

PART I

THE NOVEL

Chapter 2

History and Interpretation

"For me, the reading of novels has been my only access to certain truths." (p. 174)

Keneally produced the novel and document on which the movie on Oskar Schindler was based. Oskar is a man for whom life is in the service of desire, of passions, of a process of self-transformation, but in the end he uses that very process to save the lives of others, to ensure **their** survival. Oskar Schindler is a man with a surfeit of abundance. He is a monster of energy which is turned toward the salvation of a remnant of Jews from the steamroller of Nazi evil. To what extent is Keneally's account a fabrication, and to what extent does the novel capture the reality of the Holocaust and the character of Schindler? Is Oskar in the novel a historical witness of what occurred, and is he himself rooted in his own history?

Yosef Yerushalmi claimed that the novel was forging the image of the Holocaust rather than historiography. "The Holocaust has already engendered more historical research than any single event in Jewish history, but I have no doubt that its image is being shaped, not at the historian's anvil, but in the novelist's crucible."¹ However, critics acclaimed Keneally for being an excellent documentalist and upholding the principles of an historian or a good journalist even though the story was told in the form of a novel. "The joint testimony of these survivors has been tirelessly researched, skilfully assembled, scrupulously checked."² In the opening author's note, Keneally himself denies that he is writing fiction, and concludes that in his novel, "Oskar Schindler's astonishing *history* (my italics) appears for the first time in extended form." (p. 11)

You can't call *Schindler's List* fiction any more than you can call *In Cold Blood*, or *The Executioner's Song*, or *The Right Stuff* fiction. I do see that all of these books are in the fiction section of the bookstore for convenience sake, and also because they have these literary qualities. I think the device of the documentary novel is well established in North America and there are a number of precedents for what I did.³

Anatoli Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar*, written as a document in the form of a novel, was one such precedent. As Kuznetsov himself said in an interview, "The result is not a novel in the conventional sense, but a photographically accurate picture of actual events."⁴ Oral testimony and documentary evidence were turned into a literary version of a photograph, "for the photograph operates rhetorically on precisely the same assumption at work in documentary narrative. That is, as a seeming trace or fragment of its referent that appeals to the eye for proof, the photograph is able to invoke the authority of its empirical link to events, which in turn seems to reinforce the sense of its own unmediated factuality."⁵

The fictional technique was merely the convenient form. Keneally, in fact, was upset when he received the Booker prize, not for the prize itself, but because it was awarded under the category of fiction. He claimed to be writing the truth, an honest portrayal of the Holocaust itself and an honest account of Schindler's heroic act of salvation using the form of the novel.

The novel not only claims to represent historical truth, it begins with a personal historical note which attributes the origins of the novel to a tale told by another person at a particular time and place - Leopold Pfefferberg. Keneally attests that he is not the author of the tale. He based his story on the testimony of witnesses. Keneally claims that he is only responsible for rendering the aesthetic form he gives to the material, but the truth of the content derives from the original tellers of the tale.⁶ Is this claim valid?

Certainly, the feel of what happened is accurately portrayed. Names, dates, the integration of the anecdotes of witnesses into a continuous story, these are the documentary techniques that the novel employs to convey the feel of the time. The novel provides a powerful portrayal of the sense and emotional impact of the Holocaust. "*Schindler's List* reads like a novel: Its voices are thick with living tissue; its scenes are so vivid they appear to result from a kind of ventriloquism."⁷ "His narrative 'feels' true: it is consistent, it makes sense, it carries its own conviction."⁸

To test the verity of Keneally's depiction of the Holocaust, I want to examine examples of his description of evidence of Holocaust events, what he himself says about the Holocaust, how he explains it, and the frame within which he seeks to understand it.

The burning of the synagogue in Krakow is the first scene of actual genocide depicted in the novel. After describing the SS smashing doors and stealing valuables, tearing a fur coat off a girl by breaking her arm when she resisted, and shooting a boy who refused to give up his skis, the scene shifts to the synagogue.

"While the SS were working the apartment buildings, the *Einsatzgruppe* squad moved against the fourteenth-century synagogue of Stara Boznica. As they expected, they found at prayer there a congregation of traditional Jews with beards and sidelocks and prayer shawls. They collected a number of the less Orthodox from surrounding apartments and drove them in as well, as if they wanted to measure the reaction of one group to the other.

"Among those pushed across the threshold of Stara

Bozníca was the gangster Max Redlicht, who would not otherwise have entered an ancient temple or been invited to do so. They stood in front of the Ark, these two poles of the same tribe who would on a normal day have found each other's company offensive. An *Einsatz* NCO opened the Ark and took out the parchment Torah scroll. The disparate congregation on the synagogue floor were to file past and spit on it. There was to be no faking - the spittle was to be visible on the calligraphy.

