Remembering Babylon

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DAVID MALOUF

David Malouf was born in Brisbane in 1934, one of two children to a Lebanese father and an English-Jewish mother. Malouf was a prolific reader as a child, absorbing such sophisticated classics as Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* by age 12. He studied at University of Queensland, which he graduated from in 1955, and became a lecturer, working first in Australia before relocating to London to teach at Holland Park and later Birkenhead. In 1968, Malouf returned to his home country, lecturing for another ten years at the University of Sydney before becoming a full-time writer in 1978. His first novel, *Johnno*, a semi-autobiographical novel about boyhood in Brisbane, was published in 1975 and later adapted for theater in 2004. Malouf went on to publish several more award-winning novels and novellas about Australia during both World Wars, and he also worked on several plays and theater productions in the 1980s. In 1993, Malouf published *Remembering Babylon*, winning the Commonwealth Writers' Prize among others and making the short-list for the prestigious Booker Prize. Malouf was awarded the Lloyd O'Neil Award in 2008 in recognition of his outsize contributions to Australian literature and publishing, and in the same year he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, based in London. Although in 2018 Malouf announced he was done writing—at least fiction and memoirs—his prolific career as an author has covered the gamut of fiction, non-fiction, memoirs, plays, poetry, and even the lyrics for several operas. Malouf still lives in Sydney and enjoys his privacy.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 1788, England established a penal colony in Sydney Cove after James Cook claimed Australia's eastern coast, transporting 1,500 civilians, prisoners, and soldiers to act as settlers. The arrival of the white foreigners decimated Australia's indigenous Aboriginal population, wiping out an estimated 90% of the country's native people one of two children due to disease, loss of critical territory, and violent altercations. As their numbers dwindled and settlers from the Commonwealth of England—including Scotland, where the McIvors in *Remembering Babylon* emigrate from—continued to arrive, many of the 250 languages spoken by Aboriginal Australians were lost, and with them, their culture, which was passed down orally. Unfortunately, after the period described in Malouf's novel, and even after the various colonies formed the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901, the plight of the native Australians continued to worsen, as indigenous children were separated from their biological families and sent to live with white families well into the twentieth century. In 1967, after much protesting and campaigning, white Australians voted to affirm a referendum to finally recognize Aboriginal Australians as legal citizens, which at last allowed them to participate in Australian government and society.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Remembering Babylon is ranked among the greatest pieces of Australian literature, alongside the works of Patrick White (*Happy Valley*; *The Burnt Ones*) and Christina Stead (*The Man Who Loved Children*). Although Malouf does not himself belong to a colonized population, *Remembering Babylon* is nonetheless notably postcolonial in its criticism of the settlers' racism and their belief in their right to seize land from indigenous people. Although written from the opposite perspective—through the eyes of the indigenous people, rather than the colonizing settlers—Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* touch on similar themes of racism, colonization, and violence towards native peoples as consequences of the expansion of the British Empire. Remembering Babylon is also connected to nonfictional first-hand accounts relating to Aboriginal Australians. For example, David Unaipon wrote the first English account of Aboriginal mythology and culture (which Malouf lightly touches upon) in *Legendary Tales of the Aborigines* in 1930, and Sally Morgan's memoir *My Place* recounts her life grappling with her Aboriginal identity and the implications of its history in the modern era.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Remembering Babylon*
- **When Written:** 1993
- **Where Written:** Sydney, Australia
- **When Published:** 1993
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary, Postcolonial
- **Genre:** Historial Fiction
- **Setting:** Queensland, Australia in the mid-1800s
- **Climax:** Gemmy leaves the settlement, disappearing into the forest to rejoin the Aboriginal Australians.
- **Antagonist:** The other white settlers
- **Point of View:** Third-person

EXTRA CREDIT

Historical Inspiration. Although *Remembering Babylon* is fictional, Gemmy Fairley is loosely based upon a real figure, James Morrill. Around the same time the novel takes place,

Morrill was shipwrecked off the coast of Australia and came to live with a group of Aboriginal Australians, completely adopting their language, customs, and way of life for seventeen years. When Morrill eventually rejoined a white settlement, he spoke the same words that Gemmy does when he reveals himself to Lachlan: "Don't shoot! I'm a British object."

Babylon and Babel. The book's title is a reference to the biblical Tower of Babel. According to the Book of Genesis, the unified people of earth intended to build the tower high enough to reach heaven, but God reacted by making them all speak different languages so they could no longer understand each other. The title hints at the importance of language in the novel and its role in the divide between the white settlers and the Aboriginal people.

PLOT SUMMARY

In Queensland, Australia in the mid-1800s, three children of Commonwealth settlers are playing in a clearing when a strange man appears, sitting balanced upon a **fence**. Lachlan, the young boy, sees the man's darkened skin and assumes he is one of the Aboriginal tribesmen who live in the Australian wilderness. However, after taking the man captive by pretending a long stick is actually a rifle, Lachlan and his cousins, Janet and Meg, discover that the man is in fact a European, though he speaks and acts like an indigenous person. They march him back to the settlement, Lachlan's ego swelling with an image of himself as a powerful dominator, and show the other white settlers. The settlers are mostly disturbed by the man, who calls himself Gemmy. Though Gemmy is only slowly recovering his grasp of English, Mr. Frazer, the town's minister and botanist, spends an afternoon interviewing Gemmy and taking his story down as best he can. Gemmy is fascinated by the **pages** Mr. Frazer writes, believing that they hold some part of himself in them, but Frazer locks them away for safekeeping in the schoolhouse.

16 years earlier, 13-year-old Gemmy washes up on the Australian shore, nearly dead and unsure of where he is. A wandering group of Aboriginal Australians finds him and allows him to join their group and live amongst them, though because of his light complexion they never fully accept him as one of their own. Even so, Gemmy learns the Aboriginal people's language and customs—forgetting his own in the process, along with his former identity—but some part of him longs for a world he cannot quite remember. So when Gemmy eventually hears that other white people have been spotted settling along the coast, he ventures to meet them.

Back in the settlement, the McIvor family—which includes Lachlan (a cousin), Janet, and Meg along with the girls' mother Ellen and their father Jock—takes Gemmy in and lets him live on their property, sleeping in a lean-to next to their shack. Although the other settlers are still nervous about Gemmy, since he reminds them of the Aboriginal people and brings to mind their fears of invasion and attack, Gemmy is good with the children and helps the McIvors with what chores he can understand. When he is not working, he follows Lachlan around.

