into Aboriginal life is the changes in her appearance which are made by the captors. In a transformation similar to that made by her husband and mother-in-law when she became a Roxburgh, the older Aborigine women do what they can with this unlikely prospect” (433). White writes, “An almost tender sigh of admiration rose in the air as the women achieve their work of art” (251). The Aboriginal women had cut Ellen’s hair and decorated her face as they would a member of their own people, anointing her with animal fat and charcoal. At first Ellen does not understand the Aborigines. However, through observation, she gradually begins to understand and in many ways appreciate these foreign customs. The customs, however, for White are common “of basic human reactions such as fear or vanity” (Maes-Jelinek 37). At one point when Ellen suffers an injury, she remembers to dress her wound with charcoal as her “adoptive family” have taught her. Later when Ellen is lost, after falling behind in the forest, she expresses the desire to return to her captors because she “belonged” to the tribe (White 256). White further comments that Ellen’s skin was

blackened (263). Ellen has essentially transformed herself into a productive member of the Aboriginal community and in so doing liberated herself from the confinements that had so bound her in the outside world.

As some whites experience disgust at the dark appearance of the Aborigines, the Aborigines also have a hard time accepting Ellen's whiteness at first. For some of the Aborigines in the camp Ellen represents a "fearful apparition" (245). Ward asserts, "The aborigines regard white flesh as the mark of a 'ghost'; white people are thought to be spirits of their own dead, returned to life. Thus, while both women [Ellen Roxburgh and Eliza Fraser] are treated as slaves and are made the butt of both cruelty and humour, they are regarded with awe and are elaborately bedecked and admired" (415). During the Aborigines' journey to the mainland to engage in a corroboree, she is shown off to other Aborigines like some rare prize. The journey from the island to the mainland is also Ellen's opportunity to "liberate" herself from her "captivity." Although Ellen had been freed in her captivity with the Aborigines, she did not totally break from her past. Ellen fastens her wedding ring to the "fringe of leaves" and carries it around. Just as with blocking out her descent into cannibalism, Ellen must also block out that inner self that calls the Aborigines her "family." She follows, then, her white impulses in the contemplation of escape.

At the corroboree Ellen is drawn to a "pseudo Aborigine" who is later revealed to be Jack Chance, an escaped convict. Jack had been living among the Aborigines as one of them since he bolted. Ellen sees the scars on Jack's back, realizing they are not part of any tribal markings. Ellen befriends Jack, who at first has lost the memory of how to speak English. Jack recovers and reveals his name to her. Ellen begs Jack to help her escape to the Moreton Bay settlement, but, reminded of the brutality he receives in prison there, Jack is reluctant. Later, one night Ellen

is granted her wish, as she is awakened and dragged violently by her hand into the night. The next phase of White's novel is Ellen's return to the "civilized" world and its confinements.

As Jack and Ellen travel back to the white world, Ellen learns why Jack was sent to the penal colony of Australia. Back in England, Jack's lover Mab had been cheating on him with another man. A jealous Jack kills Mab and is sent to the colony at "her Majesty's Leisure" for the "term of his natural life." A bond develops between Jack and Ellen as they journey to "civilization." Remembering his time in the penal system, Jack tells Ellen that "men [are] unnatural and unjust" (White 281). Ellen is given more details about Jack's background and grows curious about his relationship with Mab. When Jack is asked about Mab, he says, "She was black like you [Ellen]" (White 296). Jack is able to trap birds for his and Ellen's dinner because, ironically, he had been in the "caged bird" trade back in England. Again, White is calling attention to the confinement motif that reoccurs throughout *A Fringe of Leaves*. Eventually, Ellen and Jack become lovers as they travel together. Jack questions, "Could you [Ellen] love me?" (White 299) and as Ellen has never truly been in love before, the thought of loving Jack invigorates her. Ellen does not even hold Jack at fault in the death of Mab. As Jack and Ellen arrive at the Oakes farm, Ellen finally being returned to "civilization," Jack is unable to stay with her and runs away. Ellen had promised she would talk to the authorities about Jack and make them aware of how he had saved her, saying they would surely grant him a pardon. However, Jack is unwilling to become imprisoned again. Ellen, on the other hand, quickly realizes that it is she who has been sent to "gaol."

Ellen's return to "civilization" is also a return to her captivity. White describes Ellen's feeling of confinement, at one time calling her a "prisoner" (356) because that is how she views herself. While Ellen stays with Commander Lovell's family, she calls her room a "cell" (White

391). Ellen had had a sense of freedom with the Aborigines and Jack that she no longer enjoys in “civilization.” During the rest of the novel Ellen is constantly pressured by Commander Lovell to give him details of her captivity for his report. Ellen feels she is being treated as if she were a criminal and quickly surmises that the Commander is her “adversary” (White 361). Ellen makes good on her promise to plead for Jack’s pardon, which the Commander later requests from the Governor. Out of all the people at Moreton Bay, Ellen is closest to the Lovell children and Mrs. Oakes. Ellen had been discovered by Mrs. Oakes on her farm and Ellen stays with Mrs. Oakes for a time. The women in the settlement, including the Commander’s wife and Miss Scrimshaw, the tutor for Commander Lovell’s children and the same Miss Scrimshaw from the beginning of the novel send Ellen two dresses, a black dress for mourning her dead husband and a “garnet” gown. Ellen puts on the “garnet” frock at Mrs. Oakes’s encouragement but quickly discards the gown because she feels more comfortable in black. The black dress does not represent a sign of grief for a dead husband whom she never loved and who kept her imprisoned. Instead, the dress represents Ellen’s status as “non-white” in the settlement and a connection to her Aboriginal tribe. If Ellen is in mourning at all, it is for her renewed incarceration. Ellen finally does put on the “garnet” gown at the end of the novel as she boards the ship for England. Ellen’s introduction to a Mr. Jarvis signals the beginning of her new life. Ellen and Jarvis share a moment of secret confidence on board the ship in the same dialect, which for Ellen is a sign she has perhaps found herself. The historical Eliza Fraser also met a “Mr. Jarvis” who would become her husband. In this final scene, White is returning Ellen to a life of confinement and captivity. However, through Ellen’s experiences among “savages” and a potential rapport with Mr. Jarvis, there is a suggestion that perhaps this time Ellen’s life will be different.

In *A Fringe of Leaves*, Nobel laureate Patrick White compares a white upper-class woman's experiences with the Aboriginal and convict in colonial Australia. Ellen Roxburgh's metaphorical "confinement" within white society and her unfulfilled marriage prepare her for her physical confinement by Aborigines. In many ways, the whole of Australia is incarcerated. Convicts are literally imprisoned, white Australians remain entrenched in their racist hatred toward the Aborigines, and Indigenous Australians are strangers in their own country. Ellen's role of "other" in society makes it easier for her to understand the plight of the Aborigines and convicts. Through White's themes of captivity and savagery, Brady contends, "It is clear Australia represents the dark side of ourselves and of our culture [...] a kind of mirror which gives back the reflection of our own human and social evil" (125). White describes Australia as "a country of thorns, whips, murderers, thieves, shipwrecks, and adulteresses" (311-312). White and masculine constructions function well in this climate of prejudice and inhumanity. In this environment, White has presented a space where "savagery" is not the exclusive domain of the "uncivilized" members of society. What White depicts in *A Fringe of Leaves* are injustices that took place nearly two centuries ago but also remain a representation of the modern world.

CHAPTER 4

‘BITS OF COLOUR’: RACE RELATIONS IN CHILDREN’S LITERATURE— COLIN THIELE’S *FIRE IN THE STONE* AND *STORM BOY*

To more fully understand the racial divisions that exist in the world of white Australian literature, one only needs to look at the representations found among children’s and young adult novels. Australian writer Colin Thiele effectively compares the bigoted and unfeeling grown-up with that of the more sensitive child and young adult. In Australia, as a children’s writer, Thiele enjoys nearly reverential status. He is comparable to other giants in Australian literature, such as A.B. “Banjo” Paterson and Henry Lawson, both of whose likenesses have appeared on \$10 Australian notes. The mere mention of Thiele’s name is sure to bring a smile to the faces of young and old Australians alike who have grown up reading his many stories, novels, and poetry. Thiele was a teacher by profession, served during World War II in the Royal Australian Air Force, and was later the principle at a teacher’s college in Adelaide. Perhaps because he was a teacher, Thiele hoped to instill moral lessons in his writing among those boys and girls who had grown up reading his work.

Australia is a melting pot for many different cultures and families. Thiele writes about these diverse families with deep conviction. Thiele’s depictions of contemporary family units continue to resonate with many children across Australia and the world. A good number of Thiele’s young characters come from single-parent homes. The majority of Thiele’s writing is told from similar locations, many of his stories in his native South Australia. For this reason Thiele is generally considered a regional author. However, readers from all over Australia and abroad have been drawn to Thiele’s eye for story and humanity. His writing, though localized in South Australia, includes the basic constituency of the broader Australian population including immigrants, Anglo-Australians, and Indigenous Australians. A rise in population and an

increasing concern for the loss of animal habitats due to the growth of suburbs led to a thematic shift in Thiele's work in the 1960s and 1970s when Thiele began to write many novels, which according to Sue Grey in "Colin Thiele: Images, Issues, and Role Models," dealt with contemporary social matters that he felt were immensely important (8). Thiele's novels and stories were pro-environmental and sympathetic to animal rights long before either cause was fashionable. Grey posits, "Conservation, concern for the environment, and preservation of wildlife gradually became a major focus in many of Colin Thiele's novels during this period" (8). Both *Storm Boy* (1963) and *Fire in the Stone* (1973) came out of this period and reflect some of the social issues Grey discusses.

As with the majority of his novels, Thiele set both *Storm Boy* and *Fire in the Stone* in South Australia. From the Coorong and windswept shores of the Southern Ocean in *Storm Boy* to the sun-baked dust bowl of *Fire in the Stone*'s Coober Pedy amidst its opal mines, Thiele presents two geographically dissimilar sceneries. Through Thiele's use of color imagery and location, a fully textured narrative of life in these very different regions of Australia begins to emerge. However, the ever-present trials for the Aboriginal peoples in both novels are universal. Thiele incorporates the Aboriginal perspective in both *Storm Boy* and *Fire in the Stone*. Thiele's Aboriginal characters are often accepted as friends among the young white protagonists of his novels, though continually ostracized by whites in the adult world. For this reason, Thiele's work is in a different class than other white writers who have portrayed the Aboriginal experience in Australian literature. Thiele was able to bridge racial boundaries and form genuine friendships built on mutual trust and affection. *Storm Boy* and *Fire in the Stone* both include children who are being raised by single fathers. However, the children in many of Thiele's

novels also suffer from neglectful and absentee parental figures as demonstrated in *Fire in the Stone*.

In this chapter I discuss the representations of race found in *Storm Boy* and *Fire in the Stone*. I draw on Thiele's use of color and the dichotomies in his Aboriginal perspective that form the basis for these stories. While racial constructions are demonstrated in the inadvertent vocalizations made by white people, color also functions as an invisible marker for whites to visualize non-whites. Thiele also considers color as an important agent for whites' categorizations of non-whites. Thiele is guilty of racializations vis-à-vis color words, but is unique, as with *Storm Boy*, in relying on Aboriginal characters, not whites, to make those distinctions. Thiele is still a white writer providing an Aboriginal perspective. However, Thiele also depicts non-raced friendships that are unique to white writers, like Keneally and White, who depicted Indigenous Australians. Furthermore, Thiele's color metaphors often contextualize the Aboriginal domination by whites. Thiele's representations, I show, were unique in respect to many other white Australian writers who have depicted the Aborigines, past or present. However, despite being far more successful than other white writers in portraying the Aboriginal people, Thiele sometimes remains encapsulated in the same whiteness constructs that constrain these other less successful white writers.

To analyze Thiele's use of color, it is important to first discuss Richard Dyer's theory on how color, or the lack of color in respect to whiteness, emerges in the world today and its significance to whiteness studies. Dyer's ideas about color and the assigning of race based on color is a central argument to whiteness studies. Although Dyer acknowledges that color is not the only means by which racism or racial distinctions can occur, he states how color can categorize groups who are white or perceived non-white (42). Dyer writes, "We are called and

call others white suggests the centrality of notions of colour to white representation. Other things may designate us as white and we may not be literally white, yet a colour term, white, is the primary means by which we are identified” (42). As Dyer notes, however, true colors such as white may not in fact exist. Assigning a color to a specific group can be a betrayer. For example, “It is customary in the West to call the complexion of Chinese or Japanese people yellow, yet it is by no means clear that their complexions are so distinct from that of white Westerners; it is generally the shape of the eyes that is critical in determining whether someone is ‘white’ or ‘yellow’” (Dyer 42). What then makes someone truly “white”? According to Dyer, a person’s being designated as “white” is due to a complicated interaction of elements that “include flesh tones within the pink to beige range” (42). Other markers of whiteness can range from the shape of the nose, body shape, eyes and lips, or hair color [and texture], which together may determine someone’s “color.” In Thiele’s novels, colors abound in many shades and forms. As such, colors become more nuanced and differing from novel to novel. *Fire in the Stone*, approximately two hundred pages long, is set in the blisteringly hot, barren, and dust covered opal fields of Coober Pedy. *Storm Boy*, a meager thirty pages, is set against the salt-peppered sprays of the Southern Ocean. Although color changes due to scenery, the racial implications that Thiele expresses by the use of color remain present in both novels.

Storm Boy is the story of a young boy’s life with his father and friendships with Mr. Percival, the pelican, and Fingerbone Bill, the Aborigine. *Storm Boy* is a heart-wrenching tale of the boy’s love for three pelicans that he nurses from small chicks after their mother is killed by white men with guns. Since *Storm Boy* first appeared in 1963, it has been regarded as an extremely important entry into Australian children’s literature. The novel, in terms of Australian literature at large, introduced Colin Thiele to the public as an important literary figure and was

one of the most successful Australian works to date. In *Can I Call You Colin?*, Stephany Evans Steggall writes, “*Storm Boy* is the book with which most people associate the Thiele name. It is a classic, a status accorded by its *London Times* reviewer. The narrative patterns in its design, pieced together, formed the prototype for many books to come” (15). Along with its creative success and the increasing popularity since its publication, the novel does more in its slim thirty pages to open a dialogue of understanding about the fragility of life than many other much longer adult novels. *Storm Boy* also offers a more textually realistic Aboriginal and white relationship than any other novel before it. Thiele believes it is possible to form genuine multicultural kinships if whites would only view Aborigines as individuals and refrain from making class distinctions. Thiele’s children and young adults are generally the characters who see beyond the white constructions of racial differences that confound the adult world. This is certainly evident in *Storm Boy*. In my analysis of *Storm Boy*, I will discuss Thiele’s ideal of friendships that cross racial and cultural boundaries, the use of color in the novel and specifically the way in which the color white becomes a negative force in Thiele description of the natural world, and the family unit of Storm Boy, his father, and their Aboriginal friend, Fingerbone, each defiant and nurturing amidst destroyers from outside who would break up the “family” with their racializations and cruelty.