"The Orthodox Jews were more rational about it than those others, the agnostics, the liberals, the self-styled Europeans. It was apparent to the *Einsatz* men that the modern ones balked in front of the scroll and even tried to catch their eye as if to say, Come on, we're all too sophisticated for this nonsense. The SS men had been told in their training that the European character of liberal Jews was a tissue-thin facade, and in Stara Bozníca the backsliding reluctance of the ones who wore short haircuts and contemporary clothes went to prove it.

"Everyone spat in the end except Max Redlicht. The *Einsatzgruppen* men may have seen this as a test worth their time - to make a man who visibly does not believe renounce with spittle a book he views intellectually as antique tribal drivel but which his blood tells him is still sacred. Could a Jew be retrieved from the persuasions of his ridiculous blood? Could he think as cleverly as Kant? That was the test.

"Redlicht did not pass it. He made a little speech. 'I've done a lot. But I won't do that.' They shot him first, and then shot the rest anyway and set fire to the place, making a shell of the oldest of all Polish synagogues." (pp. 60-1)⁹

One does not have to be intimately acquainted with Polish Jewry to find problems with this account. Why could a gangster not attend any synagogue, orthodox or otherwise? Any Jew - gangster or not - is welcome to join a minyan.¹⁰ Further, why would orthodox and not-so orthodox or even liberal Jews have found each others company offensive? And how many, if any, liberal Jews or atheistic Jews would have regarded the Tanach as antique tribal drivel?¹¹ The lack of forelocks and wearing of modern dress were not signs of the beliefs of modern Jews. Being an atheist did not entail regarding the Torah as either antique or tribal let alone drivel.

Though the latter point may have only been the perspective of the *Einsatzgruppen* that Keneally was

reflecting, the text is ambiguous. But the statement that a gangster would not have been invited to enter a synagogue or that liberals and orthodox were two poles of the same tribe who found each others company offensive is more clearly Keneally's interpretation. Keneally cannot be accused of using words loosely and unthinkingly. He is an excellent prose stylist and a very economical writer who demonstrates a poet's precision and close attention in his choice of words, and a great sensitivity to their meaning. Why does Keneally say these things about the Jews?

The interpretation is not only questionable, it is unknowable. Keneally could not possibly know the attitude of the Jews to each other or to the Tanach since all the Jews in the synagogue were killed. Even if Keneally happened to have access to *Einsatzgruppen* archives, they would be self-evidently unreliable in reporting only what confirmed Nazi prior beliefs.

Keneally claimed that he only used dialogue where he had testimonial or documentary support from Schindler files. "I didn't even use dialogue unless I had testimonial backing for using it, from documents that Schindler had left behind him, or from live testimony from former prisoners."¹² No Jews survived the torching of the synagogue to give evidence or testimony. Oskar was not there. Archives would not have provided such information. However, the issue is not whether the *Einsatzgruppen* characterized the Torah as primitive drivel rather than the Jews, or even the attitudes of liberal Jews, but, assuming even that the liberal Jews shared that attitude and Keneally found such views expressed in archives, why would Keneally appear to confirm their beliefs in explicit words as well as in his description of the scene? Keneally creates a powerful scene which seems to verify the *Einsatzgruppen* conviction that race runs deeper than education. Why would he do this? It is one thing to tell the story of the burning of the synagogue to confirm that Oscar knew about such planned events, but why present the possible SS view as if it were, at least in part, his own?

Look at the story again. It becomes not so much a tale about the burning of the synagogue as the story of SS beliefs and the behaviour of Jews confirming such beliefs. Further, the story seems to confirm the hypocrisy of most liberal Jews. If atheistic Jews believed that the Torah scrolls were antique tribal drivel, why would they refuse or even hesitate to spit on it if they were under a brutal threat if they refused? And why would the ultra-orthodox be "more rational" and do so readily? Both liberal and orthodox Jews knew that survival was a higher value in God's eyes than spitting on the Torah under threat of death, though presumably both groups might hesitate to spit. In any case, why would the differential behaviour of the two groups be depicted and then contrasted in their

behaviour to confirm the *Einsatz* belief that the Jewish racial blood memory of the sacred Torah was at odds with their intellectual convictions? Finally, assuming the legend of Max Redlicht had been passed down by Jews, why would the legend not be used to illustrate the courage of even a Jewish gangster who would stand up to Nazis even when they ordered him to spit on the Torah? Why is the story told to illustrate that tradition, if not blood, runs much deeper than intellectual beliefs?