Although Janet had once looked forward to her cousin Lachlan's arrival from Scotland, now that he has lived with the family for a few years she resents his presence. She is annoyed by his insistence that she always yield or defer to him because she is a girl, even though she is both older and tougher than he is.

The settlers continue to resent Gemmy, and some even think that they should organize a raiding party to kill all the Aboriginal Australians in the area. However, Mr. Frazer enjoys Gemmy's presence, spending hours learning from the knowledge of plants and herbs that the indigenous people passed on to him. Jock, the father of the McIvor family, wants to set his fellow settlers' minds at ease, but he is too wary of affecting their good faith in him or risking his social standing. However, Jock's wife Ellen does not care what others think. She supports Gemmy and proves to be the true strength behind the McIvor family, keeping their lives moving even when Jock is beset by gloom.

After Gemmy has lived with the McIvors for almost a year, he is visited by two Aboriginal men in the middle of the afternoon, who speak with him for a few minutes and then leave. However, the men were spotted by a farmhand, who embellishes the story—claiming that Gemmy was given some kind of mystical **stone**—and whips the settlers up into a fearful frenzy. Jock defends Gemmy, opposing his neighboring settlers and earning the ire of his community. Although the settlers begin harassing the McIvor family—killing their geese in the night, smearing feces on their shed—Jock and Ellen grow closer together in the midst of their hardship. However, one night Gemmy is kidnapped by the other settlers. They put a bag over his head, beat him up, and hold his head underwater until Jock, who has heard the commotion, arrives and ends it. The attackers flee into the night, and Jock brings Gemmy back to the house and holds him tightly for several hours to comfort him.

As Mr. Frazer is writing his magnum opus on Australian farming and foraging, using the knowledge he gleaned from Gemmy, he learns that Gemmy has been taken to live with Mrs. Hutchence, an older woman who owns a large house farther removed from the settlement, where Gemmy will be safer. Janet begins spending time with Mrs. Hutchence as well, learning about bee-keeping from her. One afternoon, as they are tending the hives together, the bees swarm out of the hive and cover Janet. Although the bees would have stung her to death if she had panicked, Janet remains completely tranquil and still in the belief that the bees will not harm her. The bees eventually dissipate, and though Mrs. Hutchence is mortified, Janet is calm

and collected, feeling as if she has just been reborn and received a "new self" who is confident and assured.

Although Gemmy is safe in Mrs. Hutchence's house, he hates being in such a confined space. The claustrophobia brings back long-forgotten memories about his childhood living with a drunken rat-catcher named Willet. Although Willet often abuses Gemmy and treats him almost like a slave, Gemmy feels an attachment to him since he is the family and source of identity Gemmy has, since he is "Willet's boy." However, one night after Willet passes out drunk, Gemmy lights the room they live in on fire in an act of repressed rage. When the fire gets out of hand, Gemmy flees through the window, running until he tumbles into a ship and loses consciousness. Gemmy spends the next two or three years living on ships, hopping from one to the other, until one crew finally tires of him and tosses him overboard, leaving him to drift at sea until he washes up on the Australian coast. Recollecting himself back in Mrs. Hutchence's room, Gemmy realizes that he desperately misses living with the McIvors, even though he often sees Janet.

Although Gemmy once loyally followed Lachlan around, as Lachlan gets older he feels the need to push Gemmy away. Lachlan is growing, but with age comes the grim realization that the world does not revolve around him and that there are many things he will never understand. Seeing Jock betrayed by his own trusted neighbors for protecting Gemmy leaves both Lachlan and Jock disillusioned and fearful of the wickedness they now recognize in the world.

Mr. Frazer travels to Brisbane to meet the regional governor and present his ideas about botany, suggesting a plan for utilizing the natural food sources of the Australian wilderness rather than attempting to cultivate European crops. However, he is unsuccessful, and becomes disillusioned when he realizes that the governor is a useless fool with delusions of grandeur. Meanwhile, Gemmy goes to the schoolhouse to retrieve what he believes are the pages that Mr. Frazer wrote about his life, but in fact they are only lesson sheets. Even so, Gemmy takes them and marches away into the forest, never to be seen again. As he does, the rain pours and dissolves the written sheets in his hands.

Many years later, Lachlan, now an older adult and a politician, visits Janet at her convent, where she is a nun and a masterful bee-keeper and researcher. They have recently begun meeting after an incriminating private letter between them (which seemed to express pro-German sympathies during the anti-German sentiment of World War I) was stolen from Lachlan's house and leaked to the press. The event caused an uproar, embarrassing Lachlan's government and enraging many members of Janet's community. As a result, other members of the government are calling for Lachlan's resignation, and the children Janet previously tutored in bee-keeping are forbidden by their parents from visiting the convent. Despite the fallout, both Janet and Lachlan take the events in stride, determined to ride them out. As they sit together, Janet reflects that their family had loved Gemmy, even if they didn't realize it at the time. Years after Gemmy disappeared, the McIvor family heard a rumor that Gemmy, living with a group of Aboriginal Australians, was killed in a raid by white settlers. Lachlan eventually manages to track down the bones he suspects are Gemmy's, and though he knows they may not be, decides to believe they are so he can lay his guilt and sadness to rest with the bones.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Gemmy Fairley – Gemmy is the central protagonist of the story. Although Gemmy is white and spends his first twelve years in England with his abusive father figure Willett, he lives with Aboriginal Australians for 16 years. By the time he meets the McIvors, Gemmy speaks, acts, and even looks like the "black" indigenous people—his skin is darkened by the sun and his blonde hair is dirty. Throughout Gemmy's life, he is haunted by the "demons" of his painful childhood and is looking for a place to belong and people who will love him. After Gemmy leaves the native Australians to seek out the settlers who look like him, he forms a particular attachment to the first people he meets, Lachlan and Janet and the rest of the McIvor family. Although Gemmy is eager to please, the majority of the white settlers are unsettled by him, since he reminds them of their xenophobic fear of the indigenous Australians who live in the surrounding wilderness. The McIvors slowly form a fondness for and protectiveness of Gemmy, but the derision of the other settlers and the strangeness of white people causes Gemmy's spirit to be ill at ease with the feeling that he does not belong. This feeling eventually causes Gemmy to leave the settlement to return to the spiritually-attuned life of the Aboriginal Australians, where he lives for several years before being killed in a raid by white colonists. Although Gemmy's own journey ends in tragedy, his life becomes a catalyst for the growth of several others characters including Jock, Lachlan, and Janet, and his presence also brings the racism of the colonists into full view. Moreover, to Mr. Frazer, Gemmy's hybrid status as a white person who adapts to the Australian wilderness like a native person represents the future, a model of what all the settlers should someday become. Likewise, George Abbot comes to see Gemmy's "naked endurance" of suffering, abuse, and evil as a profound expression of "essential humanity," the most innocent and pure a human being could be.

