Ancestral Narratives in History and Fiction: Transforming Identities

Chad Habel, BA (Hons)

Department of English and Cultural Studies

Faculty of Education, Humanities, Law and Theology

Flinders University

Thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2006

Table of Contents

Ancestral Narratives In History and Fiction: Transforming Identities

Thesis Summary
Chad Habel

This thesis is an exploration of ancestral narratives in the fiction of Thomas Keneally and Christopher Koch. Initially, ancestry in literature creates an historical relationship which articulates the link between the past and the present. In this sense ancestry functions as a type of cultural memory where various issues of inheritance can be negotiated. However, the real value of ancestral narratives lies in their power to aid in the construction of both personal and communal identities. They have the potential to transform these identities, to transgress 'natural' boundaries and to reshape conventional identities in the light of historical experience.

For Keneally, ancestral narratives depict national forbears who 'narrate the nation' into being. His earlier fictions present ancestors of the nation within a mythic and symbolic framework to outline Australian national identity. This identity is static, oppositional, and characterised by the delineation of boundaries which set nations apart from one another. However, Keneally's more recent work transforms this conventional construction of national identity. It depicts an Irish-Australian diasporic identity which is hyphenated and transgressive: it transcends the conventional notion of nations as separate entities pitted against one another. In this way Keneally's ancestral narratives enact the potential for transforming identity through ancestral narrative.

On the other hand, Koch's work is primarily concerned with the intergenerational trauma causes by losing or forgetting one's ancestral narrative. His novels are concerned with male gender identity and the fragmentation which characterises a self-destructive idea of maleness. While Keneally's characters recover their lost ancestries in an effort to reshape their idea of what it is to be Australian, Koch's main protagonist lives in ignorance of his ancestor's life. He is thus unable to take the opportunity to transform his masculinity due to the pervasive cultural amnesia surrounding his family history and its role in Tasmania's past.

While Keneally and Koch depict different outcomes in their fictional ancestral narratives they are both deeply concerned with the potential to transform national and gender identities through ancestry.

Declaration

I declare that the following thesis is my own work and does not use the work of others, except where appropriately acknowledged.

_____

C. Habel

Acknowledgements

A monstrous creation with such a long gestation time as this thesis should give due acknowledgement to its many midwives. I must express my enormous gratitude to Dr Robert Phiddian, whose uncanny patience and fortitude are not the least of his skills as an outstanding supervisor. Thanks also to Dr Rick Hosking and Dr Syd Harrex, both of whom guided the development of this thesis and gave me great inspiration and mentorship during my undergraduate career. This guidance was supplemented by the friends and members of the Centre for Research Into the New Literatures In English (CRNLE), a centre which has maintained its tradition of supporting aspiring academics in a warm and encouraging environment. Thanks also to all the staff of Flinders University, in the English Department and the Faculty of Education, Humanities, Law and Theology, as well as the University's Library staff. Finally, I must thank all of my family and friends who helped make this possible (you know who you are), especially my Mum and Nana who have always given me extraordinary support and encouragement in my studies, and without whom *I* would not be possible.

Preface

I hope we are now at the point the point where the notion of 'objective scholarship' is regarded with some suspicion, or at least seen as a myth to live by or a noble ideal. In any case, my experience suggests that to complete a research project like a PhD thesis the author requires a passion for the subject, and some sort of personal investment in what the thesis is all about.

For my own part, I started to become aware of my ancestral origins in my later teenage years. When I realised that I had both Irish and German ancestry I started to wonder what this meant for me as a person, and how I was to assess the significance of these origins. I was well aware of the lure of ancestor worship and the sub-rational connections and identifications that go with it. When my mother visited the 'ould country' in 1994, she became quite enthusiastic about researching our family history, and this passion infected me as well. But the academic in me could not rest.

For this reason, I decided to combine my interest in ancestry, history and identity with my love for literature and criticism. Fortunately, several books fell into my hands which were ideal for an interpretation of ancestry in literature, but I have consistently refused to pay much attention to the ancestry of their authors. Thus, while this thesis is motivated and inspired by an interest in my own ancestral origins, I have also tried hard to keep my subject at arm's length, like any good thinker. This might help explain some of the tensions within the following pages.

Prologue

That wind blows to your door down all these years.
Have you not known it when some breath you drew
Tasted of blood? Your comfort is in arrears
Of just thanks to a savagery tamed in you
Only as subtler fears may serve in lieu
Of thong and noose – old savagery which has built
Your world and laws out of the lives it spilt.[1]

Ancestry – Fitzgerald's 'Wind at the Door' – occupies an important place in the work of Thomas Keneally and Christopher Koch. As this thesis will go on to argue, ancestry is an historical phenomenon, but more importantly it serves to construct the identity of the descendant through narratives which depict a myth of origins. These larger concerns become clear in a reading of various texts which are peripheral to this thesis. This prologue aims to introduce the notions of ancestral narrative, historical ancestry, ancestry as cultural memory, ancestral identification and the transformation of identity through ancestry.

Ancestral relationships are first and foremost expressed through narrative: as a novelist Koch depicts his ancestry using established narrative structures. He admits early in *The Many-Coloured Land* that he is 'now in the area of conjecture'; his ancestry is a work of the imagination as he cannot know absolutely what his Irish ancestors would have experienced.[2] 'I see her there. It isn't so very long ago.'[3] Pursuing a dominant theme of his work, he shows how the past lives on vibrantly in the present. His ancestor Margaret is clearly a model for Kathleen O'Rahilly from *Out of Ireland* and so his ancestral narrative becomes intertwined with not only his life narrative but also his fictional narratives.[4]

Koch is a born storyteller, and it is natural for him for express ancestry through fiction. Telling of his childhood in Hobart he indicates how he found his profession: while he was only average at sports and fighting, he found that his

---

[1] Robert D. Fitzgerald, 'The Wind at Your Door', in Colleen Z. Burke and Vincent Woods (eds), *The Turning Wave: Poems and Songs of Irish Australia*, Armidale: Kardoorair Press, 2001, p. 229.
[2] Christopher Koch, *The Many-Coloured Land: A Return to Ireland*, Sydney: PanMacmillan, 2002, p 26.
[3] Koch, *Return*, p 21.
[4] That Kathleen is based on Koch's own ancestry was confirmed by Koch in his speech at Adelaide Writers' Week in 2000. However, he is usually reticent about identifying his novels with his own life and this quasi-biographical line of inquiry is one which this thesis does not pursue.