This is not really even an issue of history, but the use of legend for historiographical purposes. And the purpose does not seem to be aimed at putting forth a Jewish view of the Holocaust which might have represented the criminal atheist Max as a *tzaddic* (a righteous person).¹³ Keneally offers a version of a tale which not only has no basis in documentary facts, is implausible given what is known about Jewish behaviour at the time, seems to endorse Nazi rather than Jewish mythology, but could not even be based on historical documentary fact. Is it possible that Keneally buys into the Nazi metaphysical view of the world -- not Nazi racism and anti-semitism -- but the celebration of natural chance rather than the Hebraic spiritual tradition or the Greek philosophic tradition of human rationality?¹⁴

On the other hand, the story does attempt to document something about Schindler even if it is only a particular version of a legend about the Holocaust. Keneally's Schindler is clearly portrayed not only as knowing about the Nazi brutality that surrounded him, but of warning the Jews of planned violent actions. In the novel, Schindler is clearly acquainted with Nazi violence from the very beginning. One commentator, in describing Schindler's reaction to the clearing of the ghetto which occurred much later than the burning of the synagogue, erroneously noted:

Apparently this incident, seen from a distance, was Schindler's first experience of violence. Strangely, Keneally's Schindler, moving freely about Nazi-occupied Cracow, had managed not to see the brutality that was everywhere. The thousands of arrests, the public executions, the beatings, the evictions. The succession of roundups of people leaving churches after Mass, the many 'bloody Sundays,' the attempts at 'returning' Cracow to the status of a 'pure German' city are ignored in Keneally's book.¹⁵

The clearing of the ghetto was not Schindler's first knowledge of violence, though it may have been his first direct encounter with that violence. The critic's main point is that there has been a selection of events in the portrait of the Holocaust. For example, the suffering of the Poles and

the Christians was omitted in the novel. The fact that the Polish underground was large and active from 1939 is left entirely out of the novel.¹⁶ The critics were right in this regard; there is historical selectivity in dealing with the Holocaust as background to the Oskar Schindler story. But is that selectivity significant?

The main problem is not distortions caused by selective representation. That is bound to happen in any relatively concise document, especially when the material is not germane to the story of Oscar Schindler. The real issue is how Keneally provides such interpretive descriptions (the burning of the Krakow synagogue), what he says about what he describes, how he explains it, and the intellectual frame in which he places the Holocaust.

Keneally characterized the Holocaust and connected it to Schindler's actions as follows: "*his salvage of a cross section of a condemned race during those years now known by the generic name Holocaust.*" (my italics) Oskar Schindler's action is described as a salvage operation. Though certainly his act saved people from extraordinary danger, we normally salvage ships about to be wrecked or goods from ships about to sink. We do not ordinarily write about people as salvage. Saving them, bringing salvation if some religious overtone is intended - but why the word 'salvage' applied to the Jews?¹⁷

Further, why are the Jews referred to as a 'race' when the very idea that Jews are a race, that is, a group with the same genetic inheritance, has been rejected by Jews as applying to themselves. Jews are an ethnic group, a nation, adhere to the same religion, share common cultural features - whatever equivocal designation one prefers, but **not** a race. Why does Keneally depict Jews by the very characterization attributed to them by their greatest assassin?

And why condemned? The answer seems immediately obvious - condemned by Hitler. Condemned by Himmler. Condemned by Heydrich. Condemned by the entire Nazi murder machine. But condemnation suggests blame. Condemnation suggests guilt. Condemnation suggests that the party condemned is in the wrong. This word is not only associated with those sentenced to prison or death, or, what is worse, condemned, as in a building no longer considered useful. 'Condemned' has a psychological, moral and theological side as well as a descriptive one.

The use of 'salvage' (as if the Jews were things) and the use of 'condemned race' (which adopts the language of the murderers), may be just a questionable choice of phrase. However, the choice appears significant when a third part of the same clause is examined - the phrase 'those years now known by the generic name Holocaust'. Since when is the

Holocaust a measurement of a time span? And why is it a 'generic' term when the use of the word with capitals was to characterize the specific attempt to exterminate the Jews and the murder of six million of them as a unique event? The generic term simply means a great loss of life by fire, or "the word *holocaust*, shorn of its particular reference along with its article, threatens to become a symbolic word connoting mass murder and destruction whatever the magnitude."¹⁸ Prior to the Second World War, holocaust referred to a burnt offering as practised by the ancient Israelites, a use now restricted to historical specialists. Why would Keneally refer to the years, rather than the extermination of the Jews, as the Holocaust, and then call it a generic name as if it were a generic drug rather than one advertised by means of a name that had been culturally copyrighted?