Lachlan Beattie – Lachlan is Ellen McIvor's nephew, but he lives with the McIvor family as one of their children. After emigrating from Scotland to Australia when he is nine years old, Lachlan is among the first people to meet Gemmy, taking him hostage by pretending that the stick he is carrying is a rifle. As a

child, Lachlan harbors delusions of grandeur and a belief in his own power—particularly over Janet, since she is a girl—which his "capture" of Gemmy only reinforces. For the first months after Gemmy's arrival, Lachlan brings the man everywhere with him, at first because he believes it makes him seem powerful and later because Gemmy has become his companion. Although Lachlan's delusions of power and prestige exemplify the social posturing of the settlement's men, his notions begin to waver after the McIvor family is put at odds with the other setters over Gemmy's presence. After Gemmy is attacked in the night by other settlers, Lachlan's view of himself and the world is shaken, in part because Janet was present for the event while he was sleeping like a child. The attack also reveals the wickedness of the grown men of the settlement, suggesting an evil in the world that Lachlan had never accounted for. These realizations mark Lachlan's coming of age and the moment that his delusions of grandeur fall away to be replaced by a sobering realization of his human limitations. Lachlan pushes away from Gemmy in a bid to seek out his own adulthood, but when Gemmy disappears, Lachlan is haunted for years by guilt over rejecting his loyal friend and companion. As an adult, Lachlan eventually tracks down what may or may not be Gemmy's remains, choosing to believe that the bones are Gemmy's so that he can move on with his life. Eventually, Lachlan becomes a prominent politician.

Janet McIvor – Janet is the oldest of the McIvor children and Lachlan's cousin. Janet is present with Lachlan and Meg when they first meet Gemmy. As a girl, Janet feels oppressed by her gender for much of her childhood. Lachlan constantly expects her to submit to him even though she is older and tougher than he is, simply because he is a boy, and although she respects her mother Ellen's toughness and tenacity, the narrow future the settlement affords to both her mother and herself frustrates her. However, as the McIvors begin to be harassed and despised for protecting Gemmy, Janet begins to focus less on her own repression, and on the night of the attack, Janet waits outside in the darkness for Jock to bring Gemmy home. In doing so, Janet proves her own bravery and willingness to carry the family's burdens alongside her parents, marking a critical moment of her coming of age. From this moment onward, Janet thinks less of Lachlan, and when she begins beekeeping with Mrs. Hutchence, she finds a suitable outlet for her aspirations and intelligence, one that is not limited by her gendered role in society. In a pivotal moment, Janet is enveloped by a swarm of bees, but rather than panicking, she discovers an inner tranquility that stems from the purity of her belief that the bees will not harm her. Afteward, she is left feeling transformed into a simpler, more powerful self. Furthermore, Janet feels as if the bees communicate with her, setting the course for her life's work as an apiarist and a nun (a path that frees her from the domineering presence of men) who spends her days searching for the method by which bees communicate. As an old woman, while she visits with Lachlan, Janet realizes that the McIvor family loved Gemmy, even though they did not realize it at the time.

Jock McIvor – Jock is Ellen's husband, the patriarchal head of the McIvor family, and he becomes Gemmy's protector after he comes to live with them. Like the other men of the settlement, Jock is preoccupied with keeping up the illusion of power and respectability amongst his peers, even though he is always at least a bit insecure about his standing. Although Jock gives off the image of a powerful, hard-working man, he is often gloomy and depressed, struggling to get work done until Ellen pushes him to do so. When Gemmy arrives, Jock is privately repulsed by the man and only lets him stay because it's important to Ellen and the children. In the early months, whenever Gemmy offers any sort of physical affection, Jock is upset, feeling that it is shameful and weak for men to be affectionate towards each other. However, as the family grows closer to Gemmy and the other settlers grow more resentful of his presence, Jock finds himself siding with his family even though doing so goes against his friends. After Gemmy is attacked by other settlers, Jock spends the night sitting awake with Gemmy under a blanket, hugging the terrified man to himself and marking a major change in his understanding of manhood. Jock's view of the world is shaken when he realizes his trusted mates have betrayed him; the friends whose approval was once the most important thing in the world to him turn out to be of little quality themselves. This realization is a significant coming-of-age moment, even though Jock himself is already an aging adult. In spite of Jock's loss of trust in his friends, the persecutions draw him closer to Ellen than he has ever been, signaling that although Jock is dispirited, his character growth is ultimately for the best.

Ellen McIvor – Ellen is Jock's wife and the matriarch of the McIvor family. Although Ellen, as a woman, is societally disempowered, she represents one of the strongest characters in the story. After emigrating to Australia from Scotland with Jock and seeing his depression set in, Ellen becomes the driving force in the McIvor family, carefully establishing the pace and order of each day so that Jock and Lachlan will get their work done. Ellen remains strong even though she bears her own pains, including the loss of two babies before they moved to the settlement. Unlike her husband, Ellen is independent enough not to care what the other settlers think of her from the start, and thus she is open and receptive to Gemmy as soon as he arrives, extending a motherly affection to him that he has never experienced before. When their family is harassed and attacked for protecting Gemmy, Ellen's support of both Gemmy and her husband in keeping him are unflinching, though she does recognize that it puts Jock in a difficult position, caught between his family and his friends. Ellen recognizes her own strength in her daughter Janet, particularly when Janet waits outside with her in the darkness for Jock to bring Gemmy back after he is abducted. However, she also worries about her

daughter, whom she recognizes is brimming with potential but stifled by the narrow life afforded her by the settlement.

Mr. Frazer – Mr. Frazer is the settlement's minister, though in the story he operates primarily in his role as a botanist. When Gemmy first arrives, Mr. Frazer interviews him as well as he can, producing the seven **pages** of writing that contain an account of Gemmy's life. Although Mr. Frazer is not taken altogether seriously by the other settlers and is often oblivious to what is happening in the settlement, he proves a true friend to Gemmy, patiently but eagerly learning from Gemmy's knowledge of Australian plants. While other settlers try to pry information out of Gemmy, Mr. Frazer proves his good intentions by respecting whatever information Gemmy chooses to withhold. After Gemmy gives Mr. Frazer a thorough understanding of Australian plants and foraging, Mr. Frazer develops an alternative concept for colonialism in which the Commonwealth settlers would grow crops that are naturally found in Australia's wilderness, rather than trying to dominate and force the land to grow crops cultivated in England. He sees Gemmy, a European man who understands the ways of the Aboriginal Australians, as a forerunner of this new theory of colonialism, a new and better model of humanity. However, when Mr. Frazer pitches his idea, first to a fellow settler and then to the government of Queensland, he discovers that everyone else is too intent on trying to force Australia to look like England to listen to his ideas.

