__Conclusion__

> Our European ancestors have perpetrated evils which, I hope, still have the power to horrify us today. We are a people with a shameful past, a people who cannot assume the moral high ground as if we have a single noble heritage. Our soul has been numbed by the crimes that shame us … Who are these immigrant Australians, these people who committed the atrocities and evils described in the previous chapter? As descendants of these Australians, who are we today? What kind of power led us to perpetrate such barbaric deeds?[1]

Ultimately, ancestry is a very malleable resource for literary expression, and every writer is likely to use it in different ways. Thomas Keneally's and Christopher Koch's novels are just some examples of the many ways that ancestry can be used, but these authors' differences are also complemented by notable similarities. In their deployment of ancestry within historical fiction they imply that ancestry must produce some sort of relationship with history, although their individual approaches to history and cultural memory differ markedly. They also both use ancestry in their novels to establish relationships of identification, whereby a character has a stronger sense of who they are through contact with their ancestral narrative. Keneally promotes a positive sense of identification, whereas Koch focuses on absence and loss, underscoring missed opportunities. Another difference is that Keneally focuses on how ancestry can contribute towards a sense of national identity, while Koch is more concerned with gender identity. All these aspects serve to elaborate the different potentials for using ancestry in literature.

However, the most crucial point of comparison and contrast between these two authors is the extent to which they use ancestry as a potentially transformative kind of identification. Keneally depicts an ancestry with a high potential for transforming ideas of nationalism and how a person fits into that collective identity. While his earlier fiction elaborates an ethno-symbolist approach to national identity, his later novels problematise this simplistic idea of the nation and extend what it means to be a part of a national community. This suggests that Keneally is optimistic and positive about the transformative potential of ancestral identification, which reflects his radical-liberal politics in general.

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[1] Norman C. Habel, *Reconciliation: Searching for Australia's Soul*, Sydney: HarperCollins, 1999. It should be noted that Norm Habel and myself share Barossa Deutsch ancestry.

On the other hand, Koch is distrustful of any kind of revolutionary politics, and prefers instead to focus on a lack of transformation through ancestral amnesia. What he does is illustrate the difficulty of change, especially for men who find themselves bound into static, traditional notions of masculinity. This is caused by historical and cultural amnesia, a refusal to acknowledge or remember ancestors due to their shameful origins. Koch's characters have great difficulty overcoming the fragmentation of their gender identity. In this way he demonstrates a temperament which is comparatively more conservative than Keneally's, even though he implies the potential for transformation.

Research into Ancestry in Literature

Obviously, this thesis has had to stake out a rather narrow path in a territory where many possibilities exist. One area which has a large potential for research is the notion of authorial ancestry; this was a path which the Introduction touched on but discarded. While this thesis has focused on how Keneally and Koch use ancestry in their fiction (that is, how they create ancestors for their characters), it might also be fruitful to investigate their own ancestry. Keneally uses his own ancestry, and that of his wife, as a starting point and motivation for *The Great Shame*. In particular, his own ancestor John Kenealy was a political activist, and this may be linked to Keneally's own political awareness. Similarly, Koch's Irish ancestry was a motivation for *Beware of the Past*, and is dealt with in more detail in the non-fiction *The Many-Coloured Land: A Return to Ireland*. As well as having peasant and middle-class Irish ancestors, Koch's German ancestry inclines him to see his ancestral origins as more complex and problematic than Keneally.

It is one thing to identify and explore these authors' ancestral origins in isolation – in a biographical sense, as it were. It is another thing entirely to connect their ancestral origins with a reading of their fiction. This would be difficult for two main reasons. The first is that it would require some major assumptions or groundwork about the nature of ancestral narratives, and since the research on ancestry in literature is so thin, this would be taking too many steps at once. This is a major reason why this thesis has chosen to stake out a narrower field of enquiry. The second main reason for the difficulty of such an investigation into authorial

ancestry and its influence on individual writers' fiction is that it would have to engage with major questions about the nature of authorship. For instance, what role does the author's intention play in the construction of a text and its meaning? Would a literary reading through authorial ancestry fall into the trap of the intentionalist fallacy? These weighty questions are too much for a thesis which is conducting an early exploration into ancestry in literature, but may well provide useful questions for further research.

Another question with a great degree of potential relates to the relationship between ancestry and history, which Chapter 1 explored briefly before moving on. While ancestry necessarily involves a relationship with history, what kind of relationship is this? On the one hand, ancestry may simply promote a kind of historical consciousness, an awareness of history and its role in the lives of individuals before our time. However, ancestry could engage with history more completely, and may seek to represent history with a more specific purpose in mind. At its most extreme, ancestral narratives may promote a specific interpretation of history, in order to challenge the dominant grand narratives of history. This implies that ancestry may perform a specifically historiographic function. What is certain is that ancestry engages with various types of history: family history, social history, local history and national history. An exploration of these various forms and the historiography of ancestry would certainly be a viable path for further research.