Keneally seems to be suggesting that **the** Holocaust was not the Holocaust but **a** holocaust. This is certainly the impression of Philip Marchand who interviewed Thomas Keneally. "Keneally insists that the events recorded in *Schindler's List* be linked in spirit with these atrocities (the Armenian genocide, Stalin's treatment of the Ukrainians) as well. There is no metaphysical uniqueness to the Holocaust which should prevent it from being mentioned in the same breath with other examples of genocide."¹⁹ What Keneally grants with the capitalization, he takes away with the modifier.

Keneally treats the people who provided the testimonials for his novel, and to whom he offers profuse thanks, as objects, as salvage. He characterizes them in terms of their physical traits and their membership in a collectivity described in terms of 'race' using the language of the murderers who wanted to kill them. He then depicts the historical event from which they were saved as something both generic and unique, but unique only insofar a reference to a specific time period is unique.

Keneally goes further than merely describing events in a way that has no documentary foundation and characterizing the Holocaust in very questionable ways; he provides his own potted historical explanation of the Holocaust in general. Keneally claims that the final solution to the elimination of the Jews from Europe through mass extermination by means of gas was the result of a technological innovation - "a disinfectant compound, Zyklon B²⁰, would supplant Madagascar as the solution." (p. 69) No respectable historian of the Holocaust attributes the final solution to a technological innovation. First, other gases like carbon monoxide were used at other extermination camps, such as Belzec, Sobibór and Treblinka. Secondly, the bulk of the initial victims of Zyklon B were not Jewish; they were Soviet POWs. "Nor is there any reliable evidence to suggest that these killings were rehearsals for the subsequent mass gassing of Jews."²¹ Finally, although Zyklon B allowed for a more effective means of mass

killing on the scale of Auschwitz, it was not the critical factor replacing Madagascar as the solution. Ideological, political, economic, military and practical factors were all far more significant. For example, the beginning of the German war with the USSR is **the** critical factor eliminating Madagascar as a solution, as Keneally himself acknowledged.

Though this is a problem of historical inaccuracy, I am more interested in the fact that Keneally points to a technical innovation as the explanation for the mass extermination of the Jews. Attributing the cause of the Holocaust to Zyklon B gas is such an egregious error that some account must be given of it. I suggest that the explanation can be found in Keneally's own pragmatic orientation. Pragmatism stresses not only the importance, but the leading role of practical activities on human affairs, so that new developments are determined not only by their practicality in solving a problem, but the practicality of a new development in deciding a problem is often the decisive factor in creating a new development. Of course, pragmatists do not only believe that thinking is a response to a concrete situation aimed at solving a problem, and that such practical solutions make the critical difference in human conduct.²²

In Keneally's own pragmatism, and in his projection of the emphasis of the critical role of technology in historical change associated with pragmatism, Keneally commits serious historical factual errors. But these are less important than his peculiar characterizations. These cannot be connected with his pragmatic outlook - the description of Oskar as a salvager of a cross section of a condemned race, the description of Stern as having inherited characteristics of his race (which I had not alluded to heretofore), the description of the Holocaust itself as an historical period.

Keneally creates a powerful scene which seems to confirm the *Einsatzgruppen* conviction that race runs deeper than education. Keneally, in the rare moments when he ventures superficially into the thought side of his characters, seems to be projecting his own world-view onto them. These problems are not linked to Keneally's pragmatism, but are due to the other side of his dialectical analysis, attributing behaviour to inherited characteristics. They are connected with explaining Oskar's behaviour in terms of an inborn daimon which I will expand on later.²³

This trait does not appear to fit in with Keneally as a pragmatist, for pragmatists who follow in the Dewey mold are non-theistic humanistic believers in a universal civil religion.²⁴ Experience counts, not inherited cultural or even racial characteristics. But there is another side to Keneally. He depicts Oskar Schindler as Janus-faced. But Thomas Keneally also emerges as Janus-faced. Keneally seems to hold a doctrine

of inherited characteristics, inherited as an individual and as a member of a group. This is not racism in any sense of prejudice. Keneally is clearly not endorsing Nazi actions. But his outlook is related to the Nazi world view.

Connected with the dichotomy between pragmatism and the classical view of inherited characteristics and personality traits is another dichotomy - the tension between feelings and thought.