Nine-year-old Storm Boy lives with his father, Hideaway Tom, between the South Australian Coorong and the sea. After Storm Boy’s mother dies, Hideaway and Storm Boy leave Adelaide and move into “a rough little humpy made of wood and brush and flattened sheets of iron from old tins. It had a dirt floor, two blurry bits of glass for windows, and a little crooked chimney made of stove pipe and wire” (Thiele 70). The humpy is cold in the winter and hot in the summer but Storm Boy is happy there. Like Storm Boy, many of Thiele’s other characters,

including Ernie in *Fire in the Stone*, live in very humble dwellings and Thiele's children and adolescents are often isolated and criticized by the community. Such is the case with Hideaway and Storm Boy who are frequently scorned and condemned by unsympathetic strangers.

Hideaway is a lonely and quiet man. Thiele writes, "Years before, when Storm Boy's mother died he [Hideaway] had left Adelaide and gone to live like a hermit by the sea. People looked down their noses when they heard about it, and called him a beachcomber. They said it was a bad thing to take a four-year-old to such a wild lonely place. Storm Boy and his father didn't mind. They were both happy" (70-71). People rarely see Storm Boy or Hideaway unless they travel to town for provisions. Storm Boy is saddened about the abuses of nature he witnesses, but is too young to fully understand why men commit such callous actions. Thiele writes, "Sometimes Storm Boy saw things that made him sad. In spite of the warnings and notices, some people did hurt the birds. In the open season, shooters came chasing wounded ducks up the Coorong; some sneaked into the sanctuary during the night, shot the birds at daybreak, and crept out again quickly and secretly" (77). One day, to Storm Boy's horror, white hunters on the reserve shoot two pelicans while the birds are sitting on their nests. In one of Thiele's bitter ironies, Storm Boy, himself motherless, becomes the surrogate mother to the young chicks. Storm Boy looks after the pelicans, giving each one a name; Mr. Percival is the favorite and smallest of the hatchlings. As the chicks grow to maturity, Hideaway reluctantly tells Storm Boy he must send the pelicans out on their own to fend for themselves. Storm Boy grudgingly acquiesces but is overjoyed when Mr. Percival later returns home. Not wanting Storm Boy to be sad again, Hideaway allows Mr. Percival to stay. Hideaway and Storm Boy soon begin to realize Mr. Percival is a very remarkable pelican. Storm Boy forms a deeper connection with Mr. Percival as he trains him to help Hideaway fish by carrying a line far out in the water.

Storm Boy is a sensitive child who connects to all the wild things in nature. Thiele writes, "All living creatures were his [Storm Boy] friends" (74). Storm Boy's only human friend is an Aboriginal man, Fingerbone Bill, who also lives on the reserve. The friendship between Storm Boy and Fingerbone is significant in terms of the previous literary depictions between Aborigines and whites. These depictions have traditionally been portrayed as a separating barrier between the two cultures. Anglo-Australians have remained insulated within their own culture while unsympathetic to and ignorant of Aboriginal culture. Thiele's fictional characterization of Fingerbone is important in breaking down racial and color barriers that separate the two cultures. However, Thiele's Aborigine is also a stereotypically-speaking black man who lives out in the bush separated from the rest of society. Fingerbone is unable to form connections with any other whites except Storm Boy and Hideaway, who are ridiculed by society themselves. Thiele's treatment of white and Aboriginal relations is significant in forging an idealized union between the two cultures but also it cannot escape the racial constructions that keep the two cultures separate. To convey his ideal world, color description becomes a major element of Thiele's writing. Color is significantly amplified in a world not composed of black and white but many other shades and textures.

Thiele's description of Fingerbone Bill is important in understanding Thiele's use of racialized colors in the novel. The description is also significant in terms of the shortcomings that can result even from a writer such as Thiele who is extremely good the majority of the time in breaking down racial stereotypes. Thiele's depiction of Fingerbone as the lone spokesman for the rest of the Aboriginal people puts the Aborigine in a positive light as well as caricaturing Fingerbone as the *Aborigine*. However, Fingerbone is never a fully rounded character. Fingerbone does show emotion toward Storm Boy, but little is known about Fingerbone's life

apart from his Aboriginality. Thiele's depiction of Fingerbone reduces him to his culturally identity and Fingerbone never overcomes the Aboriginal categorization. Fingerbone is the only other person who lives close to Storm Boy and Hideaway. Fingerbone is "a wiry wizened man with a flash of white teeth and a jolly black face as screwed-up and wrinkled as an old boot. He had a humpy above the shore of the Coorong about a mile away" (Thiele 72). Thiele's description of Fingerbone can be viewed as positive from the appellation of "jolly" before "black face" and reflective of his character as a man who has gone through many difficulties in life that have left him "wizened." However, an argument can also be made that the "happy primitive" description frequently used by other white writers to depict the "other" is also being applied by Thiele. Furthermore, there is a "flash of white" that is considerably overshadowed in Fingerbone's appearance by his dark skin color. The compliment in Thiele's description is by Fingerbone being wise; not from being black. However, Fingerbone's blackness sets him apart from others. Thiele does separate Fingerbone from the other characters vis-à-vis skin pigmentation, although he uses Fingerbone's skin color as a compliment that sets him apart from other white constructed categorizations. Although Thiele values Fingerbone's Aboriginality, which is uncommon by most other white writers that categorize by race, Thiele ultimately falls short in his description of Fingerbone in this passage. Thiele categorizes Fingerbone based on his race, despite the positive description that Thiele also gives Fingerbone. Thiele is unable to break free from the constraints of his own white-centrism.

Thiele does succeed in forming commonality among Fingerbone and Storm Boy and Storm Boy's father. Fingerbone's home is not unlike Storm Boy and Hideaway's as he also lives in a modest humpy far from town. Hideaway sees no problem in allowing his son to be friends with the much older Aboriginal man and in fact considers Fingerbone a friend as well. Storm

Boy looks up to and respects Fingerbone. Since Storm Boy does not benefit from any type of formal education, he is schooled by Fingerbone in the ways of nature and develops a respect for the land and its diverse wildlife. There is a spiritual connection that Fingerbone and Storm Boy derive from nature. Fingerbone knows more than anyone else Storm Boy has ever known.

Thiele claims that Fingerbone can “point out fish in the water and birds in the sky when even Hideaway couldn’t see a thing. He knew all the signs of wind and weather in the clouds and the sea. And he could read all the strange writing on the sandhills and beaches—the scribbly stories made by beetles and mice and bandicoots and ant-eaters and crabs and birds’ toes and mysterious sliding bellies in the night” (72). With Fingerbone as a guide, all that Storm Boy learns is enough to fill a hundred books (Thiele 72). The relationships Thiele develops among Storm Boy, Fingerbone, and Hideaway are unique.

Storm Boy, Fingerbone, and Hideaway Tom’s relationship functions in a separate space from the outside world but they also speak to the outside world. Steggall argues, “The Coorong became the stage for conflict between two types of humanity, the dreamers and the destroyers. The dreamers are represented by Storm Boy and his father Hideaway Tom, who had discovered happiness in their ‘rough little humpy’ in the sandhills (200). In their world, Fingerbone exists as an equal. Fingerbone is as protective and caring for Storm Boy as Hideaway. When Storm Boy is smaller, Hideaway is dreadfully worried that he might wander off and become lost. Hideaway and Fingerbone work together to drag a long piece of wood to the top of the sandhill next to the humpy and erect a look-out post so that Storm Boy can always find his way back home (Thiele 73-74).

Hideaway, Storm Boy, and Fingerbone exist as a family unit. In this schema, each individual has his own role in the trinity of the family unit. Storm Boy and Hideaway Tom each

represent the father and son respectively. Fingerbone Bill, on the other hand, can be seen in various ways. One of these ways is as a mother or feminizing influence in the trinity for the motherless Storm Boy. Fingerbone is closely aligned already with nature, which is often depicted in terms of a feminizing element itself. Therefore, Fingerbone becomes the nurturing, maternal keeper of both the natural world in the sanctuary and of Storm Boy, who he protects as if he were his own child. Another reading of Fingerbone casts him in the role of Storm Boy's big brother, looking out for the younger more defenseless family member of the trinity. Both of Fingerbone's representations as an older brother and as a vigilant surrogate guardian to Storm Boy are most evident when Storm Boy is out alone in the wilds away from Hideaway's watchful eye.

Fingerbone's protectiveness of Storm Boy is demonstrated in a very close encounter with a poisonous snake. The passage illustrates Fingerbone's pacifist nature despite being in possession of a killing implement that he receives from the white world—a blunderbuss muzzle-loader. Fingerbone is very proud of his blunderbuss and he keeps the gun in very good shape. Storm Boy has never seen Fingerbone kill anything with the gun except a large tiger-snake that crawled close to Fingerbone and Storm Boy one day while they were together. This scene illustrates a genuine affection Fingerbone feels for Storm Boy that defies racial differences. The scene is also descriptive of Fingerbone's respect and awareness of nature. Thiele's characterization of Fingerbone is one who is opposed to killing, which is also evident in Fingerbone's anger at the white hunters' shooting of pelicans and other wildlife in the sanctuary. Fingerbone feels a maternal connection to nature and its creatures. Fingerbone only kills for protection in times of danger. Thiele's own animal rights and environmental activism is demonstrated in this characterization but also speaks to the Aborigines' spiritual connection to

nature. Traditional interpretation of Aborigines has shown that all life is considered sacred and Aborigines do not kill for the sake of killing. This is not true of the destroyers who invade the sanctuary to kill nesting pelicans. Steggall explains that Fingerbone shares with Storm Boy his knowledge and love of the sanctuary (200). Thiele develops Storm Boy as a character who understands nature and appreciates Aboriginal culture as well. Thiele presents balanced portrayals of the Aborigine, Fingerbone and his white friends in the Coorong with the whites from the outside world. However, even Colin Thiele is capable of creating stereotypes while attempting to show a non-biased portrayal of the Aboriginal experience among whites.

Thiele's inefficacies in presenting a completely non-white-coded narrative and Storm Boy's empathy toward the plight of the Aborigines are both seen in the section in which Storm Boy discovers the remnants of an Aboriginal past and imagines how he would have been an Aborigine if he had lived in this place hundreds of years before. Thiele writes, "Sometimes in the hollows behind the sandhills where the wind had been scooping and sifting, Storm Boy found long, white heaps of sea-shell and bits of stone, ancient mussels and cockles with curves and whorls and sharp broken edges" (74). Hideaway tells Storm Boy that these fossilized remnants are *middens* left by the Aborigines and that it is "a camping place where they [Aborigines] used to crack their shell-fish" (Thiele 74). Despite being sensitive to Aboriginal issues and idealizing a friendship between Fingerbone and Storm Boy and Fingerbone and Hideaway, Thiele's dialogue is spoken in the verbiage that marks whiteness constructions. Fingerbone says, "Dark people eat, make camp, long time ago [...] no whitefellas here den. For hundreds and hundreds of years only blackfellows[;]" Fingerbone stares into the distance as if deep in thought (Thiele 74-75). Thiele's language in this passage is centered on color words. He uses terms like "dark people," "whitefellas," and "blackfellas" to colorize differences between whites and Aborigines.

The important element here, however, that sets Thiele's interpretation apart is the fact that an Aborigine, Fingerbone, is the character who speaks this dialogue. Thiele is still the white author giving the Aborigine his words. One of the major deficiencies in Thiele's characterization of Fingerbone is also this very stereotypical dialogue. During the earlier scene involving the tiger-snake, Fingerbone says, "number One bad fellow, tiger-snake [...] kill him dead!" (Thiele 73). The dialogue here and in the discovery of the *middens* suggests the same stereotypical broken-English many white writers use for Aboriginal dialogue because these writers believed that was the way Aborigines talked. The use of such dialogue comes from a past in which whites communicated with Aborigines in a condescending manner. Whites were patronizingly unsure if the Aborigines understood them but also used such language in order to keep the Aborigines in their place and thereby exercising white supremacy. Whites in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often used the same language construction when talking to Aborigines, which was vocalized by Constable Farrell in Keneally's *Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. Farrell uses this language construction in his raid on Verona when addressing the Aborigines, which Jimmie copies. Keneally's novel was set in 1900 and is an example of the language constructions used toward Aborigines by whites from that time period. Therefore, such dialogue constructions began long before Thiele.

Thiele's success with the Aboriginal experience, however, separate from constructed dialogue, is in the relationship between Storm Boy and Fingerbone. Storm Boy's understanding of Aboriginal culture is almost instinctive. Listening to Fingerbone's lament about his ancestors before the arrival of the whites launches Storm Boy into a daydream. Thiele writes, "Storm Boy looked at the big heaps of shell and wondered how long ago it had been. He could paint it in his mind... the red camp-fires by the Coorong, the black children, the songs, the clicking of empty

shells falling on the piles as they were thrown away. And he thought to himself, 'If I had lived then, I'd have been a little black boy'" (75). This is a major development in Australian literature between white and Aboriginal interactions. A white writer's empathetic representation of a white person who imagines himself an Aborigine in the past is quite remarkable. Storm Boy's daydream is an acknowledgment of the respect and admiration that he feels toward Aboriginal people. Storm Boy does not place himself above the Aborigines but likens himself to an Aborigine. Besides showing Storm Boy's open-mindedness, Thiele's use of color is also evidenced in the passage. Storm Boy reasons that he would have been a *black* boy if he had lived in that long ago time. Although Storm Boy's thoughts use the color *black* in distinguishing the Aboriginal race, bringing to the surface visible racial constructions, the thought is left unuttered by Storm Boy. The passage is instead Thiele's description of what Storm Boy imagines and is Thiele's omniscient narrative voice that frames Storm Boy's daydream not any racializations on the part of Storm Boy. Since Storm Boy never distinguishes Fingerbone in terms of skin color in the rest of the novel, one can only assume the passage is merely more of Thiele's own personal designation of color. To further demonstrate the important effects of color in the book in terms of racial deconstructions and the post-colonial implications it raises, it is important to analyze specific examples from the text.