'warrior companions' enjoyed him telling stories taken out of comic books, and he eventually started making them up himself and found his vocation.[5] One of his most enduring concerns as a novelist is the narration of ancestry, and so the term 'ancestral narrative' will come to be used throughout this thesis.

A desire to narrate the author's ancestry is also evident in Robert D. Fitzgerald's poem 'The Wind at Your Door'.[6] He establishes the scene of a jailyard filled with convicts gathered to witness the floggings in retaliation for the 1804 Castle Hill Rebellion.[7] The scene then widens to take in the whole country, and Fitzgerald then speaks from the perspective of a prisoner, looking through bars. The narrative poem depicts the author's own ancestry, whereas Richard Flanagan's novel, *Death of a River Guide*, tells the story of its protagonist's ancestry as he drowns in the Franklin River.[8] As the novel progresses the lives of Aljaz Cosini's family and ancestors are depicted in more and more detail as Aljaz loses his own tenuous grip on life and reality. His ancestral narrative intersects in crucial ways with Australian convict history as well as the history of contact with Indigenous Australians during the colonial period.

Indeed, this evocation of history is the primary function of ancestral narratives. Just as local or family history is intertwined with national or world history, Fitzgerald uses his ancestry to reflect on dominant constructions of Australian convict history. The poem is addressed 'To Mary Gilmore', the famous Australian activist who wrote 'Old Botany Bay'. In this poem the speaker, a convict, claims 'The nation was – / Because of me!'[9] However, Fitzgerald takes a different approach to Australian history since his ancestor, a doctor working for the convict administration, was complicit in the workings of the System. For this reason 'he got lost; and history passed him by'.[10] Fitzgerald narrates the untold story of his ancestor, who is the type of actor under-represented in history since he was not one of the victimised convicts. This complicates history by challenging the simplistic

---

[5]   Koch, *Return*, p. 62.
[6]   Fitzgerald, 'The Wind at Your Door', *The Turning Wave: Poems and Songs of Irish Australia*, pp. 229-231.
[7]   This is the rebellion which Keneally narrates in *Bring Larks and Heroes*.
[8]   Richard Flanagan, *Death of a River Guide*, Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, 1994. It is this type of ancestry – that of fictional characters – which this thesis is concerned with.
[9]   Mary Gilmore, 'Old Botany Bay', in *Australian Poets: Mary Gilmore* (selected and introduced by Robert D. Fitzgerald), Sydney: Angus and Robinson, 1963, pp. 9-10.
[10] Fitzgerald, 'The Wind at Your Door', p. 230.

binary of jailers and jailed: in this way ancestry can reinterpret or shed new light on history.

Koch's own ancestry also becomes a springboard for numerous reflections on the history of both Ireland and Australia. He tells of the period of Probation in the administration of Van Diemen's Land which, 'although it proved less happy in practice than in theory', did sometimes succeed in reforming individual convicts.[11] Later he tells the story of Young Ireland, and reflects on the historical significance of the Protestant Ascendancy, two historical contexts which serve as important background material for *Out of Ireland*.[12] He is particularly concerned to debunk the myths of history where he sees fit, especially as it relates to the history of Australia's penal settlement.

> I'm not a believer in the simple myth of the innocent convict – that victim of nineteenth century hardship who merely stole a loaf of bread to ward off starvation. That is a self-justifying myth which was begun by the old ticket-of-leave men and women themselves – either by reciting it to their children, or through telling their sanitised stories to the newspapers of the day – and it has been thoroughly embedded in the Australian consciousness.[13]

Here Koch suggests that while ancestry inevitably creates historical relationships, it is also an act of memory-work. Although he gives a few references at the end of the book,[14] Koch does not believe in a dry, ossified version of history – it lives on (or not) in the memories of individuals and can be transmitted through the generations. Ancestry is, therefore, a site of cultural memory. In Galway Bay (his ancestor's homeland), he comments on the similarity between its landscape and that of the east coast of Tasmania: 'Was this why my grandmother so loved Coswell – and why I loved it too? Were deep-sunk memories called up by those landscapes around Great Oyster Bay – memories not our own?'[15] Landscape is imbued with memory: the gully near his family's holiday house is a ghost-ridden place of ancient gums which reeks of the past and is a clear model for the Gully in both *Highways to a War* and

---

[11] Koch, *Return*, p. 15.
[12] Koch, *Return*, pp. 63, 181.
[13] Koch, *Return*, pp. 34-5.
[14] Koch, *Return*, p. 15.
[15] Koch, *Return*, p. 144.

Out of Ireland.[16] Grounded in place, ancestry vacillates between history and cultural memory.

Recovering the lost memory of her Irish ancestry is central to Colleen Burke's poetry. In 'A Rich and Varied Compost Heap' she expresses a memory of victimisation which has been handed down through her family:

> By chains, starvation and terrorism
> The Sassenach tried to break us.
> Some of our ancestors were killed
> Some forced to plough the dense
> Connemara stones.[17]

Burke's poetry demonstrates an ongoing concern with the recovery and maintenance of Irish cultural memory in the lives of Australians.

However, memory also has its gaps and absences: ancestral memory is not always present – it is sometimes muted, demonised or rejected outright. With his origins in Tasmania where convict history was subsumed under a triumphalist narrative of progress and achievement, Koch is predominantly concerned with amnesia and its effects. 'Today, a felon in one's past has become almost a matter of pride, in Australia. Convict ancestors were either hidden, or given false occupations and backgrounds. Anything to hide what was then called the Stain.'[18] This forced amnesia has a corollary in the physical destruction of convict buildings in places such as Port Arthur.[19] Such an erasures and absences are the crux of Koch's double-novel, *Beware of the Past*. While he was able to recover his own ancestral origin, Koch's fiction is mostly concerned with situations where ancestry is forgotten or explicitly suppressed. In contrast, Keneally seeks to overcome it by recovering forgotten ancestral narratives in texts such as *The Great Shame* and *Bettany's Book*. This is one of the differences between these authors which this thesis will explore further.

This recovery of lost ancestral memory is the essence of *Death of a River Guide*. One of the visions Aljaz experiences during his death depicts his ancestor,

---

[16]   Koch, *Return*, p. 52.
[17]   Colleen Z. Burke, 'A Rich and Varied Compost Heap', in Burke and Woods (eds) *The Turning Wave*, p. 228.
[18]   Koch, *Return*, p. 7.
[19]   Koch, *Return*, p. 29.