Mrs. Hutchence – Mrs. Hutchence is an older woman who lives with Leona in an actual house—the only one for many miles—near the settlement. Mrs. Hutchence is something of an enigma; the settlers know very little of either her or Leona, including where they came from or how they could afford to build a house. Although there is no man to help her maintain her home or property, Mrs. Hutchence proves plenty capable, wearing boots and doing work traditionally done by men—which disconcerts many of the settlers and demonstrates the power and capability of women. Significantly, Mrs. Hutchence introduces Janet to beekeeping and thus offers a space in which Janet can maximize her potential. Her time with Mrs. Hutchence sets Janet on her trajectory for the rest of her life by showing her what it's like to be free of the societal repression she faces everywhere else in the settlement. Indeed, Mrs. Hutchence's house becomes a place where several characters are able to be free of their constraining social roles, if only for an afternoon. Although Mrs. Hutchence shelters Gemmy in her home after he is attacked, since it is safer there than at the McIvors, Gemmy feels trapped living indoors and soon leaves.

Leona Gonzalez – Leona is a young woman who lives with Mrs. Hutchence, and though they are not biologically related, Leona calls Mrs. Hutchence "Ma." Leona is elegant and refined and draws the affections of both Hec Gosper and George Abbott, even though she is considerably older than both of them. Even so, Leona spends many afternoons entertaining both young men at Mrs. Hutchence's house, along with Janet, Meg, and Gemmy. As Janet observes, Leona is adept at masterfully manipulating both Hec and George, flirting playfully with both of them and, though she never hurts them, exerting a subtle but impressive control over them. Leona demonstrates to Janet that other forms of power are accessible to women beyond the typically masculine, domineering, and ultimately illusory power she sees in the settlement's men.

George Abbot – George Abbot is the settlement's schoolmaster. Although he is only 19 year old at the start of the story, George intentionally gives an impression of being considerably older through his stern, humorless demeanor. Although George was a clever child with a wealthy benefactor, his young adult life has not granted him the success he feels he deserves, making him bitter and resentful of everyone around him, and he often takes out his frustrations by severely punishing his students. However, as George begins spending time with Leona at Mrs. Hutchence's house, he learns to let go of his pretenses, care less about how others perceive him, and accept his place in life, which makes him considerably more personable. George even begins to feel a sense of admiration for Gemmy, whom he'd initially been repulsed by, because he comes to respect the manner in which Gemmy has endured such long years of suffering. When Gemmy arrives at the schoolhouse one day, looking for the **pages** written about his life, George realizes that they are with Mr. Frazer, 600 miles away in Brisbane. However, George recognizes that this is important to Gemmy, so he gives him several pages of student assignments, which Gemmy believes are the pages he seeks (since he cannot read) and which serve the same psychological purpose for him.

Hector (Hec) Gosper – Hector is a young man in the settlement who is several years younger than George Abbot but older than Lachlan. Hec has a harelip, and the defect makes him self-conscious and particularly sensitive to being mocked or embarrassed. So when Gemmy steals a hammer away from Hec during his first day in the settlement—causing Hec to be laughed at by his peers—Hec forms a grudge against him that he holds onto for most of the story. Although Hec was once a friend and mentor to Lachlan, Lachlan's closeness with Gemmy distances them from each other and creates a hostility that both boys dislike but cannot humble themselves to resolve. However, after spending time with Leona and George and the others at Mrs. Hutchence's house, Hec begins to relax his hostility towards Lachlan and even sits with him in silent solidarity the day that Lachlan finds out Gemmy was attacked.

Barney Mason – Barney Mason is the McIvors' closest neighbor and Jock's closest friend amongst the settlers. Barney is a worrier by nature and constantly frets about Gemmy and the Aboriginal Australians trespassing on his land, demonstrating the absurdity of fixating on property rights in

the midst of the Australian bush. After Andy sees Gemmy talking to two Aboriginal men and reports the transgression to Barney, Barney drifts further away from Jock. Although he plays a small role in the overall narrative, Barney demonstrates the value of good neighbors in a small, insular community such as the settlement, and eventually embodies the pain that Jock feels at the loss of his friends after he opposes them to protect Gemmy.

Ned Corcoran – Ned Corcoran is one of the McIvors' neighbors. Ned Corcoran's character is not developed much in the story and it does not reveal anything about his background, but he represents the worst impulses of the settlers in their xenophobic racism. Ned even goes so far as arguing that the settlers should exterminate all the Aboriginal Australians in the area.

Jim Sweetman – Jim Sweetman is one of the McIvors' neighbors and Jock's friend. As a contrast to Ned Corcoran, Jim Sweetman is also sparsely developed as a character, serving primarily to represent the best elements of the settlers as a compassionate and cool-headed figure. Contrary to Ned Corcoran, Jim Sweetman has no hatred towards the Aboriginal Australians even though his land is the most exposed. However, when he considers the fact that his granddaughter—the center of his world—might be put in danger by roaming Aboriginal men, even he succumbs to fearful racism, demonstrating how even the best people may be coaxed into bigoted beliefs or actions by fear for their loved ones.

Andy McKillop – Andy is Barney's hired hand. Barney and the other settlers do not trust Andy because he is a drunk and a troublemaker, but after Andy spies Gemmy speaking to two Aboriginal men, he hopes that reporting the incident will earn Barney's goodwill. When Barney is slow to take his story seriously, Andy lies and tells Barney that Gemmy's visitors also gave him some sort of **stone**, which is just mysterious enough to stir the settlers into a fearful frenzy.

Sir George – Sir George is the Governor of Queensland whom Mr. Frazer briefly meets when he tries to find government support for his proposal. Sir George, however, is utterly useless. Demonstrating what Lachlan perhaps could have become if he failed to grow up, Sir George is a dreamer, but not an executor, lacking the follow-through to ever achieve anything. This lack of achievement hampers Sir George's political career, but he does not even have the maturity to own his failure, instead blaming it on other people. Sir George invites Mr. Frazer to dinner after hearing his proposal, but he ultimately fails to see its value.