Color and color associated words leap in *Storm Boy* to form a parallel between the natural world and a postcolonial indictment of white domination. Gray threatening storms and white foamy shoals crash against the shore that Storm Boy, Hideaway, and Fingerbone call home. Thiele's use of racially-constructed colors by which white people normally distinguish themselves from others is quite remarkable. As Thiele aligns white and Aboriginal characters, forming friendships in *Storm Boy*, he also adds texture to his portrayal by combining other color

combinations. At the beginning of the novel Thiele's description of the scenery in the sanctuary positions the color white in a negative light. At the bottom of the world where Storm Boy and his father live, "The waves come sweeping in towards the shore and pitch down in a terrible ruin of white water and spray. All day and night they tumble and thunder. And when the wind rises it whips the sand up the beach and the white sprays dart and writhes in the air like snakes of salt" (Thiele 70). Thiele's description presents a troubled white sea that is writhing violently resulting in a terrible ruin on the land. The effect of white people on Aboriginal culture, as already asserted, was devastating to Indigenous populations and their future. Therefore, Thiele uses this color and descriptions of the natural world to draw an allusion to the destructive white forces brought upon Aboriginal culture. White and dark are also Western contrivances to distinguish between good and evil. In this passage, the sea becomes the evil entity; the white water ironically described as a snake. A closer reading of the Creation story from Genesis reminds one that the snake represents Satan and in western culture, the snake is often described in terms of evil. White culture that continually describes the "other" as dark and forebodingly connected to the occult or paganism is receiving a similar treatment here by Thiele.

Steggall calls the whites who come into the sanctuary "destroyers" (200). She writes, "When the destroyers intrude—young men who kill pelicans and smash their nesting area—three chicks survive" (200). The three pelicans that Storm Boy saves from death form a parallel among Storm Boy, Fingerbone, and Hideaway Tom, who are spared the vitriol from the white world, though not from ones who would intrude with guns to destroy. The Aborigines in Australia remain just as vulnerable.

Color continues as a recurrent theme throughout *Storm Boy* in order to draw attention to the parallel between nature and the oppression of the Aborigines. Thiele writes, "Storm Boy put

on two of his father's coats and followed him [Hideaway] out to the top of the sandhill. Daybreak was coming like a milky stain in the east, but the world in front was just a white roar" (89). White takes on a negative connotation once again in pitting the storm against Storm Boy and Hideaway. Thiele uses the color white here to describe a fierce gale as opposed to black, which is most often associated with storms or the signs of inclement weather. As with color, the weather, particularly storms, becomes a common element in the novel. The storms represent the ferocity of the outside world coming into Storm Boy's sanctuary. In other words, there is a parallel between white people and these storms. Both ravage the land with little concern for the ramifications. Storm Boy, Fingerbone, and his father must stand against these outside storms that invade the sanctuary both from nature and whites. In fact, Storm Boy receives his name one day by a group of campers who witness him seemingly lost on the beach during a fierce storm. When the men run to town to seek help, the postmaster wryly exclaims, "'That's Hideaway's little chap. He's your boy in the storm'" (Thiele 72). The implication is that Storm Boy seems at home among the safety of the sanctuary even amid destroyers and rough weather. Storm Boy, who is closely aligned with nature, is the character who can bridge the white and Aboriginal cultures. Like the blind man in *Oedipus Rex*, Storm Boy sees beyond the surface to form a deeper understanding, while adults remain blinded by their misunderstanding. Thiele's children are the characters that possess vision to see beyond the racialized hatred found in the adult world.

The passage in which Storm Boy, Hideaway, Fingerbone, and Mr. Percival save the stranded sailors from the ocean illustrates Thiele's metaphorical ability to use white and black to discuss Aboriginal relations in larger contexts. In the middle of a storm a tugboat has run aground on a sandbar, too far out for the men to swim to shore as the boat begins to break apart. Thiele states, "Storm Boy looked hard. There was a black shape in the white [...] with huge

waves leaping and crashing over it [the boat], throwing up white hands of spray in a devil-dance” (89). Again, Thiele uses the color white to signify a negative, destructive element. The *white* gale overtakes and threatens to destroy the *black* tugboat. The metaphor illustrates the motives of white Australians in their attempt to overtake and destroy the Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, using the term “devil-dance” to describe the sea again questions the Western Judeo-Christian ideas on good and evil. The evil is being cast in white terms instead of traditional darkness. Since it is the white society from outside that troubles the space in which Storm Boy, Hideaway, and Fingerbone share—the white hunters who shoot the birds, the townspeople who judge Hideaway, and so on—it is also significant that now a *white* storm should be attacking the group from the outside. In Thiele’s metaphor the white sailors are trapped inside the black tugboat by the “white roar” from the outside. Therefore, whites and Aborigines are both caught up in the system that perpetuates racist ideology. The fact the black tugboat is caught in the white gale that is occupied by white sailors signifies how racism can also negatively affect whites. Racism is destructive on whites just as it is on the intended casualty of white racism, Aborigines. The whites are installing themselves in the position of unsympathetic racist. They are unable to see the Aborigines as people. This separation deprives whites from forming true understanding and keeps them entrenched in racial constructs.

While Storm Boy and Hideaway function in a different space than other characters of the narrative, they never verbalize color words to connote Aborigines. Characters that move outside the space that Storm Boy and Hideaway share are not given the same interpretation. At the end of the story when Storm Boy, Hideaway, and Fingerbone work together with the aid of Mr. Percival to rescue the group of sailors caught in a storm, the thankful men say, ““you [Hideaway] saved our lives [...] you and your black friend, and especially the boy and the bird”” (Thiele 94).

The men use the word “black” to distinguish Fingerbone from Hideaway and Storm Boy. It is important to note that the men are outsiders who verbalize racial distinctions. Storm Boy and Hideaway do not make such statements. This scene is another demonstration of Fingerbone and Hideaway working together side-by-side. In consideration for saving their lives, the sailors offer to pay for Storm Boy’s education and have Mr. Percival stuffed and put in a museum as a tribute when he dies. Storm Boy, at the time, will not leave his father or Mr. Percival. As with many of Thiele’s books, the reader is left with an ambiguously unsatisfied feeling about its ending. Mr. Percival is killed by white hunters. Instead of taking the sailors’ offer to have Mr. Percival stuffed and put in a museum, Storm Boy buries Mr. Percival under his look-out atop of the sandhill on the beach. Storm Boy feels to stuff Mr. Percival and put him on display would not have been what Mr. Percival would have wanted. Ultimately, however, Storm Boy is indeed sent out into the world, away from the protection of the sanctuary and his family.

With Mr. Percival now dead, Storm Boy feels it is time for him to go to school and he leaves for Adelaide. While Storm Boy is away, Fingerbone comes and spends time with Hideaway who is lonely for his son as is Fingerbone for his friend. Thiele’s ending may suggest that as with the unresolved treatment in the white world toward the Aborigines, there is no “happily ever after.” White people have murdered Storm Boy’s pelican and ultimately driven him out of the protection of the reserve. As the Aborigines are persecuted by whites in the outside world, those white allies who stand up for Aboriginal rights are constantly in threat of being overtaken by an unsympathetic majority as well. Storm Boy, although ultimately deciding his own course of action, is pulled into the outside world under the belief it is for his betterment. Similar actions from the white world would force Aborigines to conform to their ways and customs. As the little family in the sanctuary is unlike those of the outside world, white society

must attempt to force this outlier to conform to their own culture. The criticism early in the novel from the outsiders who see Storm Boy being raised by a single father in a humpy by the sea was all negative. It is white society's belief that Storm Boy is most in need of the traditional education the white world can offer. The rescued sailors also offer Storm Boy an educational opportunity feeling that a life in the sanctuary is not suitable as he matures. None of the outsiders stopped to consider, as Thiele states many times, that Storm Boy was happy there. The consolation for the reader (and of course Thiele) is the belief that in the outside world Storm Boy will take the lessons he learned from his father and Fingerbone with him. For Thiele believes that education is not found only in books and classrooms but also in paying attention to one another and the lessons found in nature. Thiele's ultimate union of nature and the bridging of cultures reappear at the end.

The final passage of the novel further illustrates Thiele's use of color to make a statement on race relations in children's literature. Thiele writes:

And everything lives on in their hearts—the wind-talk and wave-talk, and the scribblings on the sand; the Coorong, the salt smell of the beach, the humpy, and the long days of their happiness together. And always, above them, in their mind's eye, they can see the shape of two big wings in the storm-clouds and the flying scud—two wings of white with trailing black edges—spread across the sky [...]. For birds like Mr. Percival never die.
(100)

This passage is another example of Thiele's ultimate idealization to bridge across cultural and racial boundaries in the novel. Black and white combines in Thiele's description of Mr. Percival to form a parallel between white and Aboriginal relationships. Mr. Percival's significance to those who loved him is described in epic detail. Like the Arthurian legends that keep alive the

idealism of Camelot and the Knights of the Round Table, Mr. Percival's legacy continues on after his death. Mr. Percival and the memories of life in the Coorong will live on in the hearts and minds of those who were brought together by his extraordinary life in a place that offered them much happiness and multicultural harmony. Although *Storm Boy* ends sadly, Thiele offers hope in this final passage. Mr. Percival's ability to unite individuals even in his absence becomes Thiele's idealization that Aborigines and whites can overcome racialized differences to form genuine friendships. When Thiele's young readers finish *Storm Boy* Thiele is optimistic they will carry that hope inside them and grow into culturally empathetic adults. For birds like Mr. Percival never really dies. The model that Thiele evokes in *Storm Boy* will also endure.

In *Storm Boy*, Thiele has for the most part presented an even portrayal of Aboriginal and white interaction. However, constructed color words and stereotypical dialogue impede Thiele from becoming completely successful. Fingerbone speaks of himself in the words of the white man. Fingerbone states: "No blackfellow throw spear so far" (90). As a white writer, Thiele's Aboriginal character uses color words instead of Storm Boy and Hideaway in order to distinguish himself as a black man. Other attempts in literature to make these distinctions have come mostly from white characters. Thiele is still drawing racial distinctions but his attempt is also to argue that Fingerbone's race is a non-issue for Storm Boy and his father. Thiele's further use of color in *Storm Boy* is significant in accentuating a broader perspective on the white domination of the Aborigines. An argument might be made that young readers may not understand the complexities of the issues that Thiele raises. For Thiele's readers, however, a deeper fondness emerges from the memories they share of Storm Boy, Fingerbone, and Mr. Percival. Steggall claims, "Storm Boy experienced his share of grief and pain, with the absence of his mother, the callous behaviour of the hunters and the death of Mr. Percival [...]. Yet his

life conjured up magic to the many readers who have shared it with him. His home, a sort of hiding place beloved of children, was a wild, windswept and wonderful place and Storm Boy was happy there” (201). Perhaps it was Thiele’s aim all along to instill the moral lesson in his younger readers that they too can be happy by respecting the land, its creatures, and above all fellow human beings. Thiele would continue to demonstrate this ideal in many works to come, including *Fire in the Stone*.

Fire in the Stone, published ten years after *Storm Boy*, is far more complex both in terms of Thiele’s combination of color terms and mixing of cultures. The outside world does not invade Coober Pedy as it does the sanctuary of *Storm Boy*. For the Aborigines and the whites in *Fire in Stone* already coexist. In terms of class, however, whites and Aborigines remain separate. In a broader sense Coober Pedy is the outside world and a more realistic interpretation of life in white Australia than the sanctuary. The sanctuary of *Storm Boy* is Thiele’s ideal place where invaders enter from outside in order to destroy wildlife and reify their prejudiced views of the Aborigines. In Coober Pedy the idealism of *Storm Boy* is not found in the same way. The racist language that forms whiteness does not need to enter from the outside. Racism is already very present in Coober Pedy. Coober Pedy is not an ideal place with idealized characters, but there is a promise that true understanding can occur amid the disharmony. *Fire in the Stone* is not, therefore, depicted by the same ideal space that pulls together a group of culturally-sympathetic people as in *Storm Boy*, unified against outside forces. The idealism in *Fire in the Stone* is represented, instead, by one character. Steggall argues, “The book is noteworthy for the way in which Colin [Thiele] developed the friendship between the non-indigenous boy and the Aboriginal boy, something first attempted in *Storm Boy*” (279). Ernie Ryan is the chief protagonist of the novel. Ernie showcases Thiele’s ideal vision that friendship may potentially

exist between white and Indigenous Australians. The unlikely friendship with an Aboriginal boy pits Ernie against the town that regards the Aborigines as inferior. Ernie's world is one of immediate danger in a threatening and unfeeling land. The danger comes from nature and the community. In "Colin Thiele," Alison Halliday argues that "Thiele's young characters have to realize that they are involved in 'a long unending struggle of man against nature, man against man, and, hardest of all, man against himself'" (290). Amid these constant struggles, Ernie continues to nurture a friendship with Willie Winowie, the Aborigine. Ernie must battle not only the townspeople, including his friends and even his father, but he must also fight within himself to separate from the racist ideologies that saturate white Australia. Because of their friendship, Ernie is more understanding of those who must bear the bigoted vitriol found in the white world. In this section, I explore further Thiele's ideal of bridging across racial boundaries and breaking down stereotypes vis-à-vis the friendship of Ernie and Willie. I also discuss the racist fervor that exists in Coober Pedy that makes Thiele's world a frightening place for children. Although Thiele is more successful than most writers who depict the Aborigine, there are questions about categorizations and the perpetuation of whiteness actions that should also be explored.

Ernie's home life parallels that of Willie. Both Willie and Ernie live in perpetual poverty and have family members suffering from alcoholism. Ernie and his father had come from Adelaide five years earlier after Ernie's parents divorced. Robbie Ryan had brought his son to the opal fields of Coober Pedy—an unrelenting dust bowl with little rain, where people lived under the ground in dug-outs like gophers—in the hopes of striking it rich. In *Sean and David's Long Drive*, Sean Condon calls Coober Pedy the Aboriginal name for "whitefella's hole in the ground" (60). The temperature in the summer can reach higher than 50° Celcius/122° Fahrenheit (Condon 60). Thiele's Coober Pedy is one that brings out the worst in human

behaviors where people will lie, steal, or even kill to obtain riches. If Ernie's father had any paternal affection before he came to Coober Pedy, it quickly died in this uncaring environment. Grey posits that "*Fire in the Stone* [...] is a somber story, evoking stark realism of life on the opal fields, and could be seen as a comment both on racism and the quality of life which some youngsters must endure, including that of Aboriginal children in our [Australian] society" (8). The quality of life for Aboriginal and white children who suffer from the "feckless and irresponsible behaviour towards [them] by their parents" (Grey 9) parallel one another.