Ned Quade, a convict based in Macquarie Harbour in 1832.[20] This ancestral narrative has been suppressed for good reason: far from being the one-time mayor of Parramatta (as family legend had it), Quade was guilty of killing his fellow escapees and surviving off their remains.[21] The notion of the Stain, a tragic unconscious history passed down through the generations, is symbolised in the tear-stained bedspread: in this novel, characters are chained to their unhappy pasts and cannot escape them.[22] The Stain haunts the Quade family who completely reject their origins: 'Rose believed there was nothing so shameful as having convict blood, and in her family she was not alone in this opinion … They had snobbery as a dog had fleas. It wasn't offensive. It was just part of them'.[23] The reasons for this rejection and snobbery go back to when the family would be taunted by a gaggle of children shouting 'Convicts! Convicts! Convicts!'[24] This is the rejection of ancestral memory, based on social shame, which Koch is concerned with. The fear is that some shameful aspect of the ancestor will reflect upon the descendant, but paradoxically it is the repression which causes the damage.

Therefore, the real significance of such narratives is the way in which ancestry contributes to the identity of the descendant. While Keneally does identify with his ancestors (one of them was a Fenian), in Koch's non-fiction the author is very reticent about discussing his own identity, and he attempts to distance himself from the text. Nonetheless, he still claims his mixed ancestral identity: 'I thus combine in my ancestry the two opposite ends of the Irish spectrum: the Protestant Ascendancy and the Catholic peasantry. I might also be said to have descended from both the gaolers and the gaoled'.[25] While Keneally seeks to narrate ancestral identities which are coherent and consistent, Koch is concerned with forgotten, fragmented and hyphenated identities. He tells of how he remembers his grandmother as an Irish-Australian woman who worshipped Curtin and (like Keneally's family) carried a 'long-held view of perfidious Albion'.[26]

---

20 Flanagan, *River Guide*, p. 148.
21 Flanagan, *River Guide*, p. 236.
22 Flanagan, *River Guide*, p. 163.
23 Flanagan, *River Guide*, p. 52.
24 Flanagan, *River Guide*, p. 54.
25 Koch, *Return*, p. 3.
26 Koch, *Return*, p. 46.

This identification between the descendant and the ancestor is a dominant feature of many ancestral narratives. Evoking the memory of her Irish ancestors, Burke writes:

> My fragile blood is linked to theirs.
> Skin, hair colouring. A nose, a jawline.
> Ways of speaking   thinking   feeling.
>
> Hardship forced my ancestors to leave
> Forever the greenness of Ireland.
>
> Their migration
> Enriched me – the dreamer
> The realist, the questioner
> Who sometimes feels at home in both
> Yet is never wholly at ease
> In either country.[27]

Burke begins with particular physical likenesses, which often indicate family resemblance. This is much like the family resemblance between Robert Devereux and Michael Langford in Koch's novels. However, the identification goes much deeper than this: for Burke, ancestry conditions and shapes her entire sense of herself, especially her feeling of belonging, or the lack thereof. This ancestral identification is also evident in Fitzgerald's poem, although here the speaker must also acknowledge the faults in his origins.

> Perhaps my life replied to his too much
> Through veiling generations dropped between.
> My weakness here, resentments there, may touch
> Old motives and explain them, till I lean
> To the forgiveness I must hope may clean
> My own shortcomings; since no man can live
> In his own sight if it will not forgive.[28]

Fitzgerald again offers a more complex version of ancestry: he acknowledges that 'Certainly I must own him whether or not / It be my will'. He is well aware of his ancestor's complicity in the penal system but can also identify with his 'shortcomings'. This means that his ancestor's life is able to explain his own life, to some degree at least. However, the crucial aspect of Fitzgerald's ancestry is that it

---

[27]   Colleen Burke, 'The Spitting Image', in *Home Brewed and Lethal: New and Selected Poems*, Maleny, Queensland: Cochon Publishing, 1997, pp. 14-15.

prompts him to understand his own life and Australian history in a new light, to forgive his ancestor and by extension himself, and therefore to potentially transform or reshape his idea of who he is.

Ultimately, the particular power of ancestral narratives lies in the fact that they are able to either reinforce or transform personal identity. Once again, Koch is reticent about how this relates to himself, but he is consistently concerned with the transformation of Dublin between the 1950 and the late 90s. 'The twenty-first century is advancing like a tidal wave, carrying its computers, piped music systems and video games; and soon the traditional world Bobby loves will be gone.'[29] With the advance of the Celtic Tiger, Dublin has been transformed into a modern metropolitan city, contrasting sharply with Koch's memory of Dublin in the 1950s. He recoils at the sight of freeways, heavy traffic, large shopping centres and the social problems of drug abuse and unemployment which accompany the growth of large cities. This reflects his strong views about social and political change: views which are broadly conservative in the way that they bewail the loss of the old traditions.[30] One thing Koch cannot stand is change for the worse. However, he does suggest that the only thing worse than rapid modernisation is complete amnesia: his travels through Ireland are not simply a return to a place he visited when younger, they are a return to his ancestral homeland.

It is when Koch visits the West of Ireland that his ancestor's presence becomes palpable. 'I know one thing: she is in the air around me.'[31] When he visits his ancestor's Big House, Deerpark, he is struck by the way the place has been left to rot, and notes the waste represented by the vandalised interior and weed-ridden grounds.[32] For Koch the West of Ireland houses an endangered culture: 'Here in Connemara, at modern Europe's farthest point, a life that's rooted in Western myth and memory still survives, for those in middle life. But for how much longer, as the wind hums in the wires that loop across the bogs?'[33] The most poignant sections of the book occur when he spends time with his musician friend in the pubs of the West and he expresses an acute sense of being in the right place: it is here that his

---

[28] Fitzgerald, 'Wind,' p. 231.
[29] Koch, *Return*, p. 230.
[30] For his recurrent lamentations for the loss of tradition see Koch, *Return*, pp. 96, 160.
[31] Koch, *Return*, p. 204.
[32] Koch, *Return*, p. 189.
[33] Koch, *Return*, p. 171.

ancestral identity, though only implied, receives its fullest expression.[34] This captures the dual sense of his 'Return to Ireland': he is returning to an Ireland he visited in his youth, but he is also returning to his ancestral homeland, making the journey back on behalf of his own ancestors. The implication is that remembering your ancestors is crucial for your own sense of place in the world.

It is in Keneally and Koch's fiction that ancestry is fully elaborated. Keneally gives voice to historical narratives in both novels and non-fiction, and works such as *Bring Larks and Heroes*, *The Great Shame* and *Bettany's Book* explicitly reflect on history through various forms of ancestral narrative. Koch is also deeply concerned with history through ancestral narrative: his double-novel *Beware of the Past* tells of an Irish political prisoner transported to Van Diemen's Land in 1848 and his descendant, a combat cameraman in Indochina in the 1960s and 70s.