Mr. Herbert – Mr. Herbert is the Premiere, an associate of Sir George's whom Mr. Frazer has dinner with. Mr. Frazer hopes to find support for his plan, in part because Mr. Herbert seems to be better at his job that Sir George is, but nothing comes of the meeting since Mr. Herbert misunderstands Mr. Frazer's intentions.

Willet – Willet is a drunken rat-catcher who keeps Gemmy as a servant and kind of surrogate son for several years in England when Gemmy is just a child. Willet is horrible and abusive, but since he is the only person Gemmy knows and he offers Gemmy his only sense of identity—Gemmy recalls that he was not a boy until Willet found him and turned him into "Willet's boy"—Gemmy views him with an almost god-like reverence. Since Gemmy does not know any other life than the miserable one he lives with Willet, he is reasonably content for several years. However, one evening, on a resentful whim, Gemmy sets fire to their room while Willet is passed out drunk. Though Gemmy only meant to scare Willet, he cannot wake him and the fire spreads, forcing Gemmy to leave Willet behind, presumably to be burned to death.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Meg McIvor – Meg is the youngest child of the McIvor family. Although she is often mentioned as being present with other characters and takes a liking to Leona, she is rarely depicted speaking or acting and plays little role within the narrative, partly due to her young age.

THEMES

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RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA

Remembering Babylon tells the story of a Commonwealth colonial settlement living in the remote Australian bush (wilderness) near Queensland in the mid-19th century. The white settlers fear the Aboriginal Australians—whom they refer to and regard as "black" in comparison with their own whiteness—and view them as fundamentally different beings from themselves. However, those conceptions are challenged by the arrival of Gemmy, a white man who was raised by an Aboriginal community, speaks their language, and follows their customs. Although the settlers believe that white people are inherently separate from and superior to the Aboriginal peoples, Gemmy's presence and the conduct of the white settlers suggests not only that the notion of racial superiority is foolish, but also that the hard distinction between "black" people and white people is similarly meaningless.

The settlers' racism is primarily based upon their fear of people they do not understand, demonstrating how xenophobia (fear of others, especially those different from oneself) can lead to

vicious racism. Upon first seeing Gemmy, Lachlan, the McIvor's Scottish nephew who lives with them in Australia, immediately assumes that they are being raided by Aboriginal tribesmen because Gemmy has dark skin and is dressed like an Aboriginal person. However, looking closer, Lachlan can see that Gemmy's hair, though filthy, is actually blonde, and his skin is merely tanned dark by the sun, indicating that he is white. Even so, Gemmy's speech frightens Lachlan, since it is the Aboriginal people's language and "the idea of a language he did not know scared him," suggesting that the mysteriousness of it is what makes such speech frightening. What's more, Lachlan and the white settlers are largely ignorant of the indigenous people who have lived in the territory for hundreds of years, which is demonstrated by the fact that Gemmy is able to teach Lachlan and Mr. Frazer, the botanist, basic aspects of survival and foraging that the Aboriginal tribes hold as common knowledge. This ignorance adds both to the Gemmy's mysteriousness and to the settlers' fear of the Aboriginal people, since they know nothing about how the indigenous people live, what they think, or where they travel. The settlers' fear that anything may occur suggests that their racism, though vicious, is based primarily in their fear of the unknown. This is reinforced by the fact that Lachlan and even Jock McIvor—the father of the McIvor family—gradually grow less fearful of Aboriginal people as they become comfortable around Gemmy, since through him, the indigenous tribes of Australia feel just a little less unknown and unfamiliar.

Although most of the settlers maintain that white people are inherently superior to the "black" Aboriginal Australians, the settlers themselves actually end up perpetrating many of the behaviors for which they criticize Aboriginal people. For example, the settlers despise the Aboriginal Australians for their supposedly superstitious minds, which seem to be the mark of uncivilized people. However, in their fear, the white settlers become superstitious themselves. When a farmhand spies Gemmy speaking with two Aboriginal men and tells his boss, he untruthfully adds that they gave Gemmy a **stone**. The settlers' minds run wild imagining what the powers of such an item—which doesn't even exist—could be. Jock, in frustration, exclaims, "We're no' scared o stones. Ah thought that was the difference between us and them." As Jock recognizes, if rationality and the lack of superstition are marks of civilized or superior people, then the settlers themselves have no claim to such superiority. The white settlers fear that the indigenous people will someday arrive to attack them, due to their supposedly "savage and fearsome" nature. However, the settlers never suffer any violence from the Aboriginal community. Rather, the settlers commit violence amongst themselves: a small mob abducts Gemmy from the McIvors' home and attacks him, and Jock fears that the settlers will attack the Aboriginal people as well and start a war of retribution. Yet again, in their fear, the white settlers prove themselves to be much more savage than the "black" Aboriginal people, flatly disproving any notion that the white settlers are superior for being more civilized or peaceable.

Furthermore, the novel suggests that distinctions between races might be more a matter of perception than a matter of genuine difference. As a white European who is raised by a "black" Aboriginal tribe and adopts their customs, Gemmy challenges the notion that there is any true distinction between white and black human beings. Most of the settlers try to maintain a hard categorical separation between black and white people, and Gemmy's very presence thus confounds them. In his first days in the settlement, the settlers are unsure of what to call Gemmy, since aside from his behavior and scant English, he is obviously white; he is eventually referred to as the "white black man." However, even after he lives with the McIvors for several months, many of the settlers are still inclined to view him as a black person, since he does not fit their concept of a white person. That such a person can exist contradicts their racist and absolutist notions of black people and white people. But Mr. Frazer, rather than being bothered by Gemmy's hybrid status, is encouraged by it, seeing him as a "forerunner" of what all the settlers should someday become, after they learn to adapt to the Australian wilderness and live from the land as the Aboriginal Australians do. Mr. Frazer's interest in Gemmy's position between the races further suggests that the division the settlers perceive between black people and white people has little meaning, since both groups of people are ultimately interchangeable as human beings.

GENDER AND POWER

The mid-19th-century settlement in the Australian wilderness is a patriarchal society, governed and operated by men, with women relegated primarily to keeping the home or supporting their husbands. Despite this social system, women in the novel play a critical role, exhibiting strength in the face of men's weakness. The book contrasts men's power, which is all about being perceived as strong and dominating, with women's power, which is based upon their own quiet, internal strength and surety of conviction. Ultimately, the novel suggests that although men have more social authority, women are just as powerful and are often the true sources of strength in their communities.