Coober Pedy is a place of constant racism and men who are capable of violent actions. These characteristics do not make Coober Pedy the ideal place to raise children. The opal mining in Coober Pedy is an example of the greed of whites that Aborigines do not understand. Thiele mentions numerous times how the Aborigines were afraid to descend into the mines. The fact that white men would excavate deep under the earth for a slim chance to benefit from untold fortunes is impractical to the Aborigines' way of thinking. Those Aborigines who did fossick for opal in the dirt mounds shared their finds with the whole community. Ernie's father had made very minimal attempts to eke out a living for them, giving Ernie many grand promises. However, the dug-out had changed very little over the last five years they had lived in Coober Pedy. Some dug-outs had modern conveniences such as electricity and refrigerators and even air conditioners, but not the Ryans' abode. Robbie Ryan is a hopeless alcoholic dreamer, a poor provider, and neglectful parent to his son Ernie. The community ridicules Robbie and sympathizes with his son, who they feel is victim to his father's big schemes. Robbie would often leave his son alone for weeks at a time with no food or money in the house.

On his summer holidays digging in an abandoned claim, Ernie discovers a substantial opal find. The major plot of the novel concerns the theft of this opal and Ernie's search to

uncover the thief, who kills for more opal, putting Ernie and his friends in jeopardy. The subplot concerns Ernie's friendships with Nick Andropoulos and especially Willie, which becomes significant in interpreting Thiele's Aboriginal perspective. This perspective manifests itself in many ways, as Thiele revealed in *Storm Boy*. However, Thiele treats racism differently in the two novels.

Both *Fire in the Stone* and *Storm Boy* incorporate relationships between white Australians and Aborigines. Thiele, however, depicts Ernie and Storm Boy in different ways. Ernie's relationship with Willie is far more complex and multi-layered than that of Storm Boy. Age differences in the two boys explain the deeper maturity of Ernie and Willie's friendship versus that of Storm Boy and Fingerbone. Ernie and Storm Boy are both motherless and deeply sympathetic to the plight of Indigenous Australians. They also must deal with the threat of outsiders intruding upon their territories. The major difference is that Ernie must face these intrusions alone, whereas Storm Boy has his caring and sympathetic father. Ernie is without any substantial adult role model. Ernie's father is absent for the majority of the novel as all the other white adults in the town project extreme intolerance toward the Aborigines. Storm Boy has Fingerbone and his father to serve as protectors and offer moral lessons. The intruders in *Fire in the Stone* invade Ernie's own space where he views everyone as an equal. Ernie, however, is not as idealistic as Storm Boy. He must question his own belief system as he encounters pressures from the outside in order to reach an answer. Thiele's idealistic bond of Storm Boy, Fingerbone, and Hideaway is physically found in the sanctuary in *Storm Boy*. In *Fire in the Stone* the idealism is, instead, located inside Ernie himself, not a physical space.

Moreover, Thiele has created more depth with Ernie in order to illustrate the idealism that can exist when cultures are free from racial bigotry. Ernie and Storm Boy differ in many

respects. For one, Ernie is fourteen-years-old, whereas Storm Boy is only nine. Storm Boy has a loving parental role model. Ernie's father is a drunk and dreamer who leaves for long periods of time. Thiele explains from the outset that Ernie is a loner, much like Storm Boy and his father. Ernie has a few friends at school but would also not consider any of these bosom mates. Only with Willie does Ernie form a real kinship and sense of belonging. Ernie and Willie's relationship is far more realized than that of Storm Boy and Fingerbone. Fingerbone and Storm Boy are friends but the age difference puts Fingerbone in more of a caretaker role than peer.

Ernie and Willie face extreme opposition from the status quo that does not respect the Aborigines or their culture. The destroyers already exist in Coober Pedy and do not have to invade from the outside. Ernie and Willie are in constant danger from those who would do them harm. Steggall argues that Thiele's earlier experiment [*Storm Boy*] of idealizing genuine friendships across racial boundaries was very positive (279). However, "The children of *Fire in the Stone* [are] neglected and sad, one living in a squalid tin shed on a reserve [Willie] and the other in a hotchpotch squat [Ernie]" (Steggall 279). The bleak futures for these children worry the author as much as the reader (Steggall 279). Children should have "zest and hope with a life of promise ahead. In this unusual environment they [have] to contend with 'figures in the shadows, dangers, menaces, and threats' in an unfriendly adult world" (Steggall 279). Storm Boy's world, on the other hand, remains ideally serene and happy for his father and Fingerbone, even as trespassers defile their space. Ernie does not distinguish between people based on ethnicity and possesses his own personal discernment between right and wrong. Ernie remains Willie's friend and stands up for him even amidst the peer pressure of Nick who cannot understand the bond that Ernie and Willie share. Ernie possesses his own moral code that distinguishes right from wrong. Ernie views bigotry toward the Aborigines as wrong.

When Ernie's opal is stolen, the remaining bits Ernie had kept in his pockets are sold and the money put in the bank. Ernie sees protecting his income from being wasted on alcohol and other frivolities by his father as the right action to take and puts the money in the bank. Ernie knows his father is not a good provider and they have outstanding debts in town. Ernie also knows that his father would only squander the money, so he pays what debts they owed at the general store and deposits the remainder. Later, Ernie's father is angry that Ernie withheld the money from him. Ernie is compelled to give up his bank book to his father because of a sense of obligation and perhaps fears of physical violence. Robbie Ryan hastily withdraws the money and leaves town for a ramble. Ernie is willing to make a stand for those he sees being mistreated. Ernie believes the racism he witnesses toward the Aborigines, particularly his friend, is wrong. However, Ernie still feels a sense of commitment toward his father. Ernie does not have any real moral guidance to show him the difference between right and wrong. Ernie must depend on himself and his intuition without a functional family unit. Conversely, in *Storm Boy*, Storm Boy is given morality lessons from his father and Fingerbone. Ernie, on the other hand, serves as his own parent. If any familial bonds exist they are between Ernie and Willie not between Ernie and Robbie Ryan.

At one time in his life Ernie had two parents but also would never consider his family stable. Ernie still remembers his life before he came to Coober Pedy and the constant fighting between his parents. Ernie kept an old biscuit tin that his mother had once painted flowers on as a relic from his former life in Adelaide and his mother before she "cleared out for good" (Thiele 14). The biscuit tin is later where Ernie hides his opal. The theft of the opal in the biscuit tin signals the end of Ernie's connection to his past. As the tin represents Ernie's link to his mother, the theft of the tin, and with it the opal, severs Ernie's ties to both parents. The opal represented

a new beginning for the Ryans and a chance for a better life. Perhaps Ernie's parents would have reconciled. Ernie would become the provider for his family since his father was incapable or unwilling. The theft of the opal, however, dashes all those hopes. Finding the biscuit tin later in the novel among the rubbish of the thief's dwelling further severs those ties. Like the discarded biscuit tin among the trash, Ernie realizes he is himself expendable to his father and mother. Ernie must rely on Willie for his familial comfort. Without a responsible parental figure to admire including the mother who abandons him and an absentee, alcoholic father, Ernie must make a new family for himself through his kinship with Willie. Thiele is quite cognizant of what makes a family and the many different kinds of families that do exist. Ernie's makeshift "family" is reminiscent of the relationship found among Storm Boy, Fingerbone, and Hideaway Tom in *Storm Boy*. Ernie and Willie function at a much deeper level than best mates as the pair's connection intensifies throughout the course of the story. In fact, the two appear to become more like brothers than mere friends.

In Australian culture there exists the concept of "mateship." Mateship is an intense camaraderie that can exist between close friends. Edelson defines mateship as part of "the Australian ethos [...] a bonding and loyalty between friends, or 'mates'" (xvi). Many Australian writers have romanticized mateship in their poetry and prose, extolling its virtue and uniqueness to the Australian experience. Ernie and Willie share this mutual bond of mateship exclusively with one another. Ernie does not have the same relationships with his other mates. In *Fire in the Stone* Thiele uses the archetypical mateship ideal to depict the relationship between Ernie and Willie that is traditionally reserved between whites. The significant change in Thiele's portrayal is forming Ernie and Willie's mateship across racial barriers.

To contextualize Ernie and Willie's relationship, it is important to look at Thiele's depiction of Ernie and his interaction with the rest of the community as a whole. Thiele writes that when Ernie arrived in Coober Pedy with his father neither he nor his father realized how many weeks of hard digging it would take to gouge out the most minimal of homes with two tiny rooms (15). Ernie's father had said, "We'll camp here for the night, Ernie. And tomorrow I'll find a spot for a dugout. Then we'll be settled in a wink" (Thiele 15). Ernie admits that the "wink" turned into several winks. Five years later, Ernie and his father had nothing but a "squat in the hillside, a camp, a little hotch-potch" (Thiele 15). This time is intensely long and lonely for Ernie. Ernie endures five years of dirty, sweat-marked books in school, dust, and heat and cold (Thiele 15). Ernie is called a "loner" by his teachers and Ernie certainly keeps to himself. Ernie has a few friends like Nick Andropoulos, the son of Greek immigrants, who had come to Coober Pedy with his family to make their fortune in the opal mines, and Stan Henderson (Thiele 16). As asserted earlier, these were still not what could be called "bosom friends." Ernie's favorite companion is, instead, Willie. Thiele writes, "Only with Willie Winowie, a thin little Aboriginal in his own class, did he seem to have some real affinity; but even that was a strange relationship of silence and few words" (16). Although Thiele's remark that Willie is in Ernie's "own class" refers to school, the implications are that Willie and Ernie are more alike than not. Ernie does not see the same class distinctions that plague others in Coober Pedy. Ernie and Willie's relationship is strangest to his teachers. One day a teacher writes "colourless" next to Ernie's name in the records (Thiele 16). The significance of this action, Thiele claims, is that most people would agree that "colourless" mostly fitted Ernie. Ernie was not bright or dull, good or bad, just simply average. In a larger context the action is more important to Richard Dyer's scholarship on racial constructions through whiteness. White people do not racialize one

another, instead they racialize others. Whites in turn do not consider themselves a race, only the human race (3). White is a distinction, therefore, of the lack of color as opposed to being colored.

A whiteness reading of the designation of Ernie as “colourless” can also be interpreted to suggest Ernie’s friendship with Willie marks him as a peculiarity in the classroom as one who does not notice color. The term “colourless” is then most applicable to this description. Ernie is essentially viewed as colorblind or a sympathizer, incapable of viewing Willie in terms of colorized distinctions. The townspeople say, ““The Ryan kid, [is] always bumbling about on his own or noodling with the boongs”” (Thiele 16). The term “boong” is a racial epithet reserved for the Aborigines by whites. Thiele admits, “Strangely, if Ernie did feel partly at ease with anyone at all it was with the Aborigines at the Reserve” (16). Although Ernie feels at home on the Reserve and moves freely, “He seldom stayed long, unless Willie Winowie had a new pup to show him or a secret place he wanted Ernie to see” (Thiele 16). Ernie shows proper respect for the Aborigines’ home that many whites did not consider. The fact Ernie is a loner, has been taken away from his home in Adelaide, and has an unhappy family life can clearly explain Ernie’s need to find a new source of affection. However, Ernie is a more complex character than merely a boy seeking security. Ernie does not seek solace in people of his own race. Ernie sees firsthand the brutality and bigotry of the whites in Coober Pedy. Ernie had seen the bitterness between his parents and has endured five years of neglect and abandonment from his father. However, Ernie remains non-judgmental of his father and is empathetic to people in society who suffer more than himself. Grey argues, “Ernie, motherless and basically abandoned by his father, is often alone and hungry, but he does not blame others for his misfortune in life. In fact, he compares his life with that of his Aboriginal friend Willie, and sees someone whom he considers

to be even worse off than himself” (8). Grey misses the mark, however, in insinuating Ernie feels pity for Willie. Ernie identifies with Willie more in terms of their similar lot in life than a white boy feeling empathy for the “pitiful native.” Therefore, it is appropriate that Ernie’s strongest ally would be Willie, the Aboriginal boy, who is subject to similar hardships and unable to completely fit into the community.

Unlike Ernie, however, Willie’s isolation is based on skin color. The townspeople as a whole dislike and belittle the Aborigines just as Ernie receives the community’s judgments due to his father’s reputation and Ernie’s associations with the Aborigines. Ernie’s father exhibits racist behaviors, speaking racial slurs against the Aborigines. His father’s comments and bigotry deeply bother Ernie. Thiele writes, “Perhaps because of his friendship with Willie Winowie, Ernie always felt uneasy when white men on the field called the Aborigines *boongs* or *abos*. It sounded as if they were sneering at them” (25). Thiele presents an especially prejudiced environment of life in Coober Pedy. One day Mr. Toshi Hiramatsu, the Japanese opal buyer to whom Ernie had previously sold what opal he had stuffed into his pockets that had been left out of the tin, is savagely attacked and robbed. Ernie and Willie see a notice in town offering a \$200 reward for the person or persons guilty of the assault. Ernie considers the thief may have been the same person who stole his opal. In front of the general store a few Aborigines including Willie’s Aunt Merna are drinking wine and arguing with one other. Thiele writes, “Two middle-aged white women who must have come up from Adelaide that morning went tutting past saying, ‘Isn’t it dreadful,’ and, ‘That’s what happens with a weak Government’” (36). The passage clearly exemplifies the racial fervor toward the Aborigines. Unlike other writers, however, Thiele does not categorize the Aborigines based on skin color. Instead, he makes it plain the two middle-aged women are “white.” This assertion is in opposition to Dyer’s argument that whites

do not race themselves. Thiele, a white writer, is attaching race to the white women. Thiele goes further than any other white writer by treating the Aborigines to a less stereotypical portrayal. Aunt Merna also stands her ground against the white women, yelling, “Pull... pull your snooty heads in” and then falls off the cement slab (Thiele 36). This is different from Jimmie Blacksmith, for example, who is assaulted verbally and does not voice any opposition. Ernie sees Willie watching his aunt “with a queer sad look” and tries to cheer him up by offering Willie lunch, saying, “anything you like” (Thiele 36). Ernie’s act of kindness toward his mate is not the same as white society that tries to “bestow” its white ways on the Aborigines believing the Aborigines must be in desperate need to live as whites. Instead, Ernie’s actions illustrate true kindness among friends. Ernie’s feeling of ease on the Aboriginal Reserve may be that, Thiele writes, “Perhaps their [the Aborigines’] miserable humpies, the hovels or the wrecked car bodies some of them called home, were so much like his [Ernie’s] own that they could expect to understand each other” (16). Ernie exhibits empathy for his friend, Willie with whom he feels a kinship, aware that Aunt Merna and Robbie Ryan are not that unlike.

