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Abstract

Writing on the interplay of class and religion in the formation of the Australian party system, Judith Brett (2002) draws attention to the tendency for Australian historians to valorise class-based explanations over any others. Brett questions the emphasis on class as the determining factor for political allegiance among Australians, and suggests that the role of religion has been largely ignored by historians writing in the last sixty years because of their bias in favour of a classbased explanation. It would seem that there is similar bias in literary criticism, with class-based assessments predominating over other approaches in Australia.

STELLA BORG BARTHET

Religion, Class and Nation in Contemporary Australian Fiction

Writing on the interplay of class and religion in the formation of the Australian party system, Judith Brett (2002) draws attention to the tendency for Australian historians to valorise class-based explanations over any others. Brett questions the emphasis on class as the determining factor for political allegiance among Australians, and suggests that the role of religion has been largely ignored by historians writing in the last sixty years because of their bias in favour of a class-based explanation. It would seem that there is similar bias in literary criticism, with class-based assessments predominating over other approaches in Australia. The result is that both works of literature and of criticism are sometimes judged according to the perceived status of the writer rather than on actual content. In this article I will draw attention to some examples of class-based criticism to indicate its limitations and the possible misreading it can generate. Furthermore, through the reading of works by David Malouf and Thomas Keneally, I will question the connection that has been made between high literariness and the symbolic endorsement of the White nation in Australia.

The tendency to over-emphasise class can be seen in Ken Gelder's article, 'Politics and Monomania: The Rarefied World of Contemporary Australian Literary Culture', where the author writes of 'Tory libertarian literary sentiments' (52) that privilege a 'rarefied aesthetics — epicurean, tasteful, stylish, delicately cultivated, decadent' in much contemporary Australian writing that is canonised by 'Tory' journals (49). In his article, Gelder uses the word 'Tory' at least nineteen times to describe writers as various as Frank Moorhouse, Gail Jones, Helen Garner, Murray Bail, Robert Dessaix, Gerald Murnane, David Foster, Paul Sheehan, as well as several critics. It would seem that Gelder is in search of a highly rarefied political purity that makes him snub too many writers too summarily. Gelder sees Elliot Perlman's *Three Dollars* as 'one of only a few' examples of contemporary Australian fiction that might be claimed by a genuine Left, presumably because all other works show 'Tory libertarian literary sentiments' (54, 52). Moreover, Gelder's highly polarised approach leads him to look on criticism as territory to be possessed and protected from trespassers. The 'important' question the supposedly exceptional *Three Dollars* raises for Gelder is this: 'to which side of the political spectrum does realism — literary realism, critical realism belong?' (55). The defensiveness of this type of criticism and its marked tendency to label so much of contemporary Australian literature as 'elitist' is worrying. There

seems to be a certain partisan narrowness at work in this approach leading one to wonder whether some literary criticism in Australia is being hampered in the same way that Julia Brett suggests for its historiography. The question that articles like Gelder's raise is whether this kind of literary criticism is the result of over-emphasising class and ignoring other significant factors.

The charge of elitism has been levelled at some of Australia's most original writers as in the case of Patrick White and David Malouf. Some of the odium directed at these world-renowned novelists spills onto critics who value them, and onto academics who continue to teach them despite their unfashionableness in parts of Australia. In his 2003 Colin Simpson Lecture, David Marr reminded listeners of the inimical reception of Australian critics to Patrick White and showed how the political parties' championing of art and artist has led to a return of that 'exaltation of the average' that almost scared White away from Australia. As Marr notes, 'writers face the same predicament 50 years later as the old philistine culture of Australian politics reasserts itself' (online). Marr points to an arrogant attitude towards artists, a 'hands-on abuse' where artists are 'directed what to write and paint by politicians, preachers, teachers and journalists' (online).