Although the men of the settlement occupy leadership roles, their belief in their own power is fragile and dependent on their peers' perception of them, suggesting that men's patriarchal power is far flimsier than it first appears. In the first scene of the novel, young Lachlan "captures" Gemmy by pretending a stick he is holding is a rifle and marching Gemmy into town as a hostage. For Lachlan, the feeling of dominating another person and the brief admiration he receives from the adults make him feel powerful, like a "real" man. However, that feeling of power vanishes with just a quick cuff from Jock, demonstrating that Lachlan's manly power is merely a fantasy. As Gemmy later

observes to himself, "His power lay in your recognizing that he possessed it," suggesting that Lachlan's sense of power is really only others' *perception* of power. While Lachlan's power fantasies seem like the whims of a child, the adult men of the settlement display much of the same behavior. Just as Lachlan dwells on being perceived as powerful, so too do Jock and the other patriarchs of the settlement spend much of their time concerned with whether their neighbors perceive them as tough, masculine, and strong. When Gemmy shows any physical affection towards Jock, Jock immediately becomes self-conscious and uncomfortable, afraid that being seen held onto or hugged by Gemmy will make him seem weak or effeminate. This insecurity and need to project an image of masculine power suggests that for the men of the settlement, their belief in their own power or strength is actually quite frail.

In sharp contrast to the self-consciousness of the settlement's men, the women in the novel, though often dominated by men, are invariably tough, hardworking, and self-confident. In contrast to Jock's need for others to perceive him as powerful, his wife Ellen carries none of the same insecurity and instead commits herself to the challenges before her: "She lived in the demands of the moment [...] and was too high-spirited, too independent, to care whether other women approved of her." Although Jock and Lachlan are gripped with gloom and inertia each morning, Ellen pushes them and the other children to rise for the day and set about their work, "establishing the precarious order that [...] would make the day lurch and move forward on its ordinary course." Ellen's strength and drive create a marked contrast to Jock, Lachlan, and all the other men's general insecurity and lack of motivation. Though Ellen's daughter Janet is frustrated by Lachlan's assumptions that "he was superior, should take the lead in all their doings, and that she must naturally yield to him," Janet exhibits the toughness and strength of character that Lachlan himself desires but lacks. When Gemmy is attacked and abducted from the McIvors' home in the middle of the night by vindictive settlers, Janet waits outside in the darkness—while Lachlan sleeps inside like a child—for Jock to bring Gemmy back, with no fear of the dark wilderness surrounding them or the danger that might be hiding there. The quiet internal strength she shows here confirms for Janet's parents and herself that in spite of Lachlan's bravado, she is the strongest, most powerful child in the family. When Gemmy needs more protection than the McIvors can give him, he is taken to Mrs. Hutchence, an older woman who lives in the biggest house in the settlement, miles from anyone else, with a young woman named Leona. Like Ellen and Janet, Mrs. Hutchence and Leona are notably self-assured and capable, maintaining their home and property without the aid of a patriarchal figure. That Mrs. Hutchence's house seems the safest place for Gemmy to stay once again suggests the power of the novel's women, with or without men present.

Overall, this contrast between men and women's power in the settlement suggests that, although men are attributed more social authority, women are the true source of a community's strength. Although the men are technically the leaders of both their families and the settlement community, they are so concerned with the perception of their frail power that they rarely find the strength to act—though both Jock and Lachlan eventually develop in this regard. Meanwhile, the women in the book consistently demonstrate their own strength and initiative, even if their small society offers them less authority or potential for their futures. Through the example of the settlement, the novel indicates that despite women's societal disempowerment, they may be stronger and more capable than their male counterparts.

COMMUNITY AND INSULARITY

Because of the isolation of the settlers' community in the Australian wilderness, each family is heavily dependent on their neighbors for protection and provision. However, when Jock finds that he morally disagrees with his neighbors and does things that they disapprove of—like protecting Gemmy from the white settlers' wrath—it affects both his social relationships and his family's safety. Jock's plight suggests that although a small, isolated community might be closely knit and interdependent, it can also be difficult to dissent from the consensus of the group, even when the group is acting irrationally or immorally.

The McIvors and the other settler families are pioneers, living in isolation, many miles from the nearest established town. Because of the dangers of the Australian bush—with no amenities or medical help nearby—and the perceived threat of the roaming Aboriginal tribes, the settlers depend upon each other for their mutual aid and survival. What's more, the few settler families also form the entirety of each other's social relationships, since they rarely see anyone else. Of his closest neighbor Barney Mason, Jock reflects: "Under the hard conditions of life up here neighbors were important, and over the last years he and Barney had become more than that." Moreover, Barney's wife is Ellen's best friend and his children are the McIvor children's closest playmates. Such closeness and mutual dependence underscore how, in such a small and geographically isolated community, the members of that community often grow close out of necessity, effectively constituting each other's entire worlds.

As isolated and few as the settlers are, they are easily worked up into a frenzy by Gemmy's presence and their fear of the Aboriginal Australians, demonstrating how such a small community, though supportive, can also be particularly susceptible to rash fears and actions. Although Gemmy is ethnically European, his dark tan and adopted customs of the Aboriginal Australians unnerve several of the settlers, since he seems to be proof that Aboriginal people are always nearby, even though the white settlers rarely see them: "[Gemmy]

made real what till now had been the fearful shape of rumor." Such fears are compounded by a recent rumor that nineteen settlers were killed by Aboriginal tribesmen in a neighboring settlement, although no one knows whether the rumor is true. In light of such fear, violent sentiments are easily stirred up by individuals such as Ned Corcoran, a settler who is convinced that the only way to handle the possible threat of the Aboriginal people—even though the settlers have never actually had an altercation with them—is to form a raiding party and exterminate every one of them they can find. Although in a larger community the presence of cooler heads might stop such reckless ideas from taking root, in such a small and fearful community Ned wields considerable influence and goes largely unchallenged, demonstrating the manner in which such an insular community can be stirred into a frenzy. After one of Barney's farmhands spies Gemmy briefly speaking with two Aboriginal men, he relays the sighting to the other settlers and embellishes the account to make the strangers more mysterious and threatening. In response, several of the men of the settlement—the McIvors' own neighbors—abduct Gemmy from the McIvors' house in the middle of the night, beat him, and hold his head underwater in the nearby creek until Jock arrives and chases the men away. Once again, the sudden and unmerited act of violence committed by the other settlers illustrates the rashness with which people in a small, fearful community can act, even against their own neighbors.