Despite demonstrating a cognizance for the Aboriginal perspective, Thiele sometimes falls short of a completely uninfected reading. Thiele writes: “Sometimes Willie went off to visit relatives on a walkabout, and then Ernie wasn’t likely to see him for weeks” (16). When Willie is away visiting relatives, Thiele refers to Willie’s trip as a “walkabout.” Willie tells Ernie he had been to Anna Creek visiting his Uncle Jacko, a stockman. Ernie asks, “walkabout?” to which Willie responds, “walkabout a bit” (Thiele 33). Although, the definition of “walkabout” changed around 1908 in the white world to mean a short wandering by an Aborigine in the bush as an occasional interruption from regular work, traditionally, a “walkabout” is a rite of passage in which Aboriginal males go on a journey into the bush during

adolescence for approximately six months, retracing the path or “songlines” that their Aboriginal ancestors had taken. Modern anthropologist and travel writer, Bruce Chatwin, in *Songlines* calls the walkabout a “ritual journey” (14). By using the white definition of “walkabout,” Thiele is not being consistent with the rest of his characterization of the Aborigines in *Fire in the Stone* by questioning other white stereotypes.

What Thiele does succeed in accomplishing with *Fire in the Stone* is the multi-layered multicultural friendship. The friendship, although set up prior to the action of the narrative, deepens as Ernie and Willie search for the opal thief and, along with Nick Andropoulos, fossick the old Bordini claim. Ernie and to a certain extent, Nick, begin to include Willie in their plans. Willie becomes a partner with Nick and Ernie in the opal mine. Willie accompanies them on the Easter holiday excursion at the Breakaway as Nick takes along his brother Con’s ute. Ernie exclaims that he, Nick, and Willie are “the three musketeers” (Thiele 94). Later, Nick begins to grow jealous of the closeness developing between Ernie and Willie and makes racist comments about Willie. As Thiele illustrates because of the deepening friendship between Ernie and Willie, Ernie becomes more empathetic. As Storm Boy imagined the Aborigines hundreds of years ago who lived on the land, Ernie too ruminates on the plight of the Aborigines and its effect on Willie. Thiele writes:

Ernie looked at Willie; his dark face was lit by the firelight, immobile, thoughtful. He wondered what Willie was thinking. About the past, maybe, when warriors and hunters camped here on the edge of the Breakaway, or danced a wild corroboree, or carried out secret rites that were part of the heart of his people, Ernie felt the vastness of distance of time crowding in no less than the vastness of distance. Where were they now, Willie’s people? Ancestors gone, legends and stories lost, hunting grounds rooted up by

bulldozers. The last poor remnants put into a Reserve—camping in sheds, drinking cheap wine, sleeping in motor bodies. (95-96)

Thiele's description represents both an apologetic author trying to explain the fragmented Aboriginal legacy and a fourteen-year-old boy whose burgeoning friendship with an Aborigine gives him a feeling of regret and guilt. Ernie is left with nostalgic shame because he is himself a white boy living on land where Aborigines once walked and hunted. To add to further injury, the Aborigines are pushed out by a merciless white community, their land plowed under and destroyed. The machines from the white world such as the bulldozers have plowed up all the land that once belonged to the Aborigines. The Aborigines now live in the cast-offs (car bodies) from the white world—on a reserve that whites created in order to contain the Aborigines and push them off Aboriginal lands. The final “gift” from the white world is alcohol. Ernie is consumed by the guilt of his own race. A common white excuse for past injustices is that the whites of the present are not complicit in the sins of their fathers. Thiele is breaking down that denial with his characterization of Ernie, who feels regret for the past. To make life in Coober Pedy more relevant, Thiele incorporates many different types of people into the town.

Thiele has populated Coober Pedy with the basic ethnography indicative of the greater Australian population. There are the Anglo-Australians, the Aborigines, and non-English immigrants. In “Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific” Melinda Greenblatt asserts that in *Fire in the Stone*, “Nick, son of Greek immigrants; Willie, an Aborigine boy from the reserve near the town; and Ernie, a ‘white Australian,’ form a microcosm of the town itself” (563). Greenblatt's placement of quotation marks around Ernie's position as a “white Australian” refers to his Irish status. Although the town is culturally intermixed, they seem united against the Aborigines. Proof of masculinity, particularly among the immigrant population in Coober Pedy, also drives

much of the intolerance. The prejudiced mind-set of the townspeople, however, is not only aimed at the Aborigines. The Italians and Greeks are often referred to as “wogs” or “wops” and even Ernie’s own Irish roots are a source of embarrassment. When Ernie must provide a middle name to the clerk when he opens claim on the old Bordini mine, Ernie submits “Kilklernan” The clerk inquires, ““Where the devil d’they get a name like *that* from?”” (Thiele 21). It is significant that the clerk refers to Ernie’s parents as “they,” even though Ernie had not mentioned before that it was his parents’ idea to name him “Kilklernan.” This assertion places the Ryans in the category of “they” or “other,” separated from white Australia. Ernie contritely responds, ““Mum did. It’s a place in Ireland somewhere. She and dad were always fighting about it”” (Thiele 21). Robbie Ryan had wanted his family to blend into Australian society, not have a reminder of their Irish ancestry. The exercising of masculine power becomes another racist component among characters in the novel that must put down the Aborigines in order to secure their own place in the community. However, as Ernie demonstrates a change in whiteness perspective, masculinity is also seen in a different way vis-à-vis Ernie. Ernie does not use his poor white status in the community as a reason to discriminate against minorities. Ernie’s Irishness is an embarrassment only in the sense his parents gave him such an unusual middle name. Ernie’s father, however, feels the Aborigines are gaining a higher position than him and begrudges the government aid that the Aborigines receive. Ernie is unaware of his father’s underlying motivation for asserting masculine prominence. Again, Thiele’s depiction of masculinity, like whiteness, is exhibited outside of Thiele’s ideal. Ernie represents Thiele’s ideal vision of the positive potentiality between Aboriginal and white interaction in the novel.

On the other hand, insecurity that the Aborigines might acquire a greater social position than he causes Robbie Ryan’s use of derogatory language in order to assert his own superiority.

When Robbie discovers his son has been holding out about his opal find and even has opened his own bank account, Robbie speaks sarcastically about Ernie and the Aborigines finding more opal by doing minimal work. Robbie says, ““Can’t beat you kids. You and the boongs. Do a slight better than half the blokes sweating their guts out down the holes [...]. Hundred dollars a week the boongs make, some of ‘em. Beat that. Bust it up on booze. Red Ned. How’d you be? Easy come, easy go. Feel like changing places sometimes—with the boongs”” (Thiele 57-58).

Thiele’s description of Ernie’s reaction to his father’s racism illustrates the transition occurring inside Ernie. Ernie says, ““Don’t keep calling them boongs”” (Thiele 58). Noticeably taken aback, Ernie’s father responds, ““Well, for crying out loud”” (Thiele 58). Ernie would stand up for the Aborigines and Willie, respectively, many other times after this exchange.

Ernie and Willie are the two characters who show the most development. Ernie’s father is basically a one-dimensional figure who never becomes a good father or provider and remains unwilling to value the Aborigines or his son. After the blowup with his father, Ernie is angry and ““For the first time he began to see things about his father that he had never seen before”” (Thiele 58). Robbie “plays” the model father when he is actually at home. However, Ernie and his father never fully develop a true father/son relationship. Ernie is completely alone in the way he feels toward others around him such as Willie and his family and the inequalities he encounters from the whites in Coober Pedy. Not only does Robbie not share in his son’s beliefs, he perpetuates the racism that Ernie witnesses. When Ernie needs parental encouragement in the mining enterprise with Willie and Nick, Ernie only receives a bitter stream of prejudiced vitriol from his father. Robbie asks who would be mining with Ernie. Ernie responds that Nick and Willie would be involved (Thiele 60). Robbie questions, ““Willie who?”” (Thiele 60). Ernie explains that he means Willie Winowie. Ernie’s father remarks, ““What, that boong kid?

Wouldn't know how to hold a shovel. Don't know what work is, them boongs'" (Thiele 60). Robbie does not know Willie's name because he, like so many other whites in Coober Pedy, does not see the Aborigines as people with names and faces. White society recognizes the Aborigines only through the whiteness constructions that divide groups based on race. Ernie explains that Willie works at school (Thiele 60). Incredulous, Robbie responds that Willie is probably "Just like the rest of 'em down at the Camp. Only get off their broads to collect Social Service, or maybe go noodling if they have to—when they're busting for a bottle of red hot bombo'" (Thiele 60). Again, Robbie comments that the Aborigines spend what money they receive on alcohol. The hypocrisy in Robbie Ryan's sentiments, as Ernie knows all too well, is that Robbie is a hopeless alcoholic. Robbie must judge others to deflect any guilt that he may feel himself. The same mind-set causes Robbie to begrudge Aboriginal aid from the government because they are black and not white like him. Robbie is a poor provider and leaves Ernie without any parental supervision or financial support for long periods of time. However, as the novel progresses, Ernie is becoming more confident by accepting his role as the outsider and holding onto beliefs that others might not necessarily share.

Ernie reacts very candidly to his father and for the first time expresses his belief that Willie is just like everyone else in Coober Pedy. Ernie explains, "'You don't even know them [...]. Willie's no different from Stan or Nick or Hoppy or me'" (Thiele 60). Ernie's father's reaction is a common white justification for the plight of those who are deemed unfortunate in society. Robbie responds, "'Well why doesn't he get cracking and get the hell out of that Camp then? Enough to turn you up, all those damned dogs and kids and relations all cooped up down there'" (Thiele 60). Robbie puts the blame on Willie for his situation, feeling that he can simply leave. Ernie quickly counters that is "Where his parents are. That's why the kids are there.

Same as Nick lives with his. Same as me” (Thiele 60). Ernie’s father becomes very quiet, although Ernie does not seem to notice (Thiele 60). Ernie, full of fervor, explains, “Kids have to depend on their parents. And a pretty raw deal they get sometimes too [...]. Not that it’s Willie’s dad’s fault, or Uncle Winelli’s or old Yirri’s. They’ve [the Aborigines] lost all their land, and the animals are gone. We’ve [whites] grabbed the lot. Except a Reserve like a cemetery. And a few tin huts. And a couple of wrecked cars. Big deal.” (Thiele 60). Robbie scolds his son that he is becoming “too big for his boots” and angrily storms outside (Thiele 60). Thiele has developed a very rounded character in Ernie Ryan who grows more respectful of Aboriginal culture as he grows into an adult. The fact that Ernie does so without any encouragement from his father is a testament to the kind of character Thiele envisions with Ernie. Ernie represents the Thiele ideal that racial equality can exist in the grown-up world if the adults thought more like children.

Ernie and Willie’s friendship becomes more realized as the two searches for the identity of the opal thief. A chance occurrence in town with the culprit pits Willie face to face with the bitter realities of the racial inequalities that exist in Coober Pedy. However, it is not until the last part of the novel that Dosh Debruzzi is revealed as the actual culprit, although his true character is suggested from the very beginning. While in town one day, Ernie and Willie witness a scuffle among some of the men and Nick’s brother, Con. The group throws rocks at one another and one nearly hits Willie. Willie picks up the rock “[gives] a great heave to hurl it back at the fellow who had thrown it. But [it] is veered off line a bit, up, up in a long high arc like a cannonball over toward the line of cars and utilities parked at the side of the road” (Thiele 90). Willie’s rock hits the windscreen of one of the utility vehicles that belonged to Dosh Debruzzi. Dosh proceeds to denigrate Willie with racial slurs. Dosh yells, “Damn boong” (Thiele 90). Dosh

“went straight for Willie. Before Ernie or anyone else knew what he was doing he [Dosh] had lunged at Willie with a huge open hand like a lion’s paw and struck him on the side of his head. It almost lifted Willie off his feet and sent him sliding down the road on his back in the dust. Blood started running from his nose” (Thiele 90). As Dosh threatens to unleash even more punishment on Willie, Ernie, at first afraid, finally takes a stone from the ground and confronts Dosh. Thiele uses the allusion of David versus Goliath. Thiele writes, “Somewhere deep down a primitive instinct [leaps] up in Ernie, a call to self-defence, a cry of outrage” (91) and he stands up for his friend. Ernie is normally the shy and meek boy who avoids trouble. Thiele describes Ernie as being “tugged all ways at once. He was naturally gentle, almost timid, and avoided trouble whenever he could. Just as his father avoided work. He guessed he carried a part of his father around with him wherever he went. But part of his mother too, and she’d been a determined woman, quick to stand up for her rights” (88). Ernie exercises his mother’s strength in this encounter with Dosh, who backs down and runs away to determine the damage to his vehicle. Ernie helps Willie to the shade and holds a rag to Willie’s nose until the bleeding stops. Ernie then exclaims, ““Gorilla! [...] Big hairy ape!”” Ernie’s comment directed toward Dosh is significant because whites are the ones who often refer to Aborigines in negative terms such as “ape” or “monkey.” Thiele is very aware of this fact and is now reversing roles. Ernie is using the words of the white culture that denigrates the Aboriginal people against his own race who he determines are nothing more than bigoted bullies and no better than anyone else. Ernie does not visualize his or Willie’s skin color as different. Ernie considers Willie and himself as equals and those bigots of Coober Pedy, whoever they may be, are the true outsiders. Coober Pedy may not respect the Aborigines in the same way that Ernie shows his respect, but “When he [Ernie] was finally pushed to the wall perhaps he could fend for himself” (Thiele 88) and his friends.