Like Marr, I believe that some Australian critics need to remember that 'no commentator can ever tell a writer — a true writer — what to write' because 'that's the wrong way round' (online). The focus on class and elitism is influencing critics to subject writers to narrow notions of political correctness that do not make much sense as literary criticism. In her discussion of *The Conversations at Curlow Creek*, Brigid Rooney applies Pierre Bourdieu's idea of the embodiment of the sacred in 'high art and literature' (2007 67) to David Malouf, whom she sees as pursuing 'the literary project of promoting settler-belonging, and of sacralising nation' (2007 67). It is, perhaps, a pervasive and excessive class-consciousness that makes even a sensitive critic like Rooney turn prescriptive at times, as she does when she suggests that David Malouf left out an important scene in *Remembering Babylon* (2007 69). Deciding what a writer should have written is surely not a valid way of reading him. Following Gelder, Rooney defines the literary in terms of a classist detachment from the common reader:

I use that slippery term literary...an impossibly chameleon category...as it's defined by Ken Gelder: the most constant feature of the literary is the writer's attitude, posture or intention towards readerships, which often manifests itself as discomfort with or refusal of the exigencies of mass readerships and the market. The literary attitude signals detachment from the market and its commodifying demands. (2007 66)

As Rooney suggests, Malouf cultivates 'the national imaginary' through 'his characters' quest for spiritual healing' (2007 66, 68) and also, I would suggest, by complicating distinctions of class and wealth among the white settlers. Rooney writes of Malouf's writing as being 'expressive of a refined literary habitus' (66), a place and role he maintains with care:

He is not alone in such a pursuit: the coalescence of literature, nation and the sacred performs a central role in the legitimation and consecration of writers, and likewise in the reproduction of the Australian literary field. (2007 67)

The sacred, it would seem, is little more than the writer's means of obtaining ascendancy in society. Rooney goes on to argue that a 'crucial scene missing from *Remembering Babylon*' (69) is provided in *The Conversations at Curlow Creek*, as 'Malouf's novel answers critics of *Remembering Babylon* who had 'read the book as distorting and suppressing realities of the colonial frontier, thus itself colonising Indigenous bodies and history' (69). Rooney suggests that Malouf's answer to the critics of *Remembering Babylon* is in the episode where the trooper Langhurst connects with the black tracker Jonas after Garretty causes him to break into 'a high pitched wailing' by narrating his uncanny experience of border violence (Malouf 114). I think *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* certainly treats not only the memory of border violence but even the lived experience of it. One of the troopers, Jed Snelling, had recently been killed by the spear of an aborigine. I have argued elsewhere that Malouf's description does not allow the reader to accuse the whites of cruelty or of murderous intentions (Borg Barthet 2008). Many settlers who lived through border violence were themselves victims of empire and conquest. They had simply tried to survive in a world that treated them as harshly as many blacks, and thus they were justified in their claim to some share of the land.

I would agree with Brigid Rooney that Malouf spatialises narrative 'to hold back or defer its linear, temporal impulses', thus allowing 'mediative crossings between past and present' for Lachlan Beattie in *Remembering Babylon* and for Michael Adair in *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* (2009 126) As Rooney shows, 'the observer figure comes to self-acceptance through quasi-sacramental images of metamorphosis or fusion that occur in suspended time' (126–27). Rooney states that 'the arrest of time signals aesthetic rather than political resolution, returning us to and affirming the literary' (128). I would argue that the arrest of time in Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* and *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* affirms the literary by showing its relevance to contemporary politics.

The Conversations at Curlow Creek certainly focuses on frontier violence but this does not mean that the darker elements of colonial history are ignored in *Remembering Babylon*; far from distorting the past in the earlier novel, Malouf helps readers to imagine it in all the complexity, contradictoriness and ambivalence of its humanity. Gemmy Fairley, like Patrick White's Jack Chance in *A Fringe of Leaves*, is a white 'exile' who has lived with Aborigines for several years. He is not a 'fake black' as Germane Greer suggested but a hybrid character that opens up a space between white and black for a contemporary Australian identity (qtd in Davis 4). His position on the edge does not displace the blacks who are portrayed as owners of the land and who accept him only 'guardedly' as was 'proper to an in-between creature' (Malouf 1994 28). I have suggested elsewhere that Malouf

creates a grotesque body in Gemmy Fairley to open up a new space between conflicting cultures (Borg Barthet 2001).