However, these authors do not use ancestry to merely reflect on history or even provide interpretations of the past invigorated with novelistic imagination. They use ancestry as a way to express certain forms of personal and communal identity. Keneally is predominantly concerned with national identity, and his works seek to 'narrate the nation' by depicting characters who are as prototypes, or founders for the national polity. On the other hand, Koch's ancestral narratives are primarily concerned with gender identity. His novels inhabit the genre of adventure fiction in order to give expression to various forms of masculinity. No doubt ancestry can be used to express a myriad of other forms of identity as well, but any thesis is required to restrict its scope.

The great potential of ancestral identification is that it is able to both outline and transform these identities. Keneally's more recent work attempts to give expression to new forms of national identity; he seeks to transcend the nation with a diasporic and transnational vision which stands in stark contrast to the limited and oppositional nationalism of his earlier fiction. Similarly, Koch shows the need for reshaping traditional masculinity as it appears in adventure fiction, although he is more hesitant in outlining new possibilities for male gender identity. What is crucial in the ancestral narratives of these authors is that they are able to effectively express

---

[34]   Koch, *Return*, pp. 152, 166-70.

the need and the potential for transforming identity through the expression of ancestry in literature.

__Introduction__

> I do believe that we have ancestral memories, that our own ancestors transmit memories to us. It sounds strange, but after all, animals inherit memory-patterns – so why shouldn't human beings? The chicken runs from the shadow of a hawk – and yet it's never seen one. So how does it know the shadow? It's apparently some print that is transmitted from the mother in the memory cells. I wonder if humans have this, on a far more complex level?
>
> … Not many people have my belief that our ancestors continue to live inside us, but I notice that the wonderful Greek writer, Nikos Kazantzakis, who wrote *Zorba the Greek*, has that belief. One of his ancestors was a Cretan pirate. One night he was walking with a friend over the hills in Crete, when he came to a hilltop from where he could see the lights of a village down below. And suddenly Kazantzakis roared out in this great voice, 'I will plunder you!' Then he turned to his friend in amazement and said, 'I didn't say that. It was my old great-grandfather inside me.'   Christopher Koch[1]

Ancestry is protean and paradoxical: it is at once ancient and modern, past and present, unifying and discriminatory, self-actualising and destructive. While it has always been prominant in narratives and identity construction, the past few decades have seen much more interest in representing ancestry.[2] However, there has been little critical interest in this phenomenon, and no comprehensive theory or approach has emerged to help us understand the role of ancestry in literature. This thesis seeks to establish some groundwork for such a project through an exploration of ancestry as cultural memory in recent historical novels by two Irish-Australian authors, Thomas Keneally and Christopher Koch.

Despite its pluriform nature, ancestry can be simply defined as the phenomenon which describes a familial link across three or more generations. Ancestry has various strains: on the one hand it can be biological and genealogical; on the other it can be psychological and even spiritual. The biological forms tend to read ancestry as pre-determined and determinative, while the psychological forms of ancestry are more likely to accept it as elective, and imaginative. While ancestors are in our genes, to some degree they can also be chosen. Finally there are both elitist and democratic forms of ancestry: in Australia, the former would focus on

---

[1]   Christopher Koch, in Candida Baker, *Yacker 3: Australian Writers Talk About Their Work*, Sydney: Pan, 1989, pp. 204-5.

links to free settlers and the Exclusive, Merino, or Sterling origins of the nation, whereas the latter would elaborate links with the Currency, convicts, Indigenous Australians or marginalised migrant groups. This thesis uses ancestry in all these senses, but ultimately leans towards the psychological, imaginative, and democratic versions of ancestry which are more germane to historical fiction.

Koch's statement above suggests a notion of pervasive ancestral memory: for him and other authors of ancestral narratives, 'The past is everywhere'.[3] The extraordinary popularity for ancestor-searching is demonstrated by AltaVista's finding that 'genealogy is more popular than sex'.[4] However, on a more serious note it is clear that the Internet has joined public libraries as a popular resource for genealogical research.[5]

Indeed, over the past two decades libraries and museums all over Australia have been restructured to cater for the genealogy boom. In 1986 the State Library of South Australia established the Mortlock Library with a specialist librarian and staffed service point. Family history attracts huge demand, and although the Mortlock Library focuses on South Australian records, one of its main purposes is to direct researchers to other archives and resources, both locally and interstate. It is thus just one part of a large network of resources for genealogists, and the provision of these resources suggests the explosion of interest in genealogical research.[6]

Although the genealogy boom is interesting from a historical and cultural standpoint, exploring these pathways is not the aim of this thesis. This is because what is really lacking is an explanation of why the desire to research such origins is so strong. The answer can be found in the way ancestry is used to help construct identity in literature, and particularly fiction.

---

[2] Of course, ancestry is an obvious feature of the oldest surviving narratives such as the Bible, Indigenous Dreamings, epic poetry and so on.

[3] David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. xv.

[4] John Lettice, 'Genealogy more popular than sex, anthrax beats WinXP', http://www.theregister.co.uk/2002/01/11/genealogy_more_popular_than_sex/, 11 January 2002, Accessed 26 December 2006.

[5] There are many examples listing the thousands of potential genealogy resources available on the World Wide Web. See: http://www.cyndislist.com/ as well as http://www.rootsweb.com/, accessed 26 December 2005.

[6] Information gathered from a telephone interview with the State Library on 9/2/06.

Ancestry in Literature

While research on ancestry in literature is very limited, there is one work which informs the broad approach of this thesis. Sophie Gilmartin's *Ancestry and Narrative in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* is an important first step in exploring why ancestry is so crucial in literature.[7] The author begins by discussing a polite dispute between Auberon Waugh and Bernard Levin.[8] According to Gilmartin, Waugh is a self-assured holder of an upper-class British pedigree, whereas Levin expresses his migratory origins through a lack of any official 'pedigree', claiming instead a family history which is orally transmitted. This demonstrates both the widely differing conceptions of ancestry, as well as the continuing importance of ancestry and the fact that such discussions still provoke passionate disputes.