Dosh Debruzzi is only a small sampling of the intolerance and bigotry that exists in Coober Pedy. When Nick is injured on the excursion to the breakaway during Easter holidays, Ernie and Willie walk ten miles, carrying Nick on a stretcher, to seek medical help. Although, Nick's father forgives the destruction of the ute, the praise bestowed on Ernie and Willie does more to confirm Ernie and Willie's true place in Coober Pedy society. Nick's father says, "Ten miles [...] would you believe that?" [...] 'Robbie Ryan's lad.' [...] 'Well he's got guts.' [...] 'And that Aboriginal boy. Young Willie.' [...] 'Nothing to him; skinny as a whip-stick.' [...] 'Wouldn't think he had it in him.'" (Thiele 126). Willie is referred to as "that Aboriginal boy" and finally "young Willie." It can be said that at least Mr. Andropoulos knew Willie's name; however, he does not put much faith in Willie. Ernie's claim to fame in the community is being the son of Robbie Ryan in which little is expected of him. Later, when a group of tourists arrive in Coober Pedy to take photographs, the tourists exhibit another example of racial constructions. Nick, Ernie, and Willie have little patience for tourists who come poking about from the cities in the hopes of catching a glimpse of "the bush." Ernie calls the tourists an "invasion" (Thiele 129). A female tourist asks the boys to pose for a picture and Nick becomes more irritated. As the tourist organizes the boys for the proper poses, she remarks, "I know what's wrong, it's the balance [...]. The black one should be in the middle" and she points at Willie and Ernie (Thiele 129). As the lady snaps the photograph, her friend exclaims, "You're a real photographer now, Verna [...]. But you better watch out that they [Ernie, Willie, and Nick] don't charge you twenty cents each. Especially the Aboriginal" (Thiele 130). The women are exhibiting behaviors that are the essence of whiteness constructions. Verna refers to Willie as "the black one," ignoring the fact he has a name just as she has one. She also refers to Willie with the adjective form, "Aboriginal" substituted for the noun form of "Aborigine," which in modern culture, the

Aborigines deem as offensive. Among the tourists in Coober Pedy there is one man who Thiele names “a special kind of tourist” (134). The stranger seems sympathetic to the plight of the Aborigines in Australia and is Thiele’s version of McCreadie from *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. In both novels these characters serve as devices by the authors in order to form sympathy on the treatment of the Aborigines and make apologies on behalf of white Australia.

Despite the racist attitudes that exist around them, Willie and Ernie’s friendship begins to evolve and mature. During the ordeal at the Breakaway, Thiele sets up these changes that are occurring between Ernie and Willie. Thiele writes:

A strange bond was starting to form between them [Ernie and Willie]. Born out of self-blame and fear and a desperate need for hope and reassurance, it began to bind their lives in common suffering. Willie, full-blood and black, born in the barren squalor that had been thrust on his people by greed and in humanity; Ernie, strange white mixture, victim of his parents’ selfishness, failing son of a failure, drifting towards drift. (120)

Although Thiele is guilty of assigning color words to describe Ernie and Willie in racial terms, Thiele has given a good description of the commonalities that both boys share. Ernie cannot obtain any more assurance or hope from his father than Willie can from life on a Reserve that Ernie once refers to as a “cemetery” (Thiele 60). Ernie and Willie are linked with common struggles and have turned to one another for the assurances and hopes they need.

Nick sees the friendship between Ernie and Willie deepening. When Nick, Ernie, and Willie are in pursuit of Dosh, the opal thief, Ernie descends into the mine to look for the loot. Most Aborigines do not see the justification for digging out the earth in the darkness far below the ground. Although Willie has a fear of the mine, he goes into the mine to warn Ernie that Dosh has returned. For Willie to descend “down that black hole into darkness and danger [,]

must have stretched his nerve to the breaking point. It also told Nick something about Willie's friendship with Ernie—it was far stronger than anyone knew. For Willie to do a thing like this was almost like offering his life for Ernie" (Thiele 178). Nick's growing awareness creates a feeling of jealousy that culminates in him and Ernie nearly coming to blows over Willie. When Nick and Ernie want to continue to look for the stolen opal in the mine and Ernie insists they bring along Willie, Nick is not enthusiastic about the idea. Nick states, "Willie's not too keen on working below anyway; bit scared I think" (Thiele 193). Ernie stands up for Willie and explains that Willie is "not scared. Never been scared. Just not used to it, that's all. Down below" (Thiele 193). Nick thinks that Willie might have gone away to avoid the work, saying, "Gone walkabout. So he doesn't have to face it" (Thiele 193). Historically whites in Australia have been suspicious of hiring Aborigines to do work assuming they will simply leave with the job unfinished. Such was the case with Jimmie's employers in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. Nick is feeding into the general white mind-set that does not understand Aboriginal culture or the true meaning of a "walkabout." However, Ernie demonstrates that he is unlike most other whites. He angrily yells at Nick to be quiet and exclaims that he talks "such damn silly rot" (Thiele 193). Ernie and Nick continue to spar over Willie joining them to look for signs of Dosh and hopefully collect the \$10,000 reward. Ernie says that he will not go without Willie. Nick replies, "Because he's *black*, is that it?" (Thiele 194). Ernie spins around and Nick fears being pummeled. Instead, Ernie explains that there is a reward and he wants Willie to have his share. Ernie exclaims, "Why should Willie have some of the money? You tell me, Einstein" (Thiele 194). Nick then extends the predominant white rhetoric that Ernie's father had used previously. Nick says, "So he can bust it up on booze, like the rest of his mob" (Thiele 194). Ernie clinches his fists but does not hit Nick. Instead, Ernie says, "So Willie can go down South

[Adelaide], and get some training, and... and get a proper job [...]. Now, will you *shut up!*” (Thiele 194). Ernie is demonstrating deep warmth and caring for Willie’s future. The scene does speak to the white dictates that supports Aboriginal assimilation into the white world and the promise of a “better” life. However, Ernie’s explanation to Nick, based on the maturation of his character, is more of an attempt at this point in the novel to demonstrate genuine concern, not white superiority. Ernie also refrains from unleashing violence on Nick, like the white man would.

As with *Storm Boy*, Thiele’s ending for *Fire in the Stone* demonstrates that his style as a children’s writer is unique. The ending is also unresolved and achingly somber like many of Thiele’s other endings in his work. In the search for the stolen opal, Willie, Nick, and Ernie trip one of Dosh’s booby traps that causes the mine to collapse. Ernie aids in rescuing Nick and Willie from the mine. However, the extent of Willie’s injuries is so severe he is taken by the flying doctors to hospital in Adelaide. Although the boys find the stolen opal, Willie is in Adelaide and unable to obtain his share of the reward. The boys will receive \$3,300 apiece, to be given to them or their families. The thought of Willie’s condition is too much for Ernie to endure. Thiele writes, “Ernie drifted about listlessly, waiting for news of Willie” (Thiele 223). Whenever any newspaper or mail arrives at the hotel, Ernie hangs around waiting for any news. Ernie asks any tourist or stranger he encounters if they know about Willie’s condition (Thiele 223). Once, Ernie overhears two barmen talking. They say that ““the Ryan kid”” is always hanging around these days and it ““makes you cry to look at him”” (Thiele 223). When they mention that Ernie is awaiting news about Willie, the men refer to Willie as ““that Aboriginal kid”” (Thiele 223). Ernie is unable to find any comfort in Coober Pedy. Ernie overhears people speak of Willie’s condition in blasé terms without any honest empathy. Thiele writes that Ernie

“could not bear to listen to talk that was so casual, so unconcerned and heartless; talk that treated Willie like an animal or a package” (224). The aching inside Ernie to know about Willie’s condition is too overpowering and Ernie finally makes up his mind that he will go to Adelaide himself. A trucker who has arrived in Coober Pedy gives the news that Willie has died. Ernie, however, has already gone to search for answers and for the other part of himself that is now gone. As Ernie journeys onward, Thiele writes: “The stars gleamed icily, the wind marbled his cheeks. And beneath him, under his footsteps as he trod, lay the ancient seas of rock that had changed his life—the bands and wavering threads of potch and the sudden unspeakable fire still locked there inside the stone” (228). Ernie, once described as “colourless” because he did not follow the rest of white society does not fit that description. Ernie is colorblind in that he lacks the white mentality to categorize and judge others based on race. However, the title of the novel can be likened to Ernie. Like the fire within the stone, a light shines inside young Ernie Ryan—a light free of racial constructs and white prejudices that confound the adult world. The depiction of Ernie is the Thiele ideal. Thiele believes that if whites can regard others as people, then the world can open up to an array of different colors and textures that are not separating barriers, but instead unifiers.

For the time, Thiele’s style was not consistent with the majority of other authors of children’s stories, who pictured idyllic scenes with happy endings. Instead, Thiele was at the forefront of a movement in children’s literature that would dominate the genre for the foreseeable future. Thiele offers many questions about the plight of native wildlife and environmental abuses as well as human complicity. The reader obtains a glimpse at how cold and heartless the world can sometimes be for children. Thiele incorporates two very common problems in both novels. In *Fire in the Stone* Ernie wonders, “Even out here with just a handful

of them in the desert it was the same. Robbery, violence, poverty, racial abuse. Men could never get on with one another. Were never likely to” (Thiele 38). In *Storm Boy*, Hideaway tells his son, ““in the world [...] there will always be men who are cruel, just as there will always be men who are lazy or stupid or wise or kind. Today, you’ve seen what cruel and stupid men can do”” (Thiele 98). Thiele often leaves the reader with an ambiguous ending because there are no easy answers. Thiele’s depictions of the Aborigines do in fact share commonalities throughout his work with other white writers. As with other white interpretations, Thiele’s Aborigines are the source of prejudice among the white world and form spiritual connections to the land. However, Thiele’s Aborigines are generally accepted among his younger protagonists. Thiele’s children are often open-minded and more honest than the adults in these novels. Perhaps the key to the children’s ability to understand lies in the hardships the children face themselves. These children are often coming out of single-parent families or homes that include neglectful and abusive adult role models. Thiele’s children see firsthand the malevolence of an uncaring and unsympathetic world that also persecutes the Indigenous population. Left powerless and vulnerable, the children often seek solace from those members of society who are also mistreated and scorned. Thiele’s overall message by forming cross-cultural friendships is to demonstrate that Aborigines and whites can form these same friendships in the real world. McVitty argues that “*Fire in the Stone* sees Colin Thiele recognising the growing incidence of family breakdown in contemporary society” (210). However, much like the family unit presented in *Storm Boy*, Ernie and Willie must form their own surrogate brotherhood in the hopes of obtaining stability. This is the ideal that Thiele is arguing for in both *Storm Boy* and *Fire in the Stone*. Both novels present characters who defy the status quo to reach their own understanding about a people who lived in Australia first. Thiele’s aim is to educate young readers in the hope that the moral

lessons in his books will follow them throughout their lives. Walter McVitty quotes Thiele in McVitty's essay, "Universality in the Heart of Man." Thiele states:

One of the functions of literature for a reader of any age is the revelation of mankind to man—to comment on the variousness of the human condition, to heighten his awareness of the miraculous diversity of life. But the writer for young people has a different, perhaps far greater, responsibility: he must lead his young followers with that humanity and compassion he can compass to travel a worthwhile road to adulthood, avoiding brutality on the one hand and sentimentality on the other. (200)

Thiele succeeds in both *Storm Boy* and *Fire in the Stone* in reaching his call for responsibility. Although Thiele opens up a new representation not seen in books that depict the Aboriginal people, Thiele's novels also contain coded color words and separating barriers. Thiele's books are not perfect. However, Thiele does put his characters in positions that champion the underprivileged in society. In many cases, the characters exist in the same sphere. In *Storm Boy*, Hideaway and Storm Boy do not resort to using the color words that divide and categorize. If there is any mention of color in the novel it comes from the outsiders and destroyers who invade the sanctuary or from the Aborigine Fingerbone. The ideal exists in the space that Fingerbone, Storm Boy, and his father share in the sanctuary. In *Fire in the Stone* the Thiele ideal exists in one character, Ernie Ryan.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Since colonization, Aborigines have suffered bitter intolerance and racial prejudices from white Australia. Aboriginal rights have been withheld. Children were kidnapped and forced to become part of political schemes that benefitted whites. Lands were stolen to further an agenda of white separatism and denials were made that Indigenous Australians were even the first inhabitants on the continent. Such atrocities are in fact commonplace and unite Indigenous peoples worldwide. In *The Origins of Indigenism: Human Rights and the Politics of Identity*, Ronald Niezen argues, “Ethnocide and ethnic cleansing are among the most significant markers or sources of indigenous identity. Indigenous representations speak of the ‘gross violations’ of their peoples’ rights, if not in ways that make direct use of the abstractions of human destruction, at least in ways that reflect the meaning they encompass” (56). The pattern of dispossession and genocide of Indigenous peoples is seen all over the world from the Pacific to Africa to North America. All Indigenous cultures can commiserate over the systematic destructions inflicted on their peoples.

As Anglo-Australians destroyed the last of the full-blooded Tasmanian Aborigines by the end of the nineteenth century, Social Darwinist proponents began to prophesy the extinction of the Aboriginal race. Although this was merely racialized conjecture from a white nation that saw itself as superior, there was no question that the Aboriginal people and their culture were under attack. Niezen explains that “‘ethnocide,’ sometimes called ‘cultural genocide,’ occurs more often where the state has a firm grip over a subject people but is still striving to secure its national identity” (55). Australia at the time of Federation in 1901 was debating the question of identity and what bonded them together as a nation. In “Genocides of Indigenous Peoples:

Rhetoric of Human Rights,” Elazar Barkan states that the United Nations ruled Australia was in fact committing genocide in their removal of Aboriginal children. Barkan argues that “because Australia adopted the United Nations Convention against Genocide in 1949, which defines genocide as including, among other things, ‘forcibly transferring children of the group to another group, the commission concluded that the removals fit the legal definition of genocide, because the foremost purpose of the policies was the elimination of Aboriginal life and cultures” (129). Australia was slow in redressing any wrong-doings and it would be half a century before any progress was made toward contrition. The treatment of the Australian Aborigines in Australia is really only a sampling, as Indigenous cultures worldwide have suffered similar injustices and antipathy from the white world.

This study analyzes four novels by three white Australian writers who portray the Aborigine in their work. These writers are Thomas Keneally, Colin Thiele, and Patrick White. Each of their novels in this study represents a different historical time capsule in Aboriginal and white Australian history. All the novels with the exception of Colin Thiele’s *Storm Boy* were published in the 1970s, though the time frames in these novels range from the 1830s in *A Fringe of Leaves* to the early 1970s in *Fire in the Stone*. By tracing Australian history from the beginning of colonization until the late 1970s in which Patrick White’s *A Fringe of Leaves* was published, only a small glimpse has been shown of some of the atrocities committed by white Australia on the Aborigines and their culture. Though there is no way to catalog every injustice or express fully the trauma that Indigenous Australians have endured, attempts have been made in this study to recognize a few of the more egregious offenses perpetrated on Aborigines by whites.

In his Introduction to *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia*, J.J. Healy states the “Distance between black and white in Australia continued to be great in the nineteenth century, and remained considerable for most of the twentieth century. The literature Europeans wrote in Australia dealing with the Aborigine bears the mark of distance” (1). I shed new light in this study on why there is distance in both the authors’ interpretations but also between the white and Aboriginal characters who are portrayed in their works. Healy concedes that the literature written by whites about Aborigines also “bears the mark of a continual attempt to overcome the tyranny of cultural distance and to bring the Aborigine into focus” (1).