The hostility that the McIvor family experiences for protecting Gemmy while the rest of the settlement wants to get rid of him exemplifies the difficulty of acting against the consensus of one's insular community, even when one knows that the community is wrong. Although Jock rescues Gemmy, he is tortured by the fact that his own neighbors, whom he trusted and considered very highly, would endanger his family in the middle of the night and attack Gemmy, whom they have taken as one of their own, "while the men who had done it—neighbors!—were creeping home to crawl in beside their own wives, safe in bed." Jock's intense reaction suggests that more than simply the attack, it is the notion that it has been perpetrated by some of the few people he trusts and depends on that haunts him. The animosity is aimed not only at Gemmy, but also at Jock and his family. A few days before the abduction, their neighbors slit the throats of several of their geese—which were the children's pets—and later smear one of Jock's sheds "with shit." As Jock looks at the defaced shed, he thinks, "Some man had done this. That was the real abomination. Someone he knew. Someone whose eyes he had looked into, and recently; maybe at the very moment he was planning the thing." The neighbors' harassment of Jock and his family powerfully illustrates the great difficulty of acting against one's own small community, even when that community is acting reprehensibly.

Although the closeness of a small, isolated community is perhaps vital for survival in a situation like the settlers' and it arguably has many benefits, Jock's experience of betrayal by his stirred up neighbors reinforces the pain of defying one's only friends and fellows. The fact that such acts were committed by people Jock knows and once trusted—leaving him now with no one to depend on—seems even more painful than if the acts were perpetrated by an external threat such as Aboriginal Australians.

COMING OF AGE

In *Remembering Babylon*, Gemmy's presence in the settlement and the tension it creates forces several characters—including Lachlan, Jock, and George Abbot—to reexamine what they believe about themselves and the world. For Jock and Lachlan in particular, the realization that the world is less trustworthy than they once imagined and that they are less significant than they might wish is a crucial force in their coming of age, as they step from immaturity to maturity.

Several characters in the novel struggle to consider anything beyond themselves, which leads to misplaced priorities in their lives and demonstrates the manner in which such self-centered delusions are the mark of childish immaturity. For example, as a young boy Lachlan believes that he is destined for greatness, envisioning himself as a heroic defender of the McIvor family and later as a great explorer, charting the Australian wilderness and having monuments built in his honor. Although these fantasies seem harmless in themselves, such belief in his own greatness leads Lachlan to mistreat the people around him. For instance, he expects Janet to always yield to his wishes, and he does not want to help with menial chores since they seem beneath him. Lachlan's selfishness demonstrates the negative impact such delusions of grandeur can have on other people. Even Jock has misplaced priorities. Although Jock does not fantasize like Lachlan, he does place an inordinate amount of value on being respected by the other settlers, in the "belief that to be thought well of by such fellows was the first thing in the world." Jock's own misplaced priorities, which he will eventually have to reckon with, suggest that such childish immaturity—and the need to grow up and come of age—can also be found in adults.

However, as the characters begin to mature, they learn that the world does not revolve around them, suggesting that such a loss of innocence is simply a part of coming of age. As Lachlan grows older and the conflicts around Gemmy play out, Lachlan slowly and painfully realizes that he is not the metaphorical center of the universe. He is hurt not only by the fact that Janet, and not himself, was present when Gemmy was abducted—and thus rose to a new level of maturity and responsibility in her parents' eyes—but by his sense of his own limitations. When Ellen tells him about Gemmy's abduction a week after it happened, Lachlan feels the "power drain from him and the stab of fear; not at what he might have to face […]

but at what he might have to admit of the way the world was, and how his failure to see it was a weakness in him." Lachlan's realization that the world is vicious and does not share his notions of his own power frightens him, though it also marks a critical step in his growth. After this point, he sets aside his fantasies and begins to think of others while realizing that he is not powerful enough to fix everything. Jock, too, must let go of his preoccupation with being admired by his friends. After fellow settlers attack Gemmy in the middle of the night, Jock realizes that the people whom he had spent all of his energy trying to impress are at times both wicked and cowardly, meaning that being respected by them holds little value. Although Jock keeps up those relationships on the surface, "something had been destroyed in him that could not be put right. [...] The days of unselfconscious trust in his standing among them [...] were gone." Jock's loss of innocence and loss of blind trust in his friends demonstrate that even a grown person may still need to come of age and metaphorically grow up from their childish behavior.

Furthermore, the novel suggests that the painful loss of innocence and acceptance of limitations inherent to coming of age ultimately help people develop stronger, more enduring characters. For instance, Lachlan's acceptance of his own limitations as a youth later allows him to be a good leader and meet his own failures with dignity. As an adult, Lachlan becomes a public figure and eventually a Minister in the Australian government. However, when he is caught in a public scandal (by aiding a German citizen amid public animosity against Germans during World War I) and faces calls for his resignation, Lachlan accepts the consequences of his actions with maturity and accepts his fate with dignity. The grace with which Lachlan handles this personal failure demonstrates that the painful loss of innocence he experienced as a youth has developed a strong character within himself. Though he appears only briefly, Sir George, the regional Governor who holds office during Lachlan's youth, forms a marked contrast to Lachlan. Although Sir George holds public office, he is a dreamer like young Lachlan once was, indulging in such childish fantasies for so long that he never actually accomplishes anything. Sir George imagines that his own greatness lies in merely dreaming up accomplishments; he "exudes an air of magnificent unreality." Because Sir George does not truly do anything, he can sense that his career as a politician is languishing, though "not, he believes, through any fault of his own but through neglect, not to say malice, [of his supporters]." Sir George is thus depicted as a worthless fool who never has to experience the pain of growing up. Through the contrast between Sir George and Lachlan, the novel highlights the idea that in order to be a productive and helpful member of society, one must set aside self-important delusions and instead come of age by confronting the realities of the world and of oneself.

COLONIALISM AND PROPERTY

As a work of post-colonial literature—literature that counteracts earlier literary depictions of colonialism as noble and just—*Remembering Babylon* suggests that the Commonwealth settlers' claims to land lived in by Aboriginal Australians for countless of years are baseless and absurd. Although the settlers in the novel insist that the land belongs to them by right of law, the superficial nature of legal borders suggests that such colonial claims are groundless and artificially constructed; the settlers' right to the land exists only in their own minds.