This debate introduces Gilmartin's discussion of ancestry in nineteenth-century British literature. Through his emphasis on oral history, 'Levin demonstrates the facility of the imaginative move from a consideration of pedigree to an involvement with narrative'.[9] Ancestry becomes really significant when it is expressed through narrative, and the term 'ancestral narrative' will be used throughout this thesis. Such narratives produce a network of relationships with an ever-widening circumference. 'A family pedigree can be seen as the first element in an expanding series – pedigree, tribe (or region), race, nation (or: nation, race) – an individual's definition of self, his or her assertion of social existence, begins with the family tree.'[10] Just like Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist*, genealogical researchers seek to clarify their place in society and the world through an ever-widening set of relationships. Dedalus refers to his geography book where he has written 'his name and where he was'.[11]

While *Ancestry and Narrative* is a useful entry point, it is not concerned with contemporary literature and it does not propose a concrete thesis, or argument. Firstly, the book focuses on British literature of the nineteenth century; it is

---

[7]   Sophie Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative in Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Blood Relations from Edgeworth to Hardy,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

[8]   Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative*, p. 1.

[9]   Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative*, p. 2.

[10]   Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative*, p. 3.

[11]   James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin in association with Jonathan Cape, 1916, pp. 15-16.

essentially an exercise in literary history, an exploration of the role of ancestry in a time rather distant from our own. What is needed is an exploration of the current fascination with ancestral origins, rather than a museum display of past interests. Furthermore, Gilmartin's exploration is essentially that: an exploration. 'The overarching theme of the book is the question of assimilation versus difference; which pedigrees are assimilated or included, which seen as alien or excluded?'[12] This thesis seeks to provide a much more concrete position on ancestry in literature, and argues that ancestry has, and should have, a specific role in constructing cultural identities.

Nonetheless, Gilmartin employs several ideas which are important starting-points for many elements of this thesis. This introduction will make use of these points in order to illustrate the structure and flow of the thesis argument. With her focus on the nineteenth century, and especially her suggestion of humanity's much more ancient ancestry,[13] Gilmartin identifies the close relationship between ancestry and historical consciousness.

Historical Ancestry

History is an essential aspect of ancestry because our origins are necessarily located in the past. Historical ancestry leads on to social history, which is has been considered by historians in *Generations and Change: Genealogical Perspectives in Social History*. In the Foreword, Willard Heiss argues that 'The social historian's concerns about family and kinship and the genealogist's desire to supplement the pedigree with a credible story line furnish a context for interaction'.[14] Contributors to the volume aim to develop the notion of *historical genealogy*, with the intention of overcoming the mutual disdain between historians and genealogists. This methodological interaction is enabled by recent developments in both fields: social history makes possible the analysis of minor historical actors (especially in the context of family history) while the professionalisation of genealogy endows the field with the kind of rigor and attention to detail which is necessary for valid history-writing. It is the 'newness' of both fields which makes possible this creative

---

[12] Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative*, p. 21.
[13] Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative*, p. 18.

interaction. In fact, Hays goes so far as to say, 'The new social history is simply the new genealogy writ large … It is the accumulation of activities in the lives of many individuals that adds up to social history'.[15] Here, ancestral narratives contribute to a wider sense of history: social, national, and perhaps even human history can thus be composed of multiple ancestral narratives.

History and genealogy both have something to gain from such an interaction. For historians, genealogy can contribute to a longitudinal approach, since genealogical records stretch far back into the past and so can provide a broader historical perspective.[16] On the other hand, genealogists should be able to bring their subject to life, and 'be encouraged to write family-history narratives, to take that pedigree chart and expand it into a full-scale group biography'.[17] The narratology of history-writing can serve to embody genealogy and bring it to life, in order 'to eschew the extremes of sterile numbers and pointless anecdotes'. In this way, the interaction between history and genealogy can be a creative confluence.

One chapter of *Generations and Change* seeks to narrate a history of genealogy itself. Part of this story is the shift towards a democratic, secular notion of genealogy: 'Whereas upper-class native white Americans generally carried on genealogical work in times past, the last fifteen years have witnessed participation that cuts across age, sex, ethnic and socioeconomic lines.'[18] This encapsulates the notion of 'secular' ancestry, which is important in the reading of Keneally's ancestral narratives. Gilmartin notes this trend in nineteenth-century British literature, where 'realist novelists … were confronting social wrongs, and following, instead of the narrative of the noble hero, the careers of proletarian or lower-middle-class protagonists who had previously been consigned to the subplot … or to the picaresque'.[19] This reinforces the strong link between ancestry and social history.

Moreover, popular genealogy in America was connected to the development of national sentiment. 'For the first time, it appears, Americans confessed to having a national history, and genealogy was one of several manifestations of a deepening

---

14 Robert M. Taylor, Jr. and Ralph J. Crandall (eds), *Generations and Change: Genealogical Perspectives in Social History,* Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986, foreword.
15 Taylor *et al.*, *Generations*, p. 47.
16 Taylor *et al.*, *Generations*, p. xv.
17 Taylor *et al.*, *Generations*, p. 25.
18 Taylor *et al.*, *Generations*, p. 15.
19 Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative*, p. 12.

public desire to plumb that history.'[20] Similarly, Gilmartin refers to Benedict Anderson's seminal notion of the nation as an 'imagined community' which is inherently limited within specific boundaries, just like the family pedigree.[21] This link between genealogy and nationalism also applies in the Australian context, and particularly relates to Keneally's expression of national consciousness through ancestral narrative. It also foreshadows the myths of origin in Anthony D. Smith's ethno-symbolist theory of nationalism.

Generations and Change is a useful tool for framing the concerns of this thesis. Its rigorous conception of genealogy relates ancestry to historical investigation. Thus, it seeks to quantify and rationalise genealogy to the extent that it can interact fruitfully with a history focused primarily on truth and documentation. This kind of social history is mainly concerned with demographics, statistics, and fashioning raw data into a quasi-scientific argument for an interpretation of the past. While this book does scrutinise the interaction between personal heritage and historical discourse, it is not so much concerned with ancestry in literature or historical fiction as such. Furthermore, its endocentric focus on American case studies means that much of it is not really relevant to Australia, Ireland, or interactions between the two. Thus, *Generations and Change* paves the way for a discussion of the concrete interactions between ancestry and history which Chapter 1 pursues.

Metaphorical Ancestry

> With wonder, George beheld these majestically wild, vicious, and beautiful birds. They embodied everything that Uncle Mingo had ever told him about their ancient bloodlines of courage, about how both their physical design and their instincts made them ready to fight any other gamecock to the death anytime, anywhere.[22]

Alex Haley presents his ancestor's beloved gamecocks as a metaphor for strength and survival in the narrative of his African-American ancestry. A theory of metaphor is one potential way of exploring the significance of ancestry in literature. Gilmartin acknowledges this: 'The image of the family tree, and the etymology of

---

20 Taylor *et al.*, *Generations*, p. 7.
21 Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative*, p. 19.
22 Alex Haley, *Roots*, London: Hutchinson & Co., 1977, p. 430.