Keneally appears to sympathize with the view that liberal members of the enlightenment had feelings which were sentimentally attached to their past (their inherited daimon) while their intellectual convictions were based on entirely different premises and looked towards the future (their pragmatism). Keneally endorses first those liberals, who, like Stern, combined their liberal enlightened attitudes with a commitment to his people rather than their Book. He does not approve of those whose sentiments are out of synch with their thoughts, but who make no effort to integrate the two. Even the orthodox, who have a much more coherent value set, are superior in this regard. For Keneally, rationality entailed integrating one's thoughts and feelings.

His description of Schindler's behaviour is an illustration. Chapter 5 in Keneally's novel demonstrates even more explicitly that Oskar Schindler's sympathies were not with the Nazi goal of eliminating the Jews, but with the Jews themselves. The dilemma for him was how to make Oskar's thoughts and actions conform to his feelings. Secondly, Oskar comes across as an unequivocal communitarian pragmatist²⁵ as he shares his anti-Nazi sentiments with his German officer pals drawn from the lesser ranks as they listen to music in a cellar jazz club together, where the SS and Party officials were most unlikely to appear given the Nazi conviction that jazz was the expression of subhuman animals.

Some of Oskar Schindler's friends came from Canaris. "To the SS the enemy within might be the Jew, but to the Canaris the enemy within was the SS." (p. 65)²⁶ None of the friends in the jazz club were abominators of Jews. Keneally is explicitly clear that Schindler belonged to a community of Germans who opposed Hitler's policy of extermination. Schindler belonged to a community of pragmatists who were anti-Nazi. Schindler also had feelings of sympathy for the Jews.

Oskar Schindler went one step further in this identification. He communicated with a number of dissident factions, particularly the Zionist underground, to transfer funds and transmit information back. Further, like many Jewish survivors, for whom testimony became the sole reason to survive, Oskar also wanted to serve as a witness to what had occurred. After the first *Aktion* in the ghetto: (7000 had been cleared out) "Oskar had now become more exact about this sort

of information. He knew, for example, that the *Aktion* had been under the overall management of one Wilhelm Kunde but had been led by SS Obersturmführer Otto von Mallotke. Oskar kept no dossier, but he was preparing for another era when he would make a full report to either Canaris or the world. It would be made earlier than he expected." (pp. 134-5) In the book, the importance of what Oskar sees in the ghetto is that he is preparing to use the material he observes as historical evidence for the subsequent convictions of the perpetrators of murder.²⁷

In fact, Oskar Schindler was an important war crimes witness.

"And he proved useful to the American authorities, and brought a heap of dangerous hostility upon his own head, by presenting the occupying power with the most detailed documentation on all his old drinking companions, on the viscious owners of the other slave factories that had stood near his, on all the rotten group he had wined and flattered while inwardly loathing in order to save the lives of helpless people."²⁸

This is ironic. Oskar Schindler, who lived to be a witness to history against the Nazis, is given an enormous boost towards general immortality by an author who claims to be an historian, but who reconstructs that history with interpretations and explanatiopns that seem to betray, to some degree, that history.

In the postmodernist version, the explanation is simply that all historical reconstruction is creative. "All writing, all composition, is construction. We do not imitate the world, we construct versions of it. There is no mimesis, only *poesis*. No recording. Only construction."²⁹ Put another way, "the truths of the Holocaust--both the factual and interpretive--can no longer be said to lie beyond our understanding, but must now be seen to inhere in the ways we understand, interpret, and write its history."³⁰

One, however, need not go that far. Historiographical accounts may be judged in terms of their completeness, consistency, plausibility, evidential support, interpretive projections, erroneous explanations, etc. Further, the intellectual frame for undertaking the construction will tell us a great deal about the design and interpretation of the events. And Keneally's interpretation was focused on the problem of portraying virtue. He could not revert to the romantic hero modelled on Rousseau's portrait of himself as naturally good and well intentioned. For Keneally makes it clear that Schindler neither purported nor could be mistaken in any way for possessing such a virtue. Rousseau in his *Confessions* claimed an "utter inability to hate or injure". Schindler nowhere invokes such virtue nor provides any self-justification for his black marketeering, his use of slave

labour, his drinking and womanizing based on the exceptionalism of his circumstances. Keneally makes clear that Oskar neither possessed nor professed conventional virtues.

For this is the story of the pragmatic triumph of good over evil, a triumph in eminently measurable, statistical, unsubtle terms. When you work from the other end of the beast - when you chronicle the predictable and measurable success evil generally achieves - it is easy to be wise, wry, piercing, to avoid bathos. It is easy to show the inevitability by which evil acquires all of what you would call the *real estate* of the story, even though good might finish up with a few imponderables like dignity and self-knowledge. Fatal human malice is the staple of narrators, original sin the mother-fluid of historians. But it is a risky enterprise to have to write of virtue. (p. 14)

Keneally was faced with a problem. He was writing in the midst of an evolutionary imaginative world in which his readers already brought to new imaginative reconstructions their own ready-made experiences and expectations provided by Keneally's predecessors. He was writing about virtue and not original sin; modern readers are skeptical of virtue.