For Malouf, the making of Australian consciousness, the construction of the ‘imagined community’ of the nation, requires a re-working of the relationship between settler and indigene, a task that may be less difficult to achieve after rifts of class and race among British settlers are healed. Malouf’s fiction underlines the hardship undergone by all British settlers, whether of Anglo-Saxon or of Celtic race, of Protestant or Catholic religion, and suggests their unity in his fiction by erasing some of the features that distinguish the Irish.

In *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* the central character is an ambivalent figure, an Irish officer in the English army, brought up as both heir and orphan and struggling to find a cohesive identity and the inner peace that would enable him to go home to Ireland and his love Virgilia. The action of this novel takes place in the nineteenth century, it is partly set in Ireland and partly in Australia and many of the characters are Irish. There is not, however, a single mention of Catholics and Catholicism. Replacing the confession that the condemned bush-ranger Daniel Carney expects when Adair first enters the hut, the purification rite undergone by the bush-ranger before his execution is a climactic episode in the novel described in non-sectarian religious terms such as ‘laved’ and ‘the sanctity of things’ (199–200). The cleansing ritual is ‘aesthetically-charged’, as Rooney states, and, I believe, it sacralises the White nation, through an assertion of unity among Australians of British descent (2007 70). While I believe that Rooney’s suggestion that there is a ‘crucial scene missing’ in *Remembering Babylon* is mistaken, I certainly agree that Malouf adheres strongly to ‘his vision of national healing through the reconciliation of opposites’ in *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* (2007 8). As Rooney distances herself from the class-obsessed atmosphere generated by some Australian criticism, she makes some truly insightful and thought provoking comments: ‘Perhaps the spiritual continues to work in *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* as a category that ultimately contains the political’ (2007 70).

The ‘spiritual’, however, is still often seen as a mere dressing for ‘real’ socio-political positions. Writing of Australian historiography, Brett explains that ‘most historians writing in the secular second half of the twentieth century have preferred to see religion as a somewhat awkward fellow traveller of class interests, rather than as an agent in its own right, endowing people’s political commitments with moral conviction’ (45).

The Conversations at Curlow Creek underlines the hardship undergone by all settlers and suggests their unity by erasing distinguishing features such as the Catholic religion. Malouf’s desire for unity between Catholic and Protestant, Irish and Scottish, Welsh and English emerges clearly in the Boyer lectures.¹ In his essay, ‘Made in England’, Malouf puts forward what Rooney aptly calls Malouf’s own ‘cosmopolitan style of Australianness’ with its ‘urbane adaptiveness’, an openness towards difference which may indeed help ‘recover a better national self against a dangerous tide of fear and paranoia’ (2009 133–34). Malouf is

conscious of the role of history in politics, conscious of the systems that turn past events into present historical facts and he does his part in his fiction to heal the rift between Protestant and Catholic in Australia and to defend the position of the white population there. Far from showing ‘a refusal of the category of the “political” in favour of a high literariness’, as Lyn McCredden has suggested (qtd in Rooney 2007 68), Malouf’s work demonstrates how aesthetics — and religion — can be political.