The writers in this study represent whites and their interaction with the Aborigine at various times in Australian history. Keneally’s novel depicts Jimmie Blacksmith, a half-caste Aborigine, based on the historical Jimmy Governor at the turn of the twentieth century. The gross brutality Jimmie commits is motivated in part by the vitriolic prejudice he receives from the white world. In the process of searching for his place among whites, Jimmie is confused by whites’ need to hate and belittle him when they are powerful on their own land. Blacksmith is told by white missionaries that if he tries to fit into white culture he might have a chance of being accepted or maybe even become white. Whites, after all, had been trying to assimilate the Aborigines by force for the last hundred years. Jimmie realizes that true acceptance would never exist for him in the white world. Jimmie feels he must act out violently in order to achieve any real justice. *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* presents Jimmie’s duality, unable to fit into either the Aboriginal or white world. He is the permanent “outsider.”

Patrick White’s *A Fringe of Leaves* takes place in the late 1830s retelling the events of the historical Eliza Fraser’s captivity by Aborigines after being shipwrecked. In White’s novel, Ellen Roxburgh must contend with a lackluster marriage, a domineering husband, an

unscrupulous and lecherous brother-in-law, and a repressive white society that treats her like a prisoner. As Ellen is metaphorically confined to her roles like the convicts and Aborigines, she must face her own prejudices from whites. Ellen's true freedom is not realized until she literally becomes a captive to the Aborigines develops an understanding of these people.

On the other hand, Thiele's *Storm Boy* and *Fire in the Stone* offer the idealization Thiele believes can exist if adults are as open-minded and accepting as his young characters. Thiele's children undergo many difficulties. Through each crisis the children are better prepared to understand fully the hardships and inequities sometimes found among others. Thiele's world is a frightening one with many dangers and cruel and neglectful adults. However, with such hardships, the closeness that Thiele develops between young whites and Aborigines make the world less frightening.

In all of these novels the Aborigine is represented through the eyes of a white author identifying what he feels Aboriginal and white interactions in Australia embody. The characterizations are not perfect but each demonstrates an attempt to understand Australia's history of racial dissonance. Whiteness and masculine constructions thrive in ordinariness in both the writers' narratives and in the interactions among the whites and Aborigines. The world that these writers inhabit is where ideological constructs such as whiteness, white male privilege, and other modes of separation exist in normal and invisible ways. Thus, by using whiteness and masculine studies, these racialized issues begin to surface in these writers' depictions that opens the door for debate.

In my analysis, I draw on whiteness and masculinity studies as theoretical frameworks to better communicate the racialized stereotypes that exist in these authors' depictions. As ideological constructions, whiteness and masculinity exist in the modern world in much the same

way. Both are enshrined with invisibility as white men are oblivious to the markers of their privileges. In *Talkin' Up the White Woman*, Moreton-Robinson writes:

Whiteness in its contemporary form in Australian society is culturally based. It controls institutions, which are extensions of White Australian culture and is governed by the values, beliefs and assumptions of that culture and its history. Australian culture is less White than it used to be, but Whiteness forms the centre and is commonly referred to in Public discourse as the 'mainstream' or 'middle ground.' (172)

Whiteness and masculinity exist in the normative realms of society. Both are invisible and both form the basis of race and gender discourses. Wadham argues that both masculinities and whiteness demonstrate how certain ways of "being" in Australian society are viewed as "normal" and taken for granted (194). He further argues that by the "normalizing" of alternate ways of "being" then all others become inferior (194). Whiteness and masculine constructions are at work when these writers make missteps in their portrayals of the Indigenous peoples of Australia. Constructions like whiteness and masculinity operate within cultural products like novels and within society. Whiteness and masculinity remain ever-present in society because they are shrouded in invisibility and ordinariness. Because whiteness and masculinity exist in normalcy and invisibility, their appearances in novels by white writers who portray Indigenous Australians illustrates the pervasiveness of racial discrimination in society. By calling attention to the existence of white and masculine constructs in the world, it is the hope that an understanding between different ethnicities can potentially exist.

Because much has taken place in Australian society since the 1970s in terms of political and social advancements for Indigenous Australians, efforts have been made in recent years by white Australia to redress some of the "sins of their fathers." However, white Australia

continues to have much for which to amend. These advances, though minimal, indeed give hope in a brighter future for white and Aboriginal relations. Because recent attempts toward reconciliation are significant in the future of race relations in Australia, a brief summary of the strides made in recent years to remedy past injustices and move toward reconciliation would prove beneficial in order to conceptualize how far Aboriginal and white relations have come since colonization.

Though minimal progress had been made before the late 1990s, especially with the Mabo decision that repudiated the *terra nullius* premise and other land rights decisions, the road toward true reconciliation began earnestly in 1995 with the acknowledgement that the Stolen Generations did in fact exist and by opening an Inquiry into their removals. Sabbioni posits, “Of all the negative policies brought to bear on the lives of Aboriginal people, the most traumatic to our society has been that resulting in ‘the stolen generation’” (xxvii). The majority of orphans were told that their parents and families did not want them (Sabbioni xxviii). As such, “The trauma is a continuing legacy, and Aboriginal people suffer daily from their experiences” (Sabbioni xxviii). The Inquiry and supporting testimony of those affected by their removals created many somber moments when bitter truths that had been largely hidden from the public’s attention finally were acknowledged.

With the official release of the *Bringing Them Home Report* in 1997 by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Susan Barrett in “Reconstructing Australia’s Shameful Past: the Stolen Generations in Life-Writing, Fiction, and Film” claims that “Things [in Australia] changed dramatically” (1). The *Report* was the first national Inquiry on the separations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (Barrett 1). Although Barrett argues that the *Report* was aimed primarily at non-Indigenous people and produced by the same

authorities who had been responsible for controlling the Aboriginal people in the first place, the document was an important milestone for Indigenous Australians (1-2). The *Report* contained stories from over 500 Australian Aborigines who were taken from their families by force between 1910 and 1970 and also included 54 recommendations on how the Australian government could make full restitutions (Barrett 1). As Kay Schaffer in “Manne’s Generation: White Nation Responses to the Stolen Generation Report” argues, an intense “bitter vitriol” emerged upon the release of the *Report* (1) from conservatives and those who felt they shared no complicity in past actions.

Prime Minister John Howard refused to make an official apology. In a 27 May, 1997, speech before the House of Representatives on the issue of which resolutions Parliament should consider on the question of the Stolen Generations, Howard claimed that all Australians should indeed acknowledge the “injustices of the past” (qtd. in Bird 126). However, Howard did not “believe current generations of Australians could be held accountable for or regarded as guilty for the acts of earlier generations over which they had no control” (qtd. in Bird 126). Howard further contended, “As an intensely proud Australian, along, I am sure, with all other Australians who have a balanced view of the history of this country, I am immensely proud of what we have achieved over the last two hundred years” (qtd. Bird 126). Howard’s reaction is in keeping with the conservative backlash to the *Report* and the challenges against historical interpretations that had been waged since *Mabo*. Howard declared, “I believe that the Australian achievement is something of which all of us should be proud. It has been a heroic achievement in the face of immense difficulties” (qtd. in Bird 126). Howard’s recommendation in regards to Australian reconciliation was to recognize white injustices but also for Australians to remain proud of their country’s past achievements and work together, united as Australians,

for a cooperative future (Bird 126). Opposition Leader Kim Beazley vehemently opposed Howard's position. Beazley acknowledged that some of the actions in the *Report* were committed when Labor was in power. For that, Beazley apologized and called for Howard to apologize. Howard, however, stuck to his position. In a speech before the House of Representatives on the same day, Beazley defiantly responded to Howard's position. Beazley stated:

These things [Aboriginal concerns] are therefore worth concentrating on and being concerned with as we sit down to think these issues through. They [the Aborigines] are not people to be toyed with politically in an Australian domestic context; they have been toyed with for a very long time and they do not deserve that. They are not people of substantial power in the community; they are not people to be feared. They are people to be treasured, and that is something that really ought to be reflected in the resolutions of this parliament. (qtd in Bird 129)

With the Liberals winning elections in 1996 and Howard government firmly installed, the *Report* was officially submitted to the Prime Minister in 1998 with pressure on him to apologize to the Stolen Generations and admit Australia's complicity in their removals (Webby xx).

The impassioned weight of what the *Report* contained moved many political leaders, including Kim Beazley, who wept on the floor of Parliament after reading the *Report* and pleaded directly to the Speaker. Beazley said, "Mr. Speaker, you cannot walk away from them. This chamber cannot walk away from them. The government cannot walk away from them. They have to be confronted. There are processes which you can do that. You can do it the easy way, or you can do the hard way. The easy way is to allow a motion to proceed to make the first step of restitution: that is the apology." (qtd. in Bird 132-133). The motion did not come from

anyone in the leadership. Senator Rosemary Crowley of the Labor Party from South Australia made a passionate and personal response and apologized to the Aboriginal peoples (Bird 133). Bob Brown, representing the Greens from Tasmania, also made an official apology (Bird 153). Howard and the Liberals received criticism from those who wanted an official government apology, including Robert Manne, Associate Professor of Politics at La Trobe. In *The Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Manne accused Howard and other Australians of rationalizing the removals by saying that they were “well-intentioned” (Bird 143). Manne went on to be scurrilously critical of Howard by punching holes into his argument with supporting historical data. Many more criticisms toward the Liberals’ position followed, but the Liberals refused to budge on the issue of making any formal apology. Howard’s continued refusal and attempts to challenge advances in Aboriginal land rights by proposing amendments to the Racial Discrimination Act to limit further claims hindered any progress toward reconciliation for the next eleven years.

Despite the Liberal loggerhead, the importance of the *Report* in paving the way to Reconciliation was very significant. Ronald Wilson the President of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission that released the *Bringing Them Home Report* writes in the Preface to *The Stolen Children: Their Stories* that the *Report* is no ordinary one. Reading the *Report* he admits is hard to do for some people. Because some of those who told their stories were not required to “prove” they were true, there was some who attacked the credibility of the *Report* (xiii Bird). Wilson argues, “There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the stories we were told. Altogether, the commission listened to 535 personal stories of forcible removal and had access to another thousand or so in written form. In general terms, each of those stories was

corroborative of the substance of all the others” (xiv Bird). The submissions, some confidential, others public, along with the subsequent testimonies, were very difficult to hear.

In Carmel Bird’s Introduction to *The Stolen Children: Their Stories*, which he edited from selections that appeared in the *Bringing Them Home Report*, he cites a confidential submission (number 65) from a woman who was fostered since she was two months old in Tasmania, 1935. She writes: “I’ve often thought, as old as I am, that it would be lovely to have known a father and mother, to know parents for even a little while, just to have had the opportunity of having a mother tuck you into bed and give you a good-night kiss—but it was never to be” (13). This was one of countless such testimonies, all with the same heart-wrenching story. Bird posits that the “Report documents a terrible grief and loss, and highlights the troubled relationship that exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The relationship is a critical and dramatic element in our history, imbued with tragedy and sorrow, affecting the lives of all of us, and until it is fully examined, acknowledged, and mourned, there can be no reconciliation” (2). On 26 May 1998, National Sorry Day, though not sanctioned by the government, was commemorated by Australian Aborigines, “mourning for the tragedies and losses suffered by Indigenous people of Australia” on the anniversary of the release of the *Bringing Them Home Report* (Bird 2). In “Sorry Time,” Jan Mayman writes: “Sorry Time was eerie music, like a rising wind:/the song of tribal Aborigines in mourning” (qtd. in Bird 2). In December 1997, a formal government response was made on the *Report* (Bird 5). No apology was offered by the government on behalf of Australians, but \$63 million was set aside to promote health and welfare and repair language and culture within Indigenous communities (Bird 5). Howard’s Liberal government never made an apology.

In 2007, campaigning on a platform offering an official apology to the Stolen Generations, Kevin Rudd challenged the increasingly unpopular Howard administration whose involvement in the Iraq war and failed domestic policies led to an anxious electorate. Liberals' crushing defeat positioned Labor to take charge of Australia once more. Kevin Rudd became the new Prime Minister and soon made good on his campaign promise in 2008 to make an official public apology. On 13 February at 9:00 a.m. in a televised ceremony, Rudd apologized:

The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future. We apologise for the laws and policies of successive parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians. We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country. For the pain, suffering and hurt of these stolen generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry. To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry. And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry. (*Sydney Morning Herald* para. 5-10)

Both Kevin Rudd and Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin received standing ovations upon entering the Federal Parliament at Canberra. Dylan Welch of the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported, "Former prime ministers Paul Keating, Bob Hawke, Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser and Sir William Deane were all seated on the floor of the Parliament as well as 17 people representing the stolen generation" (Welch para. 5). The apology, containing 361 total words was completed by 9:30 a.m. (Welch para. 4). John Howard was not in attendance. Although

reconciliation and acknowledgment of white Australia's devastation on Aborigines was slow in coming, perhaps with Rudd's apology a new chapter can be written in Australia's treatment of Indigenes.

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NOTES

¹The Uluru and Kata Tjuta (the Olgas), 335 km (450 km by road) southwest of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory was a particularly important land rights debate in the late 1970s and 1980s. The claim was in relation to the 1,142 ft. high rock formation known as Ayers Rock and based on the traditional stories associated with them by the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people. Although the motel owners at the tourist destination, wrongly concluded the claim was for the land on which they operated, in “The Early Land Claim Experience,” Geoff Eames asserts that the story may have, in fact, gained credibility due to an incident that occurred at the hearings (42). Phillip Toyne, the solicitor for the Pitjantjatjara Council, arrived dressed in a T-shirt that borrowed upon the popular slogan that appeared on tourist souvenirs: “I climbed Ayers Rock!” Toyne’s shirt read: “I claimed Ayers Rock!” (Eames 41). The motel owners were especially unpleasant with the claimants, who finally left due to the motel owners’ racism (Eames 43). The legends surrounding Uluru have been well documented over the years. The area is a very sacred one for the Aboriginal people and many superstitions have arisen regarding tourists who pillaged pieces off the great Sedimentary. Travel writer Sean Condon discusses some of the stories in *Sean and David’s Long Drive*. Condon writes about a man who worked for an unscrupulous tour company that “against all native laws and park regulations, removed pieces of the sacred Rock and sold them later, far away in places like Surfer’s Paradise [Gold Coast, Queensland]” (87). Reports of bad luck immediately surfaced from those people who had bought the rocks (Condon 87). There was such an apparent outrage that the man went back to Uluru and “deposited a carload of envelopes full of returned Rock-bits” (Condon 87). Tourists who take rocks from Uluru are often reported to become cursed and suffer misfortune. There are several reports of people who removed such rocks attempted to mail them back to various agencies in an effort to remove the perceived curse. In “Rock Theft Brings Bad Luck,” an article for *The Age* by the Australian Associated Press, reported in 2003, “Thousands of rocks, along with samples of soil and sand, have been sent back to the park from such far-flung places as Germany, France and Spain, but also Australia, over the past 15 years” (para. 4). The largest rock fragment, according to the article, was sent from Germany and was 7.5 kg in 2002 (para. 9)

² Redfern is a suburb of Sydney.