'pedigree' serve to construct the pervasive metaphors of this study.'[23] When expressions such as 'roots' and 'family tree' become naturalised as a part of common language, such use tends to occlude the fact that these expressions are actually metaphors. Investigating their use *as metaphors* reveals important aspects of ancestry, especially in the production of literary texts.

Metaphor is often used to describe personal heritage. For instance, the use of the term 'roots' to mean an individual's ancestry is actually a metaphor, if examined in terms of figurative language use. In the United States, Alex Haley popularised the notion of personal heritage and the search for ancestral origins.[24] Furthermore, the title of his book popularised 'roots' as a metaphor for ancestry: this is an organic metaphor, which describes an intergenerational relationship in terms of a tree or a plant. The idea is that an individual's 'roots' stands for their ancestral origins, the same way a plant's origins lie in the ground. Since Haley, 'roots' has become an enduring and powerful metaphor for ancestry, even though it was first used to denote ancestral origins as early as 1072.[25]

However, there are many other metaphors of ancestry. Like 'roots', the 'family tree' is an organic and aborescent metaphor which explores human relationships by relating them to the natural world. The difference is that the 'family tree' metaphor is more structured, with a much more definite meaning. While 'roots' can apply to more individuated aspects of ancestral origins, the 'family tree' specifically describes the kinship network of the whole family. It is actually the graphic representation of an entire genealogy: the whole network of family relations is mapped out into a kinship network, conceived of as a proliferation of linear relationships. This allows for a visual representation of the family and lines of descent linking individuals in the present to their ancestors in the past.

Primarily, the 'family tree' relates to the maintenance of family ties, and encapsulates a notion of continuity across the generations. In this usage, the family network develops and grows, but is rarely destroyed completely because the 'tree' can withstand generations of abuse and neglect. However, all metaphors are open to new usage, and so the 'family tree' can be used to express precisely the opposite:

---

23 Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative*, p. 9.
24 Haley, *Roots*. This novel was also the basis for a popular miniseries with the same title.
25 See the Oxford English Dictionary: http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50208696. Notably, another meaning of 'root' is 'The bottom or inner basis, the real or essential part, of anything.' This suggests the notion of identity through ancestry which this thesis pursues.

the loss, or lack of a coherent kinship network. This can be supplanted with the notion of regrowth to express the retrieval, or reconstruction of ancestral memory and family connections. This is precisely how Vincent Buckley uses the metaphor in *Memory Ireland*.

> One of the continuing tragedies of Ireland over centuries is that the conditions for sustaining corporate memory have been destroyed. Every generation of the Irish has had as one of its chief signs the phenomenon of interrupted lives, and hence interrupted memory-transmission. Families become dispersed, like leaves at the end of autumn; the 'family' remains, it is true, but as a denuded tree-stump, full of stay-put melancholy.[26]

The notion of 'ancestry as metaphor' has great potential. While there are many theories of metaphor, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's theory of conceptual metaphor has the clearest application. These authors understand figurative language use in terms of human cognition, and the conceptual systems which frame our understanding of the world. The title of their book, *Metaphors We Live By*, emphasises the daily use of metaphor in human life, describing a kind of meaning transference, where metaphors operate by relating a source domain to a target domain.[27] Through such transference, certain aspects are highlighted, while others are hidden, in order to produce a coherent figurative expression. This suggests that ancestry can be elective to some degree: the metaphorical identification allows some element of choice as to which ancestors to acknowledge whilst also being culturally determined.

Ultimately a connection with an ancestor is always based on certain perceived aspects of the ancestor's life, which are highlighted by the metaphorical nature of the relationship. However, other aspects of the ancestor's life are hidden, and not acknowledged or understood by the descendant. The potential for this is expressed by Robert D. Fitzgerald in 'The Wind at Your Door', where he suggests that if he could claim a convict as his ancestor, 'I'd take his irons as heraldry, and be proud.'[28] There is not always an element of conscious choice, but the metaphorical connection itself tends to highlight some aspects of ancestry and hide others. It is

---

[26] Vincent Buckley, *Memory Ireland: Insights into the Contemporary Irish Condition*, Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, 1985, p. ix.

[27] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

the flawed characteristics of ancestors that are likely to be hidden, especially in the narratives of hero ancestors.

The final aspect of the theory of conceptual metaphor which assists an understanding of ancestry is its account of new metaphors, which 'can give new meaning to our pasts, to our daily activity, and to what we know and believe'.[29] New metaphors can explain the phenomenon of ancestral revelation. This occurs when an individual discovers an ancestor previously hidden in the family history, who serves to explain important aspects of the descendant's life and experiences. This is a common occurrence in ancestral narratives, particularly historical novels such as those by Keneally and Koch which employ the 'lost document' motif. The protagonist suddenly discovers a painting or a journal which reveals a previously unheard-of ancestor. This is a form of revelation which explains quite suddenly the protagonist's life experiences and challenges; the implication is that the relationship has been there all along, but only makes sense to the reader and/or the character when it is made obvious in the form of a novel metaphor. Ancestral metaphors can also be adapted to new uses, as in Deleuze and Guttari's notion of rhizomes which opposes the linear, arborescent notion of 'roots'.[30]

What 'ancestry as metaphor' can do is to help identify the major concerns in the work of Keneally and Koch. By exploring the ancestral connections in their fiction as a type of metaphor, it is possible to understand some aspects of how these writers set up relationships of identification in their ancestral narratives. People construct their own identities in terms of their ancestral narratives, which is a kind of conceptual metaphor. However, we must also distinguish between authorial ancestry and fictional ancestry, and focus on how authors set up ancestry within their fictional worlds.

Fictional ancestry is to do with an ancestral relationship which is established within a fictional text itself; it is part of the fiction. In this type of ancestry, a fictional character is related to another character across historical timeframes, and this ancestral relationship has only an indirect relationship with the 'real' world as

---

[28] Robert D. Fitzgerald, 'The Wind at Your Door', in Colleen Z. Burke and Vincent Woods, *The Turning Wave: Poems and Songs of Irish Australia*, Armidale: Kardoorair Press, 2001, p 231.

[29] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, p.139.