Although the symbolic mode of description is used by Malouf to promote settler-belonging, the national imaginary is not the only meaning generated by *The Conversations at Curlow Creek*. Patrick Morgan, for example, reads the novel as ‘an Australian variant’ of ‘an archetypal Romantic story’ involving the contrast between the orphan and the heir (2). It is also a story ‘of two warring potentialities within the same personality’ (Morgan 2), and I would add, a parable about an uneasy survival that is ever needful of absolution, as well as a story about telling stories that make life possible. As Morgan’s reading of *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* shows, Malouf’s fiction does more than assert the rights of the white race. Similarly, *Remembering Babylon* has generated a reading by Justyna Sempruch which applies the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida to show how Malouf addresses ‘the dichotomy of being (oneself) and the other as entangled in the metaphysical thought of Western reasoning’ (1). Sempruch’s exploration of being and language in this novel yields the political: ‘*Remembering Babylon* is remembering the mixture of resistance and assimilation, remembering the failure of exchange as well as an attempt to move beyond that failure, which in the end seems to connect variously defined diasporic stories’ (7). The concern here is that such valid and rich interpretations may be foreclosed through the prejudice against ‘elite’ writing and reading.

Australian author Peter Carey has spoken of the ‘tall poppy syndrome’:

Basically, the tall poppy syndrome is that if you have a field of poppies and one poppy gets taller than the rest, the head gets chopped off. And that’s how we generally celebrate success in Australia. (Boswell para. 20)

Peter Carey’s admonition should be taken on board by Australian criticism. It is perhaps only too easy for the common run of humanity to fear and even hate someone who is simply and innately more intelligent than others. Most people can, however, recognise the green-eyed monster in themselves and keep it under control.

Apart from the narrowness of excessively class-based literary criticism, I would like to suggest that it may be too simple to equate high art and literature with the sacralising of nation in Australia without enquiring into the equally nationalist projects of writers who cater for middlebrow and even mass readerships as these can be just as involved in justifying the claims of settlers on the Australian land. In this respect, it is interesting to see that while Malouf is indicted for ‘sacralising’ the White nation, Thomas Keneally’s more prosaic endorsement of White nationhood is rarely, if ever, questioned.

Keneally is seen as a writer whose work is not, like Malouf's 'expressive of a refined literary habitus' (Rooney 2007 66). Some Australian academics have indeed denounced Keneally for his prolific output and presumed financial success. As Peter Pierce puts it

It seemed that Keneally's many books had attracted academic disdain, rather than respect for his capacities as a writer. To be prolific and popular was evidently — for some — a sin against literary propriety. To have remained a best-selling author for so long seems to have compounded Keneally's offence. (4)

The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith (1972), was short-listed for the Booker and brought international fame for Keneally. In this novel the subject position is occupied by the half-aboriginal Jimmie, so that Keneally would seem to be taking a very responsible attitude to fiction by ensuring not merely that 'crucial scenes' are not missing but that his own imaginative sympathy is devoted almost wholly to a character and a culture that was all but destroyed by colonialism.

It turns out, however, that just as Malouf is guilty by omission, Keneally is equally guilty by commission, although he is immediately absolved of the crime of foreclosing 'aboriginal subject positions outside the realm of white liberal objectification', since he 'has since questioned his approach to the writing of the novel' (Davis 14).

It seems that Keneally has absorbed the lessons of his critics — or learnt how to deal with their prejudices. In his interview with Robin Hughes in September 2002, Keneally states that now that there are a number of capable Aboriginal writers who can tell their own story, now that he has lost the recklessness of youth, he would not 'presume to put [him]self in the mind of a tribalised half-Aboriginal half-European' but would now make it a point to maintain the 'cultural courtesy' of leaving Aborigines to tell their own story (Hughes 94).

At this point of the interview, Robin Hughes raised the question of how it was that Keneally felt at liberty to write about women, about Americans, about Eritreans but not about Aborigines. Keneally's answer about having written from the point of view of an observer, not from the point of view of an Eritrean in *Towards Asmara* (1989), did not change the fact that following independence in 1993, UN observers for the referendum 'had to read' Keneally's book, a fact that has given Keneally one of his proudest moments (Hughes 97).