³ The Botany Bay Colony near Sydney was the first penal colony set up by the British in the deportation of convicts from England at the tail-end of the eighteenth century. Elizabeth Webby writes in her Introduction to the *Cambridge Guide to Australian Literature* that there is “Much debate among Australian historians as to why in 1786 the British government decided to dispatch a small fleet of eleven ships, carrying officers, marines, and 736 convicted felons, to found a penal settlement at Botany Bay in New South Wales” (6). Jeremy Bentham in 1812 wrote, that the transportation “was indeed a measure of experiment... but the subject-matter of experiment was, in this case, a peculiarly commodious one, a set of *animae viles*, a sort of excrementitious mass, that could be projected, and accordingly was projected—projected, and as it should seem purposely—as far as out of sight as possible” (Hughes 2). During the expedition of the First Fleet and after there was much writing of letters and journals and as Webby claims, “Several of the officers already having an eye on publication” (7). By 1790 a second settlement was erected at Norfolk Island and two further settlements by 1803 at Van Diemen’s Land near present-day Hobart in Tasmania and Port Phillip Bay near present-day Melbourne (Webby 7). As Webby

writes, “Over the next fifty years, Van Diemen’s Land was to experience the virtual wiping out of the Indigenous population with the rapid spread of European settlement and the growth of the wool industry” (7). Webby claims that a plantation-society existed in Tasmania not unlike the American South, with ornately-built edifices and a class of landed gentry (7-8). However, the worst offending of the convicts were sent to Van Diemen’s Land and especially Port Arthur which created “a much darker colouration in the Australian imagination” (8). In 1855 the last convicts were transported to Van Diemen’s Land and in 1856 it was renamed Tasmania (Webby 8) after Abel Tasman. Beginning in 1788, with the arrival of the First Fleet, the transportation of convicts from England ended in New South Wales in 1840; Van Diemen’s Land in 1855; and Western Australia in 1868 (Webby xi-xiii). An accurate number of convicts transported to Australia vary. According to historian Robert Hughes in *The Fatal Shore*, A.G.L. Shaw in *Convicts and Colonies: A Study of Penal Transportation from Great Britain and Ireland to Australia and Other Parts of the British Empire* (1966) puts the number at 156,000 and Lloyd L. Robson in *The Convicts Settlers of Australia: An Enquiry Into the Origin and Character of the Convicts Transported to New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land 1787-1852* (1965), around the same number, with others as high as 162,000 (611). Hughes writes that “due to defects in the record, the true number will never be precisely known” (2).

⁴ The story of Trucanini is an especially sad one. Hughes claims that the last Aboriginal man of Tasmania, William Lanne, died in 1869, who was known as Trucanini’s “‘husband,’ although he was twenty-three years her junior” (423). There was a dispute over Lanne’s bones when the Royal Society of Tasmania and the Royal College of Surgeons in London both realized that Lanne’s bones may have some value as a scientific specimen (Hughes 423). Hughes writes, “Dr. William Crowther, representing the Royal College of Surgeons, sneaked into the morgue, beheaded Lanne’s corpse, skinned the head, removed the skull and slipped another skull from a white cadaver into the black skin” (423). As Hughes further relates the scheme was unraveled when “a medical officer picked the head up, ‘the face turned round and at the back of the head the bones were sticking out.’” (423). Angered at the Royal Surgeons, officials from Tasmania were committed to disallowing the Royal Surgeons access to all of the corpse, cut off the hands and feet and threw them away (Hughes 423). The cadaver was officially buried, but exhumed the next night and dissected for its skeleton by members of the Royal Society (Hughes 423-24). Hughes writes that one of the representatives of the Royal Society remarked it was a “‘dirty job’” (424). The skeleton later disappeared as did the head which Crowther had sent by sea to the Royal College of Surgeons in England. Hughes writes, “The ineffable doctor had packaged it in a sealskin, and before long the bundle stank so badly that it was tossed overboard (424). Trucanini was despondent when she learned of the fate of Lanne’s body and was further worried of the retribution from the evil spirit Rowra (Hughes 424). Trucanini begged a clergyman to wrap her body in a bag with a large a stone at her feet when she died and for it to be thrown into the deepest part of the D’Entrecasteaux Channel (Hughes 424). Hughes posits that by “1873, the last of her black companions [were] dead and Trucanini was taken to Hobart, where she lingered on a wretched aura of colonial celebrity, invented by the whites, as the ‘Queen of the Aborigines.’ One May evening in 1876 she was heard to scream, ‘Missus, Rowra catch me, Rowra catch me,’” suffering a stroke and slipping into a coma for five days (424). Trucanini’s last words were: “‘Don’t let them cut me, but bury me behind the mountains’” (Hughes 424).

Trucanini was given a very public funeral with large crowds, who followed her coffin to the cemetery and watched it being lowered into the ground. Hughes reports, however, that the coffin was empty, “fearing some unseemly public disturbance, the government had buried the corpse in a vault of the Protestant Chapel of Hobart’s Penitentiary the night before” (424). However, Trucanini’s corpse was dug up in 1878 and “sloughed the flesh off her bones, then boiled them and nailed them in an apple crate, which lay in storage for some years” (Hughes 424). The crate was going to be discarded when someone at the Art Gallery realized it was the corpse of the deceased Trucanini. Trucanini’s bones were then strung together and put into a glass case at the Hobart Museum (Hughes 424). Public and humanitarian protestations in 1947 forced the museum to move the skeleton to the basement where it remained until being cremated in 1976 at the centenary of Trucanini’s death. Trucanini’s ashes were scattered in the waters of the D’Entrecasteaux Channel (Hughes 424).

⁵A.O. Neville was the administrator depicted in Doris Pilkington’s account, *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* and the subsequent Miramax film adaptation directed by Phillip Noyce, *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002).

⁶ In American terms, this notion was known as “manifest destiny,” the belief that the United States should extend from one ocean to the other. By early religious ideologues, it came to convey the spread of Christianity to the “dark and heathen” continent. The first Puritans settling in New England had a sense they were “destined” by God to establish a religiously, morally, and politically *pure* nation. The Australian premise of *terra nullius* took on similar attitudes by the dominant white culture in the belief they were entitled to possess the Australian continent as “unclaimed land.” The sentiment is also why the mission settlements such as in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* were set up to “Christianize the heathen.” Consequently, up into the twentieth century, there was a belief in some circles that the country should be a “pure,” *white* nation, aided by government supported “Australia White Policy.” Throughout Keneally’s novel there is a strong belief among whites that the whites are the ones entitled to the land and deny Aborigines any claim of ownership.

⁷ In American terms, the accommodations between the dominant ruling culture and the Indigenous populations are historically documented. Many Native Americans were forced onto reservations despite government and tribal treaties. As with the Australian Aborigines, thousands of Indigenous Americans died due to white man’s ills, including disease, the introduction of alcohol, starvation, and massacres. Consequently, the parallel between both cultures continues in the modern world. Alcoholism and poverty remains a major problem among Indigenous cultures. The plight of the Australian Aborigine seems to receive more notice than that of Native Americans, perhaps due to the disparity of populations between the United States and Australia.

⁸ The term “imagined communities” is the name of the book and theoretical premise articulated by Benedict Anderson. Anderson claims that a nation is a community socially constructed that is imagined by people or a group in order to perceive themselves as part of that group. Anderson defines a nation as “an imagined political community [that is] imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (5). An “imagined” community is different from a real one because it

does not involve face-to-face interaction between its members. Instead, members hold on to a mental image of their affinity to the “nation.” Anderson argues, a nation “is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). In the novel *Jimmie Blacksmith* voices his patriotic fervor at times because to him and the Australians at large, patriotism is the mode of being Australian. Since the imagined, but accepted, premise of *terra nullius*, the colonials were linked together by their common British background. Now becoming a diverse, but white dominated “nation” at the time of Federation, Australians had to confront the issue again of their ownership. As with *terra nullius*, the Australians must now form a new “imagined community” to join themselves together as one white country opposed to the Aborigines and other marginalized groups and separate from the nation which brought many of the whites there in chains from England as convicts.

⁹ Like the Constitution of the Federation of Australia, the American Constitution did not recognize Native Americans, black slaves, women, or non-landed whites.

¹⁰ David Roediger’s research, though mainly contextualizing the immigrant influxes into the United States post-Civil War, is applicable to the other former Anglo-colonies undergoing individual searches for identity in terms of nation-building. It is important to note the political issues at work in the United States and the mode in which the Irish regarded the former slaves as important in demonstrating the Irish need to prove whiteness and exert masculine power. Antebellum American sentiment saw the Irish as considerably inferior in respect to the other mostly Anglo-German and Scottish stock. Furthermore, “low-browed and savage, groveling and bestial, lazy and wild, simian and sual—such were adjectives used by many native-born Americans to describe the Catholic-Irish ‘race’ in the years before the Civil War” (Roediger 133). The ferocity of the insults to the Irish matched some racial epithets reserved for blacks. In fact, in many cases the Irish were regarded as “black.” Roediger writes, “in Antebellum Philadelphia, according to one account, ‘to be called an ‘Irishman’ had come to be nearly as great an insult to be called a ‘nigger’” (133). Consequently, Roediger further cites diarist and Whig, George Templeton Strong, who considered the Irish workers who worked for him to have “prehensile paws” as opposed to hands (133). The need to fit into American culture led many Irish to become involved in pro-slavery groups before the Civil War. The extent of prejudice was wide. Some considered “the Irishman [were] a ‘nigger’ inside out” (Roediger 133), while the Census Bureau, who took records of native and foreign populations, separated the Irish from the latter, relegating them to their own distinct group (Roediger 133). Cartoonists of the day also characterized the Irish as apes (Roediger 134), leaving the question in doubt if the Irish were really white. Additionally, the comparisons between blacks and Irish might also relate to environmental and historical reasons as opposed to biological. The Irish and the blacks, according to Roediger, often worked and lived side by side in the slums of the American cities of the 1830s (134). Similarly, both groups engaged in hard work, were poor, and often vilified (Roediger 134). American abolitionist Frederick Douglass on a tour of Ireland in 1845-46 during the potato famine likened the wails of anguish among the Irish to that of the slaves back home (Roediger 134). The need for the Irish to prove their whiteness and exert masculine dominance through owning land or possession of wealth became most important. It was also true in Australia as demonstrated with Mr. Healy in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. Similarly,

Jimmie uses the constructs of possession and ownership he learns from the white world as a frame of reference for becoming white.

¹¹Andrew Lang was a real man of letters who wrote folk and fairy tales as well as dabbling in anthropological pursuits with *The Secret of the Totem* in 1905. Lang's work, however, is a hodgepodge of various totem believing cultures around the world and hardly an Aboriginal cultural primer.

¹²Nolan is most noted for his series of paintings dramatizing notorious bushranger Ned Kelly.

¹³Van Diemen's Land was later renamed Tasmania after Dutch explorer Abel Tasman.

¹⁴Dame Edna Everage is the cross-dressing alter-ego of Australian author and humorist Barry Humphries.

¹⁵The women's factory was the gaol or prison that housed the female convicts. Although White does not state to which factory Holly is sent, one of the more famous factories is in South Hobart. The female factory, as well as numerous other gaols around Tasmania, still remain and serve as tourist attractions.

¹⁶Battery Point is now an historic section of Hobart noted for its very old homes.

VITA

MATTHEW ISRAEL BYRGE

- Personal Data: Date of Birth: January 2, 1977
 Place of Birth: Oak Ridge, Tennessee
- Education: M.A. English, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City,
 Tennessee 2010
 B.A. English and Speech with a Theatre Concentration, East
 Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee 2006
 Public Schools. Anderson County, Tennessee
- Professional Experience: Graduate Assistant. Writing and Communication Center. ETSU.
 Spring 2009.
 Tutor. Writing and Communication Center. ETSU. Fall 2008-
 Spring 2009.
 Student Teacher. Honors Composition. Dr. Katherine Weiss.
 ETSU. Fall 2008.
 Research Assistant. English Department. Dr. Katherine Weiss.
 ETSU. Fall 2008.
 Research Assistant. English Department. Dr. Phyllis Thompson.
 ETSU. Spring 2008-Fall 2008.
 Student Teacher. British Literature I. Dr. Phyllis Thompson.
 ETSU. Spring 2008.
 President. Alpha Psi Omega. ETSU. 2005-2006.
 Vice-President. Alpha Psi Omega. ETSU. 2004-2005.
 Tutor. Student Support Services. ETSU. 2004-2005.
 Aide. English Department. University of the Cumberlands. 1997-
 1998.
 Tutor. Academic Resource Center. University of the Cumberlands.
 1996-1997.
- Scholarly Presentations: “Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* and Rise of the Gothic Novel.”
 Johnson City, TN. Southeastern American Society for
 Eighteenth Century Studies. Spring 2010.
 “Fence Building: Physical and Moral Boundaries in Doris
 Pilkington Garimara’s *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*.”
 East Tennessee State University Southern Appalachian
 Student Conference on Literature. Fall 2009.
 “A Good Man Is Hard to Find: The Invisibility of Men in Sean
 O’Casey *Juno and the Paycock* and Christina Reid’s *Tea in*

a China Cup.” Louisville, Kentucky. South Atlantic Modern Language Association. Fall 2008. (Poster)
“What He Did for Love: Michael Bennett, Social Reformer on Stage.” Georgia State New Voices Graduate Conference. Paper read by conference chair. Fall 2006.

Publications: *Reading Beckett: A Fragment (Play). The Mockingbird.* ETSU. Spring 2009.

Honors and Awards: Third Prize Drama. *The Mockingbird.* ETSU. Spring 2009.
Ronald E. McNair Scholar/Intern. Ronald E. McNair Post-Bacheloreate Program. ETSU. 2005-2006.
Service Award: President of Alpha Psi Omega, ETSU. Spring 2006.
Bert T. Combs Leadership Award. University of the Cumberlands. Fall 1996.