Ethical Ancestry

The final path for further research is one that this thesis has begun to gesture towards, but lacked the space to elaborate fully. The main body of this thesis proposes that ancestry promotes certain forms of identity, which are open to transformation over time and according to different usage. However, the question remains as to what purpose this identification and/or transformation will be put to. On the one hand, ancestry can be used for quite negative, destructive purposes, in the overt xenophobia of fascism or the sectarianism in former colonies such as Ireland, India, or the African nation-states. Here is an ancestry red in tooth and claw, which drives people to kill their neighbours (or at least 'cleanse' them) because of their difference. On the other hand, however, ancestry can be used for more positive

purposes: to promote dialogue, reconciliation, and healing. Like nuclear or genetic technology, ancestry is a tool that can be used for either purpose, and so this research would essentially pursue an argument based in ethics, maintaining that ancestry must be used in a positive way.

This ethical use of ancestry is precisely the project of Norm Habel in his book *Reconciliation: Searching for Australia's Soul*. For Habel, acknowledging his ancestors and their role in Australian history is an essential first step towards reconciliation with Indigenous Australians. He discusses how European cultural traditions are steeped in ideological racism, an 'insidious ideology [which] was part of the accepted Eurocentric worldview of most of our ancestors.'[2] This understanding has provoked him to reject such beliefs as fundamentally wrong, and so to transform his self-image. 'For various reasons, virtually all Europeans imbibed that belief until it became an assumed truth. I, and my ancestors, are heirs of that assumed truth; we must now acknowledge that our beliefs were wrong, as was our behaviour based on these beliefs.'[3] Habel does not focus exclusively on his ancestry, because he is primarily concerned with pursuing reconciliation from a theological perspective. However, the fact that he uses his ancestry as a starting-point for the reconciliation process reflects the important potential of ethical ancestry. Furthermore, his brief reflections on ancestry serve to reinforce some of the ideas central to this thesis.

Firstly, a consideration of ancestry allows Habel to connect with Australian history, particularly contact history. Chapter Three explores the 'grave injustices perpetrated against Aboriginal people: dispossession, genocide, massacre, dehumanisation, destruction of culture, desecration, and assimilation'.[4] More importantly, however, he sees how a connection with this history is essential in understanding our identity, especially how it is conditioned by the 'hidden side' of history.[5] Furthermore, it is both individual and group identities which are relevant: 'The anti-venom required is probably an intense probing of the individual and collective soul as we each confront the poison within'.[6] Habel's ancestral identification is commensurate with other such acts of reconciliation around the

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[2]   Habel, *Reconciliation*, p. 71.
[3]   Habel, *Reconciliation*, p. 71.
[4]   Habel, *Reconciliation*, p. 44.
[5]   Habel, *Reconciliation*, p. 85.
[6]   Habel, *Reconciliation*, p. 86.

world: he cites Boris Yeltsin's speech upon the laying to rest of the remains of Tsar Nicholas II: 'By burying the remains of the innocent victims we want to expiate the sins of our ancestors.'[7] Habel's ancestry allows him to move from a consideration of the injustices of history to a means for reparation and healing: 'My search was no longer understanding what happened in the past when my great-grandfather lived, but how my identity, my past, was linked to the Aboriginal heritage of this land. I had embarked on a new journey to become Australian.'[8] This advocacy of reconciliation through ancestral identification is an ideal example of ethical ancestry.

While ethical ancestry it is an important approach which is very much needed in the world today, it is too complex and advanced for the space we have here. This thesis has had to content itself with an early exploration of ancestry in literature. The first step is the recognition that ancestral narratives are significant because they imply an immediate and personal relationship with history and cultural memory. Furthermore, ancestry contributes to identity; that is, it helps construct a sense of who a person is based on their idea of who their ancestor is. This identity works in a number of ways, from the national to the gendered. Finally, such forms of ancestral identification are not static or fixed; they are always open to new usages and transformation, although this potential is not always fulfilled. While a theory of ethical ancestry is relevant and highly important, it needs yet to be born as a descendant of this thesis. One can only hope is that such a descendant will go further and do more than its ancestor.

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[7] Yelstin, cited in Habel, *Reconciliation*, p. 128. Notably, the use of the verb 'expiate' may be due to a simplistic translation from Russian rather than a cavalier attitude to reconciliation, but the point is that ancestral identification makes these questions possible.

[8] Habel, *Reconciliation*, p. 4.