If it is fair to contend — with the author himself in this case — that one should leave Aborigines to tell their own story, then it follows that this should also be the case for Eritreans. Even if Keneally's book does not usurp the fictional Eritrean subject position, through the book Keneally subsumes the role of the living Eritrean writer. Reading Keneally means that UN observers need not find out anything from, for example, the Eritrean, Wolde Yesus Ammar, whose book *Eritrea: Root Causes of War and Refugees* was published in 1992. My argument, however, is not that Keneally cannot or should not write about whoever or whatever inspires him, but that Keneally is inconsistent in what he says about

what a writer can be permitted to write. If he admitted himself blameworthy in the case of Aborigines, he should certainly not have found his own substitution of the Eritrean author a matter of pride.

Although Keneally's style is very different from Malouf's, he has frequently made use of 'the sacred' in his fiction. In contrast with Malouf, however, Keneally's sacred is often a specifically Catholic rite. I would like to suggest that Keneally's use of religious characters and themes in his fiction has been just as useful as Malouf's highly refined 'sacralising' literary style in endorsing a particular kind of Australian nationhood and that it may therefore be too simple to conflate the pursuit of a national sacred with the world of high art.

Keneally's *A Family Madness* is set in Nazi-dominated Belorussia in the Second World War and in the Australia of the 1980s. The characters inhabiting war-torn Europe include both positive and negative Belorussian and German characters, but East European immigrants in 1980s Australia all bring a dark, barbaric past with them and constitute a grave danger to the innocent Australians. Irish-Australian Delaney is at great risk from the Kabbels who have 'an armoury adequate for starting a small revolution' (15) in their apartment, and especially from Danielle Kappel who is about to ruin his marriage to Gina Terraceti, a second generation Italian who has inherited 'the honest and ancient connection with the Earth' of her Sicilian father and who could bring Delaney 'the meat, bread and greens of love' (22).

Although Delaney's obsession with Danielle is the result of his Catholic education with the De la Salle Brothers, there are answers for Delaney's predicament in Fr Doig's mature, secularised version of Catholicism. This humane, open-minded, homosexual priest blames the church for Delaney's lack of emotional maturity. When Delaney was a sixteen-year-old student at De la Salle, Brother Aubin had emphasised the need to maintain an ideal love where the beloved remains forever the only one desired, '*Ti mon seul desir*' (78). In this atmosphere sexual passion is a 'runaway monster', and now that Delaney has to admit his passion for the young Danielle Kappel, he can only imagine that his love for Gina had not been perfect. As Fr Doig tells him, Delaney cannot compromise: 'Because the church told you your sexual passions were runaway monsters which would tear your house down. You have to tear your house down now that the monster is out of its cave. Now that there's such a thing as desire, you have to throw Gina away' (264). Fr Doig has made his own rational arrangement over sex and the only consideration that stops him telling his parishioners about the one man he loved is the knowledge that it is not 'within their means to take it in' (323).

Keneally challenges readers to accept Fr Doig's moral code, an Australian secularised Catholicism that admits homosexuality, and promotes honesty, maturity, and a reasoned approach to sex in all relationships. Fr Doig secularises his church to promote a social unity led by Irish Australian values. He throws out

almost all the statues in the local church to the chagrin of older, more traditional Catholics like Delaney's father: 'He says that the Infant of Prague is Czechoslovak or something, and that St Therese was only patron saint of Aussie while the place was a missionary country, and that's not on any more' (40) With the same honest humility of Graham Greene's whiskey priest in *The Power and the Glory*, Andrew Doig inspires readers with an 'Australian' code of ethics that attracts readers who are bred on liberal European values. His secularised morality can encompass different cultures and thus absorb potential challenges to the Anglo-Celtic centre of power.

The morality and the culture that *A Family Madness* serves is multicultural in accepting some Europeans in the Australian nation. It suggests, however, that tomato-growing Italians and their progeny are much safer members of society than are Serbs and Belorussians, who bring dangerous atavistic group dynamics with them.