Keneally had a pragmatic problem. How could he make an act of such great virtue plausible. Further, how could he do so without endorsing a doctrine of the inevitability of evil which others used to write about the dramatic fight between these old opponents?

Who else has written about such a lofty theme in the twentieth century? To whom is Keneally comparing himself? For what author does evil prevail even if good achieves a few imponderables like dignity and self-knowledge? The reference to original sin offers a clue. Is Keneally thinking of the seedy world of Graham Greene? In *The Last American*, at the end of the novel, the character Fowler reflects on his memory of Pyle through whose death Fowler achieved a small measure of redemption. "Everything had gone right with me since he had died, but how I wished there existed someone to whom I could say that I was sorry." As one critic summarized Fowler's state, "what has mattered in Fowler's story is that he is capable of feeling this pity and sorrow for the lost young man; that as an ordinary, nonpolitical, moderately selfish, but intelligent human being he is moved to act against violence and stupidity; and that he is impelled towards such action above all by his insight into human suffering, especially the suffering caused by war and political conflict."³¹

This suggests why Keneally sees his task as difficult. He

cannot rely on the literary device of irony to provide a sense of distance from the action, for Schindler is not moderately selfish, but excessively so. And when he moves to act against violence and stupidity, he succeeds. According to Keneally, Oskar's success does not seem to result from some metaphysical or theological insight into suffering produced by war and conflict. Keneally is writing about a selfish man who lacks any special understanding of either pain or evil, a man who achieves a tremendous victory over the forces of evil, while the characters in a plethora of novels that have (literally) informed our imaginative intelligence have failed to achieve such a victory. How is Keneally going to establish credibility about his account of Oskar Schindler?

To put it another way, in an era when the anti-hero is king in literature, how does a novelist write about a hero without appearing maudlin? How can the author convey a sense of dramatic intensity that the subject deserves without making the whole affair seem implausible? Unlike Fowler, who is full of moral intelligence but is totally indecisive, Schindler is extremely decisive but with no special entrée into the world of moral wisdom. Like Pyle, Oskar is courageous, but he is not ineffectual; Oskar has street smarts. Rehabilitation in Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* is slow and secret; in the novel by Keneally, there is **no** rehabilitation.³² There is **no** original sin, just human failings.

We are entering the same Manichaeian worldview Graham Greene held, but without the Jansenist premise of original sin and the power of evil to embrace us all.

The Holocaust has become the principal metaphor for evil in our time, and like all metaphors it risks devaluation by constant use and occasional rhetorical abuse. By telling Oskar Schindler's story the way he does - with names, dates and anecdotes supplied by survivors - Thomas Keneally renews the metaphor in the only way possible, by locating it again in concrete, imaginable situations where certain individuals make choices and others suffer consequences, where evil is as palpable as the presence of a madman with a gun or a bureaucrat with a list.³³

Palpable, not metaphysical evil. The victims are salvage. The Holocaust is but a depiction of a few years of history. Concrete space and time. Keneally left the priesthood and, like Oskar, is a lapsed Catholic. For him, evil is the stuff of everyday life. The contest is real enough, even if the might of evil's power has been greatly reduced.

When Keneally refers to the "inevitability of evil"³⁴, perhaps the comparison is to be made to Joseph Conrad who was

one of the pioneers of the anti-heroic leading character in quest of his soul in a dark, dark world. But for Conrad, "there is a fundamental incompatibility between material interest pursued by self-seeking individuals and common human needs."³⁵ Schindler, as a character who was victorious over evil, just does not fit into this imaginative frame. Can you think of one literary work or film in which the hero is a businessman? And this is heroism on a most magnificent scale. Consider how hard it is to write convincing prose about a hero who is introduced as a man determined to make money. Imagination is determined by our experience and education. We cannot leave them behind and then pretend we are omniscient. They influence what we expect and what we will accept as plausible. By what means does Keneally make a virtuous hero out of a man in pursuit of wealth?

The conundrum is that none of the imaginative frames that we, Keneally's readers, bring to the novel, allow for the existence of such a character. This is Keneally's difficulty. He has to make such an account convincing. Providing the appearance of historical authenticity was critical to establishing that plausibility. Keneally's novel overwhelmingly succeeds in creating that sense of reality even if his descriptions, characterizations of the Holocaust, explanation for it, and intellectual frame for understanding the Holocaust have little to do with history itself. The appearance of historical reality, however, is not a sufficient condition for making his account of a virtuous hero convincing.