[30] See, for example, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guttari, *AThousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, c. 1987 and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guttari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, c. 1983.

we normally understand it in novels. Fictional ancestry lends itself to the close reading pursued by this thesis. On the other hand, authorial ancestry refers to the actual ancestors of the authors themselves, and although this may permeate the novels they write, it is not a straightforward basis for such fictions. This thesis is strictly concerned with fictional ancestry, because authorial ancestry is more concerned with biography and issues of authorship than literary interpretation as such.[31]

To briefly discuss the ancestry of the authors under study will suggest the potential confusion of such an approach. Keneally grew up in the context of a strong Irish-Australian community, and although he trained for the Catholic priesthood he was not ordained.[32] Thus he has a continuous Irish identity, and although he does narrate his own ancestry in *The Great Shame*[33], this is used for the purposes of illustrating the general situation of the Irish in Australia, rather than informing an autobiography. It is his deployment of ancestry in novels and history which is really interesting for reasons which will become clear.

Christopher Koch also has Irish ancestors, but they were not discovered until later in his life: they were part of the 'Stain' that many Tasmanian families hid. However, he also has a dual ancestry: his paternal ancestry is German, while his maternal ancestry is Irish. Koch deals with his Irish ancestry in his most recent non-fiction *The Many-Coloured Land: A Return to Ireland*,[34] but like Keneally he keeps this aspect of his life strictly within the realms of non-fiction. It is used to inform his discussion of travelling through Ireland, but does not contribute to Koch's reflections upon his own life at all. Clearly it does have some indirect bearing upon the fiction he writes, but if this thesis were to focus on this relationship between author and work it would become too concerned with the issues of authorship which would detract from the analysis of literary texts themselves.[35] For this reason the main focus is on *Beware of the Past*.[36]

---

[31] Koch's *The Many-Coloured Land: A Return to Ireland* is a fine example of the difficulties in reading authorial ancestry.

[32] This background of Keneally's is related in his memoir. See Thomas Keneally, *Homebush Boy*, Port Melbourne: Heinemann, 1995. For further background see Peter Quartermaine, *Thomas Keneally*, London: Edward Arnold, 1991.

[33] Thomas Keneally, *The Great Shame: A History of the Irish in the Old World and the New*, Milsons Point, NSW: Random House, 1998.

[34] Christopher Koch, *The Many-Coloured Land: A Return to Ireland*, Sydney: PanMacmillan, 2002.

[35] This is true even though Koch is aware of his identity and its bearing on his fiction: 'I had no problem with my identity, I simply knew it was a dual identity – even though my ancestors came

Within their fiction, Keneally and Koch's ancestral narratives contribute to individual and collective identities. For Keneally, the relationships between his characters and their ancestors are more than merely personal: they are national. In his fiction, ancestors are used to 'narrate the nation': the identification is national, but allows for an exploration of ideas of the nation, rather than explicit definition of national boundaries. In contrast, Koch displays an ongoing concern with constructions of masculinity in his fiction. His characters relate to their ancestors in terms of gender identity, which emerges from Koch's inhabitation of the genre of adventure fiction. However, Koch is less able (or willing) than Keneally to articulate the transformative potential of his ideas.

Transformative Ancestral Identification: Nation and Gender

> People often see their family origins, their pedigree with all its class, racial and national implications, as partly defining them, and therefore as influencing their life's tendency or narrative. Whether this genealogical perspective determines an individual's life narrative, or does so only imaginatively … is less important than people's belief in a myth of origin, belief that their pedigree has partly defined them.[37]

While historical ancestry and metaphors of ancestry are useful approaches to reading ancestral narratives in literature, the real function of ancestry is its construction of personal and communal identities. Gilmartin suggests the importance of identifying with ancestors: 'For the Celtic nations … in time of famine and massive emigration, a blood tie to the wandering tribes of Israel may have helped to explain and to give a moral, spiritual authority to the displaced and wandering state of their own tribes and nations.'[38] This operates on both personal and communal levels, just as 'the remembered past is both personal and collective'.[39]

Like many postcolonial writers, Keneally's fiction throughout his career has demonstrated a persistent concern with what Homi Bhabha calls 'narrating the

---

here soon after first settlement.' Koch in Baker, *Yacker 3*, p. 189. He emphasises that he is not an autobiographical writer (p. 208).

[36] Christopher Koch, *Out of Ireland*, Milsons Point: Random House, 1999; Christopher Koch, *Highways to a War*, Milsons Point: Random House, 1995.

[37] Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative*, p. 22.

[38] Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative*, p. 7.

[39] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country*, p. 195.

nation'.[40] His 1967 novel *Bring Larks and Heroes* reconstructs an important but neglected event in Australian history: the 1804 Castle Hill uprising.[41] This is an early example of Keneally's subaltern characterisation, and he represents his characters in that historical moment as 'tomorrow's ancestors', or national founders. Even though it contributes to an oppositional culture, this is a tragic novel, because the major characters are both executed. Their bloodlines are cut short, and they are denied the opportunity of becoming ancestors to generations of Australians. A novel which is more deeply concerned with intergenerational cultural memory as such is *Schindler's Ark*, which narrates the tragedy of the Holocaust but also moves towards a type of redemption with the survival of the Schindler Jews.[42] Notably, Keneally also demonstrates the potential for revising this tragic conception of national history with the comic reconciliation of *The Playmaker*.[43] These novels are concerned with 'the role of narrative and the imagination in the construction of a national identity'[44], and here Keneally shows himself to be a master mythmaker in national literature.

However, in his more recent work Keneally attempts to move beyond simplistic formations of national identity through ancestry. These books depict the nation as a more problematic entity than any one-eyed nationalist would admit. This is an instance of Gilmartin's suggestion that 'it is essential to locate the areas where pedigree crosses and elucidates the racial, regional and national tensions which threatened to fragment Britain's image of herself as unified and insular'.[45] Displacing conventional notions of nationalism is just as important in Australia as in Britain, a task which Keneally undertakes self-consciously.

At a first glance, *The Great Shame* aspires to social history in that it narrates the history of the subaltern (nation) in opposition to a dominant community. However, the text transcends this binary because it is really a diaspora history: it aims to tell the story of the Irish in their homeland as well as in Australia and the United States. In this way it depicts a transnational type of ancestral identification. In a similar way, *Bettany's Book* projects ancestry beyond national borders, and even beyond the concept of the nation itself. The protagonists of this novel live

---

[40] Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, London: Routledge, 1990.
[41] Thomas Keneally, *Bring Larks And Heroes*, Melbourne: Cassell, 1967.
[42] Thomas Keneally, *Schindler's Ark*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982.
[43] Thomas Keneally, *The Playmaker*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987.
[44] Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative*, p. 4.

through their ancestral narratives and reappraise Australian history in its colonial form, coming to understand themselves as embodiments and inheritors of a problematic white settler culture. In this way they are led towards a post-colonial, and even new humanist, awareness of their personal role in history. Thus Keneally's writing comes to a fuller enunciation of national identity through ancestry, before moving beyond the parameters of the nation itself.