The Catholic church in Australia, now run by the Australian-born, has increasingly recognised the need to carry out its mission in the multicultural ambience of contemporary Australia. Even if devotional practices are still predominantly Irish, the integration of European immigrants is a powerful trend as can be seen from the high level of participation on the part of Poles in the Australian Catholic church. But who, for Keneally, is to be integrated into the Australian nation? Keneally's novel highlights the Catholicism of his wholesome characters and these are Irish and Italian, the Delaneys and the Terracetis — almost nothing is said of the religion of the dangerous Kabbels of Bellorussia or of the Serbs who knifed Delaney's friend Stanton within an inch of his life. Like other decent Australians of the 1980s, Delaney was at risk from Eastern Europeans to whose alien culture, he 'was a stranger and barely held a visa' (187).

Written seventeen years after *A Family Madness*, *The Office of Innocence* (2002) makes a different use of Catholicism to respond to the more recent and stronger challenge of US influence in Australia. The novel is set in wartime Sydney and the protagonist is the Catholic parish priest Fr Darragh. His struggle with Master Sergeant Fratelli of the US army tests Australian decency against a materialism that deadens people to violence and to evil. The violence that America condones is brought out through the treatment meted out to Private Gervaise Aspillon, the black soldier who is arrested by the American military police for desertion after spending a few days with a white woman at her house in Lidcombe. The police corner the unresisting Gervaise Aspillon and open fire on him and on Father Darragh in the flimsy wood barn, needlessly and recklessly risking both their lives. At Lidcombe, Darragh learns first hand of the corruption and cruelty of Australia's liberators. Darragh realises that although Americans were supposed to be the saviours of the Christian world, the chances of survival for Private Aspillon in the military prison are pretty slim after he has challenged society by acting on the assumption that a 'nigger from Luisiana' could enjoy the same privileges that other Yanks enjoyed in Australia (202).

For Fr Darragh, the difficulties he has with America are paralleled with those he has with Monsignor Carolan and with the church hierarchy. As he matures, Darragh breaks free of the imperial hold of the Vatican, Britain and the US to emerge as an independent Australian with an individual conscience who can grapple with wider political and moral questions.

In *The Office of Innocence* the attitude of ‘decent’ Australians in war-time Sydney towards the US and Britain is predicated on class. This is brought out through Mr Connors and Mr Regan who support the prime minister, John Curtin, for having ‘defied Churchill’ by bringing the Australian troops gradually home from the middle-east (208). They also support Curtin’s ‘brave plan to cooperate with the Americans’ — ‘because Mr Churchill isn’t interested in our welfare, he thinks we’re *bad stock*’ (208). What the Connors and Regans have not yet tested is the depth and extent of America’s egalitarianism. As Fr Darragh is realising, their chain of command, like that of the Vatican, shelters those who abuse their strength, men like Fratelli, who started the fusillade upon Gervaise Aspillon in the hut. As the Australian private who informs Darragh of Fratelli’s responsibility in the shooting of Aspillon and the priest in the wood barn says, American soldiers think of Australians as hillbillies ‘even *their* hillbillies think we’re hillbillies’ (163).

Equality and justice will not come from the US army or from the Vatican. Catholicism, surprisingly however, can be a fount from which Australians may nourish themselves in the struggle for social justice. Through *The Office of Innocence*, Keneally withdraws from a Vatican that is ‘deep’ in the fascist state of Italy, from the politics Pius XII, under whose picture, Darragh grows increasingly uncomfortable. At the same time, a more Australian version of Catholicism — that espoused by Aunt Madge and Kate Heggarty, and of which Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical of 1891, *Rerum Novarum*, is the leading light — is presented as having answers for contemporary Australians. Kate Heggarty is determined to teach her son to consider poverty as ‘the sin against the Holy Spirit’ because it ‘debases people to a state where they have no virtues because they’re at animal level’ (81). *Rerum Novarum*, as Kate’s father used to explain, was the ‘Church’s answer to Karl Marx’, an aspect of Catholicism that can satisfy the hunger for social justice. Bravely for the time, it advocates the formation of working men’s associations ‘so organised and governed as to furnish the best and most suitable means for attaining what is aimed at, that is to say, for helping each individual member to better his condition to the outmost in body, soul, and property’ (Leo XIII online).