ENDNOTES

- . Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982, p. 98.
- . Marion Glastonbury, "Too Grateful," *New Statesman*, Vol. 104, November 32, p. 25.
- . Thomas Keneally, as quoted in an interview by Philip Marchand, "Realists to tarnish Schindler's List hero," *The Toronto Daily Star*, April 23, 1993.
- . "The Memories," *New York Times Book Review*, 9 April 1967, p. 45. The sentence has been quoted often in discussions of documentary novels. Within the context of Holocaust documentary novels, cf. Sidra Ezrahi, *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 31; James Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988, Midland edition, p. 57.
- . Young 1990 p. 57.
- . Keneally gave the book its title and, I will argue, did more than just give it what was said an aesthetic form. "(H)e has no title to that narrative which is not his own...he is not entitled, therefore, to give it a title...he can only 'render' the beauty of his author's hand." (Shoshana Felman, "Turning the Screw of Interpretation" pp. 94-207, in Shoshana Felman, ed., *Literature and Psychoanalysis - The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982, p. 127.) Furthermore, like the postmodernists, I question the separation of aesthetic form from the truth value of any representation, but like the postmodernists, I do not think that this entails that all truth representations are relative. Some, I will argue, are more truthful than others.
- . Paul Zweig, "A Good Man in a Bad Time," *The New York Times Book Review* October 24, 1982, p. 1; pp. 38-9.
- . John Gross, "Life Saving," *New York Review of Books*, February 17, 1983, Vol. 10, p. 3.
- . It is interesting to speculate why Spielberg did not include this scene in his film. I would venture to guess that the following reasons determined the decision. First, it would have shifted the centre of evil away from Amon Goeth. Secondly, the scene was too horrendous to come near the beginning of his picture of the developing Holocaust in terms of dramatic momentum. Thirdly, if Schindler were known about this event, it would have taken away from the surprise and triumph at the sight of the ghetto being cleared. Finally, for reasons I will give later, the characterization of the differential behaviour of the Jews with respect to a synagogue would have had no appeal.
- .. "The nature of the covenant between God and the Jewish people forbids the exclusion of any Jew, however wayward, from our people's collective destiny." *Form Judaism*, Winter 1995, 13. Though there is certainly a debate on what to do about the wayward, the emphasis is on the assimilated and those attracted to other religions, not on gangsters. Whatever the different approaches, or whoever someone who had converted to another religion or perhaps was seen as having rejected Judaism might be excluded. Max Redlicht would certainly not have been welcome in a synagogue.
- .. I know of very few "enlightened" non-religious Jews now, nor have I known any, including my late father who was an ardent atheist born in Poland, and I can imagine there were or are very many who would characterize the Torah as "a primitive tribal drivel", even if they did not use the Torah as the guiding document to govern their behaviour.

.. Thomas Keneally , as quoted in an interview by Philip Marchand, "Realists to tarnish Schindler's List hero", *The Toronto Daily Star*, April 23, 1993).

.. Cf. Yaffa Eliach, *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982. Eliach, unlike Keneally, claimed to examine each tale for their historical accuracy and plausibility. Further, in contrast to the interpretation in this tale, the Hasidim might have turned Max into a *tzaddik* (pious person) for his willingness to defy Nazi orders and die rather than sit on the Torah.

.. Keneally, as I shall show, is a pragmatist, and the two most eminent pragmatists, Charles Pierce and William James, believed in chance. In the Hebrew, the divine hand in history, and in the Greek view, civilization, are both designed to counter luck and arbitrariness with order. In the Nazi view, history is a result of genetic chance, circumstantial opportunities and engineering that maximize one's choices. In Hebraism and Hellenism, the stable bonds of family and friends, of reason and of faith, may limit choice, but they also greatly diminish the impact of sheer chance determining outcomes. History is the effort to enforce and develop these bonds while expanding human options. (The phrase is taken from Ralf Dahrendorf, *Life Chances: Approaches to Social and Political Theory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 1979.)

.. Bogumil Kosciuszka, "A Novel Informed by Prejudice," *Commonweal*, Vol. 117 / 6, 1983, pp. 284-5.