While Keneally demonstrates a new type of humanism through challenging static and normative forms of nationalism, Koch also attempts to do so through challenging certain types of gender identity. This concern with gender is a parallel to Gilmartin's discussion of matriarchal ancestral identification.[46] A concern with nationalism is certainly evident in Koch's ancestral narratives, but what is distinctive about them is that they display a deep concern with constructions of masculinity. Many of his novels inhabit and write back to the tradition of adventure fiction, and his protagonists explore their masculinity through life experiences which challenge them to remake themselves in a newer, better light. The preferred form of masculine identity appears to be holistic and integrated, as opposed to the fragmented split-figures which dominate so many of Koch's novels.

The primary material for discussion here is the double-novel *Beware of the Past*, which consists of both *Highways to a War* and the more recent *Out of Ireland*.[47] These two novels construct ancestry as a type of wound, which can fester and become a serious threat if left unattended or cast to the winds of amnesia. Within these novels Robert Devereux is a metaphor for Michael Langford, although the ancestry is unacknowledged and repressed within the family history. Both men are adventure heroes and their lives are portrayed using the conventions of adventure fiction. Both are men of action whose primary desire is to escape Tasmania for the wider world. However, because Langford is unaware of his ancestral origins and the narrative that accompanies them, he is doomed to repeat the mistakes of Devereux and he pursues the illusion of romantic nationalism, which leads to his violent death in Cambodia. Paradoxically, it is a lack of ancestral identification which is the danger here. As archetypal nationalist poet-warriors, each man struggles with a fractured identity and is unable to reshape his masculine self-

---

45 Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative*, p. 5.
46 Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative*, p. 3.

image. In this way, Koch's work represents a tragic vision like Keneally's earlier novels, because there is little redemption or success in moving towards a post-humanist future. The path is pointed out as necessary, but it is not taken.

In moving beyond a consideration of ancestry as simply a gateway into history, it is necessary to consider how ancestral narratives contribute to the process of identification. Ancestry as metaphor is a useful and insightful theory, for it explains particular metaphors of ancestry and begins to shed light on how ancestral narratives contribute to this process of identification. However, it works better as a framing device and springboard for discussion of ancestral identification. What is really interesting is how Keneally and Koch both use ancestry to transform static formulations of identity, in their respective areas of national and gender identity.

Comparing Keneally and Koch

Thomas Keneally and Christopher Koch are both similar and different enough to yield a fruitful comparison and contrast. Perhaps the most obvious similarity is that they both have Irish Catholic background, although this thesis is not really concerned with this point. They are both well-established writers of Australian historical fiction, and they are both from a generation where it was initially quite difficult to establish a career as a full-time writer.[48] They both represent a particular generation of post-War Australian writers with their origins in the 1960s, a time when Australian literature was experiencing a renaissance. However, they are now in a position where they have attracted some critical acclaim, both in the form of literary awards and in terms of having had a substantial critical culture built around themselves. The most pertinent point of comparison is that they share Irish ancestry, and more importantly that they write about Irish-Australian ancestry. Their ancestral narratives explore different perspectives on history but also contribute substantially to an individual's sense of personal identity. The main basis for comparing these authors is that ancestry features so prominently in their work.

---

[47] The fragmentation of the ancestral narrative into two novels reflects Koch's notion of the 'doubleman' as a example of fragmented male gender identity.

[48] As important figures in this era of Australian national literature, Keneally and Koch both utilised European literary forms but also attempted to establish Australian literature as something unique and different. For related background see Robert Dixon, Christopher Lee and Delys Bird, *Authority and Influence: Australian Literary Criticism 1950-2000*, St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 2001.

However, it is in their depiction of the transformative potential of ancestry that Keneally and Koch diverge. Keneally embraces the potential for transformation through ancestral narratives wholeheartedly. His more recent fiction is based on a fundamentally different idea of national identification from his earlier novels. Works such as *Bring Larks and Heroes* depict the nation in opposition to a dominant, colonial culture and thus illustrate static, radical, and more traditional national identity which is constructed in terms of ethno-symbolism.[49] In contrast, his later works extend this idea of the nation in post-colonial and new humanist terms. These books are more concerned with diasporic identity which cuts across borders, and communal identities which have a more complex relationship with the past and other societies in places such as Africa. So Keneally depicts a powerful potential for the transformation of national identity through ancestral narrative.

On the other hand, Koch is much more reticent in promoting transformation. His fiction is primarily concerned with male gender identity, and he consistently depicts a traditional masculinity based on identification with a nation and objectification of the female as 'Other'.' While he portrays the negative and self-destructive nature of such forms of maleness, he stops short at promoting any coherent plan for change. While the central message of *Beware of the Past* is that those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat the same mistakes, this double-novel does not suggest how men might actually learn from their forefathers.[50] These two authors respectively demonstrate how a remembered origin 'is integral to our sense of identity', while 'amnesiacs bereft of their past are also deprived of their identity'.[51]

Ultimately, the reason for this difference is the temperamental predilection of each writer. Keneally is the more radical thinker; on the one hand he leans towards an actively oppositional nationalism while on the other he is prepared to openly adapt his thinking and embrace new possibilities. In contrast, Koch is severely distrustful of revolutionary politics; he favours a more evolutionary kind of change and is less forward about promoting specific policies or pathways for new kinds of identity. This thesis explores the differences that separate Keneally and Koch's

---

[49] Chapter Three elaborates and applies Anthony D. Smith's ethno-symbolist theory of nationalism fully.

[50] The gender-exclusive pronoun is used intentionally in the context of specifically male gender identity.

[51] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country*, pp. 41-2.

fictions through an analysis of their ancestral narratives and how they construct

approaches to history and identity. In the end, ancestry teaches us that while we are

all different, we are also all human. As Mark Turner writes:

> Genealogy connects past, present and future into one. It connects
> ancestors in the past to real descendants in the future, binds them into
> one living unity. This yields a model of humanity that unifies human
> diversity: living individuals are a lateral plurality, vastly divergent,
> even competing, but nonetheless united vertically into a descending
> tree.[52]

---

[52] Mark Turner, *Death is the Mother of Beauty: Mind, Metaphor, Criticism*, Chicago: Chicago
University Press, 1987, p. 194