While a decent income is a moral necessity, Keneally’s novel shows that material wealth often joins hands with abusive power. For Kate Heggarty, this means that sometimes, ‘capital goes to Mass and communion, and the poor go to hell’ (81). At this point, Darragh is not ready for Kate’s insight into the complicity of the church as empire (that is, the Vatican in the Second World War) in the exploitation of the poor. He experiences it first hand when Monsignor Carolan

will not let the orphaned Anthony go to the non-Catholic Mrs Stevens according to his mother's wish, but would have him delivered to Killcare orphanage, to be stamped with the 'automatic stigma' of orphanhood (211). Darragh is now ready to plot 'with a plump, ordinary woman of non-Catholic background against a monsignor and nameless expert nuns' (212).

As he prepares to meet with Kate's murderer Fratelli, Darragh enlists the help of the communist Trumble. Keneally's novel reminds Australians of the unusual but traditional sympathy between Catholic values and aspects of Labor thinking in Australia to combat the capitalist aggression that fires American militarism in the new century. One year after 9/11 sparked off the war on terror, Keneally's *The Office of Innocence* gives a timely warning to an Australian government that sent its men to Iraq as naively as, years back, their forebears were packed off to Gallipoli.

Keneally presents Catholicism as a force that can encourage people to question a powerful establishment. Driving back from the orphanage where young Anthony Heggarty has been left, Fr Darragh experiences a conversion like that of St Paul on the road to Damascus. He now knows that his vocation as a priest may demand disobedience of the Vatican. He has learnt to look at his community and to ask 'God, source of all I am and home to what I might be, what would You have me know, and what have me do?' (216).

Keneally presents Fr Darragh's commitment to the hunger and pain of his community as a sacred vocation, the sacraments he performs connecting New South Wales 'to eternity' (5). Keneally's use of the sacred is embedded in a prosaic style of writing that appeals to the mass of readers. Unlike Keneally, Malouf utilises a richly metaphorical style to signal the sacred and satisfies the demands of a highbrow readership. The political aims of the two writers are also very different, with Malouf promoting a city style of Australianness that is open to different cultures aimed at diminishing xenophobia; and Keneally stressing the Republican aims of dissociating Australia from imperial masters past and present. Despite these differences, both Malouf and Keneally sacralise Australia as a nation, suggesting that the marketplace is as good as academia in promoting settler-belonging, and that the sacred in Australian fiction does more than secure the legitimacy of the White nation.

NOTES

- ¹ In Boyer Lecture 6 'A Spirit of Play', Malouf argues that before the 1960s 'the strongest of all divisions' in Australian society was 'the sectarian division between Protestants and Catholics':

When I was growing up in Brisbane, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Catholic and Protestant Australians lived separate lives. They might have been living in separate countries. The division between them, the separation, the hostility, was part of the very fabric of living; so essential to life here, so old and deeply rooted, as to seem immemorial and impossible of change.

Catholics and Protestants went to separate schools and learned different versions of history. Secondary students even went to different dancing classes, and when they left school they played football with different clubs... People knew by instinct, at the first meeting, by all sorts of tell-tale habits of speech and attitude, who belonged to one group and who to the other. And these divisions functioned institutionally as well as at street level. Catholics worked in some areas of the Public Service; Protestants in others. In Queensland, the Labor Party was Catholic; Protestants were Liberals...

...Part of the bitterness behind all this was that Catholics were almost exclusively Irish, so that the division had an ethnic and historical element as well as a religious one. It was a continuation on new ground of the history of Ireland itself, based on ancient resistance to English invasion and tyranny, and on the English side on a fear of Irish subversion and a deep-rooted contempt for Irish superstition and disorderliness. All this created its own mythology. (Malouf, 1998: para. 15, 16, 17)

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