.. "The Poles showed impressive solidarity and resistance...The Polish people are victims of Nazi aggression, terror and cruelty, which condemned some groups in Poland to partial physical destruction...Yet the suffering and the plight of the Poles--however grievous--are not identical with the Holocaust. Both Poles and Jews suffered, but in unequal measures; the two groups were *unequal victims*. The difference is basic. As a group the Jews were sentenced to death, whereas the Poles had the chance, the possibility, and the *right* to remain alive." (Israel Gutman, "The Victimization of the Poles," in Michael Berenbaum, ed., *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis*, New York: New York University Press, 1990, p. 98.) In fact, there is at least one reference to a partisan (he was reported killed) at the party in Amon's house in the novel's prologue.

.. Even the choice of "cross-section" is questionable. The Jews saved were not only old women, children and old people, the crippled and the healthy, the religious and the secular, **but not** the Chassidim or the Jewish Marxist revolutionaries. They are a cross section by age and sex, but **not** by belief. They are a *physical* cross-section of Jews, both the old and young, the crippled and the healthy. This case, is the implication that such a cross-section was in itself a rebuke to Schindler's intention to select and save only those who were physically the best specimen, to keep alive temporarily only those strong enough to work?

.. Michael Berenbaum, "The Uniqueness and Universality of the Holocaust," in Michael Berenbaum, ed., *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis*, New York: New York University Press, 1990, p. 20.

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.. The film, *Triumph of the Spirit*, has a very accurate picture of how the cyanide pellets were poured into containers in the ceiling of the extermination chambers.

.. Arno J. Mayer, *Why Did The Heavens Not Darken: The "Final Solution" Story*, New York: Pantheon, 1988, p. 367. Bruce Allen, a critic, describes the

chnological detail as providing the "nearly documentary quality" of the novel. A large part of the book comprises a manual showing how the Nazi system worked and how Schindler manipulated and circumvented it." (*Christian Science Monitor*, November 1982, p. 15)

.. Cf. Igor N. Sidorov, "Rationality and a Sense of Pragmatism," in John S. Arrington, *Philosophy and the Reconstruction of Culture: Pragmatic Essays after Dewey*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993, pp. 175-185. Pragmatists generally believe that through such rational thought and activity, progress results. It is difficult to describe the technological innovation of using Zyklon-B gas as progress, at least humane progress.

.. In this chapter I will only sketch Keneally's use of daimon as explanation; I will provide a much fuller analysis of the daimon in chapter 4.

.. Cf. John Dewey, *A Common Faith*.

.. Pragmatism is not necessarily nor normatively individualistic. Nor is it simply a rational doctrine. "(W)e are erotic beings. Our eros, however, is neither divine nor animal. It is distinctively human; we are beings who seek meaning imaginatively through each other, and the locus of this transformative activity is the community." (Thomas M. Alexander, "The Human Eros" in *Philosophy and the Reconstruction of Culture: Pragmatic Essays After Dewey*, ed. John S. Arrington, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993, p. 203.)

.. Keneally could have included a few more details about Canaris, the Abwehr military intelligence, known popularly by the name of its head, the German admiral, Wilhelm Canaris. Canaris (the admiral) was in contact with Hitler in opposition to Hitler, opposed the outbreak of war and the brutalities perpetrated by the SS under Heydrich. (The latter had been his subordinate in the navy when he attempted the assassination of Hitler in 1944, Canaris was arrested, sent to a concentration camp and executed for treason. Many commentators have explained that the Canaris opposition to the excesses of the SS and the Einsatzgruppen were rhetorical; they asserted their adherence to the chivalric tradition of warfare while allowing others to get their hands sullied. Cf. May 1988).

.. This is a crucial difference between the film and the book. The film concentrates at the end on Israel as a witness against the intention of the Holocaust. The book concentrates on witnesses against the perpetrators of the Holocaust. These include not only Bloch and Amon's male Jewish secretary with photographic memory, but Oskar Schindler himself who anticipated providing evidence against the perpetrators of murder. There was no suggestion in the film that Oskar has any plans or is collecting evidence in order that he might help convict the Nazi murderers.

.. Herbert Steinhouse, "The Real Schindler," *SATURDAYnight*, April 1994, p. 77

.. Robert Scholes, *Structural Fabulation*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975, p. 7.

.. James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Usequences of Interpretation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980, p. 1.

.. Miriam Allot, "The Moral Situation in *The Quiet American*," in Robert D. Hays, *Graham Greene: Some Critical Considerations*, University of Kentucky Press, 1953, p. 205.

.. In the film, the rehabilitation of Schindler is quick and dramatic.

.. John B. Breslin, *America* 147:335, November 27, 1982.

.. After all, in the Catholic Graham Greene, there is no inevitability about

≡ forces of evil; grace could intervene.

.. Jeremy Hawthorn, *Joseph Conrad: Narrative Technique and Ideologic
Commitment*, London: Edward Arnold, 1990, p. 210.