The settlers jealously defend the boundaries of their land, demonstrating their belief in their exclusive rights as colonialists to possess property in the bush. Although none of the settlers was born in Australia, and although each family owns more property than they can reasonably manage, many of the settlers are fixated on making sure that no one trespasses on their property, especially after Gemmy begins living in the settlement. Even to Jock, this seems absurd: "Barney, in his anxious way, was forever out there pacing the line and looking for signs of trespass; except that there was no line, and the trespass too might be no more than a shadow on Barney's thoughts, and how could you deal with *that*?" Barney's anxious insistence that no one step on his land typifies the settlers' fixation on land ownership and on excluding other people from even passing over it. In the minds of the settlers, their land belongs exclusively to them because "six hundred miles away, in the Lands Office in Brisbane, this bit of country had a name set against it on a numbered document, and a line drawn that was empowered with all the authority of the Law." The Law, referring to the Commonwealth Law, is itself a rather arbitrary force in such an isolated place as the settlement. This "numbered document" has little authority out in the wilderness hundreds of miles away, as the settlers to stake out their boundaries and attempt to enforce them through violence.

However, the Aboriginal Australians' general disregard for white claims of property ownership or fences suggests that in their eyes, such notions of ownership are absurd, present only in the minds of the newly arrived white settlers. Although the settlers might hold their borders with confidence and threaten violence against trespassers, even they realize that such borders and boundaries mean nothing to the indigenous peoples, who are "forever encroaching on boundaries that could be insisted on by daylight—a good shotgun saw to that—but in the dark hours, when you no longer stood there as a living marker with all the glow of the white man's authority about you, reverted to being a creek bed or ridge of granite like any other." The fact that the night can so easily turn legal boundaries into simple components wild bush land suggests that the settlers' conception of land ownership is inherently flimsy, rooted only in the perception of Commonwealth authority. The settlers' claims to the land do not account for the

nomadic Aboriginal Australians who have lived in and crossed over those lands for generations, long before the white settlers ever arrived.

Furthermore, though the settlers are frustrated that the Aboriginal Australians do not respect their borders, Gemmy reveals that the Aboriginal people do not view the landscape in the same manner as the settlers. Where the settlers see borders, fences, and claims, Gemmy and the Aboriginal people see only spirits and navigational markers, those things which allow them to safely traverse the wilderness. As a group who constantly moves, there is no reason for the Aboriginal people to claim a particular plot of land and forbid others from entering it. The Aboriginal Australians' disregard for Commonwealth property claims is further demonstrated by the fact that Gemmy often sees the Aboriginal tribesmen traveling on or near the settlers' property while he is teaching Mr. Frazer about plants, though they easily keep themselves hidden from the settlers' view. Such disregard suggests yet again that they have no regard for the white settlers' new claims to ownership of land that Aboriginal people have walked on for generations.

The white people's ideas of land ownership—which overrule, in their minds, the Aboriginal Australians' rights to the land—are essentially the basis of colonialism. Accordingly, the invalidity of these ideas suggests that colonialism as a whole is groundless, particularly when it infringes on the rights of the people who already live in the place being colonized. In the settlers' minds, they are acting on behalf of the British Commonwealth and the law it upholds. But for the Aboriginal community who has lived in the Australian wilderness for generations, such a law is meaningless; there is no reason for them to respect it.

The author himself is white, and the novel does not depict the settlers as purely evil invaders. Nonetheless, the story ultimately does characterize their colonialist ideas as unjustifiable, reinforcing the novel's post-colonial perspective.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE FENCE

The fence which Gemmy balances himself upon in the first moment that Janet and Lachlan see him represents the divide between the Aboriginal Australians' world, where Gemmy has been living for 16 years, and the white society of the settlers. When Gemmy approaches the children, he has no intention of leaving his Aboriginal tribe behind, which is signified by the fact that he balances himself upon the fence, committing himself to neither the Aboriginal Australians' world nor the white world. However, when Gemmy loses his balance and lands on all four on the settlers' side of the fence, he is unwittingly removed from the world of the Aboriginal Australians and pitched into white society. When Janet is an adult, long after Gemmy has died, she keeps picturing him balanced upon the fence, not yet having chosen between being an Aboriginal man or a white man. Thinking of that very moment when Gemmy was neutral, caught between worlds, Janet realizes that her family loved Gemmy. That they loved him while he was still on the fence—as opposed to not loving him until after he had fallen into white society—suggests that it ultimately does not matter whether Gemmy considered himself white or Aboriginal Australian, whether he chose one world over the other; they loved him just the same. Ultimately, the fence symbolizes both the force of the division between these worlds and the way that that division is somewhat meaningless.

THE PAGES

The pages that Mr. Frazer and George Abbott write about Gemmy's life represent his connection to white society. When Mr. Frazer interviews Gemmy in his first days in the settlement, he pieces together as complete an account of Gemmy's entire life as he can, having George transcribe the interview in ink on paper. Gemmy feels grateful to be known in this way, to be accounted for, since it makes him feel grounded in the community. However, Gemmy, who cannot read, also secretly attributes a magical quality to the sheets of paper that contain his story, believing the pages hold some secret part of him as well that has yet to be restored. Although Gemmy would like to sit with the pages, Mr. Frazer stores them away. After Gemmy leaves Mrs. Hutchence's house, having finally remembered all the traumatic details of his early life and the abuse he suffered with Willett—memories which he believes have been forming the mental demons that plague him and make him sick—Gemmy resolves that he must retrieve the pages himself. He thinks that his spirit has been bound up in them and is slowing dying, trapped in ink. This is true, in a sense, since Gemmy's memory of his trauma and suffering in England are what torture him so. When Gemmy requests the pages from George, George realizes that they are 600 miles away with Mr. Frazer. However, seeing that this moment is important to Gemmy, George gives him seven pages of student homework, which Gemmy believes are the real pages. As Gemmy walks out of the settlement, intending to live with the Aboriginal people and never return, rain begins to fall and dissolves the pages in his hands, symbolizing Gemmy's complete and total severance from white society, both from the settlement and from all of the suffering he experienced in England.

THE STONE

The stone works as a brief but frank symbol of the settlers' fear and the manner in which it can be weaponized. After Andy sees Gemmy speaking with two Aboriginal men, he goes to tell Barney about the matter, hoping to stir his excitement and earn his goodwill through their shared animosity towards the Aboriginal Australians. However, when Barney takes little heed of Andy's story, Andy lies and says that the visitors also gave Gemmy a magical stone. The mysterious quality of the stone takes on a life of its own and stirs the whole settlement—aside from the McIvors—into a fearful frenzy about Gemmy and the Aboriginal Australians. In the same manner that a stone is harmless when left on the ground, so too are the settlers' fears largely harmless when not acted upon. However, when some fool such as Andy decides to take advantage of those fears, effectively throwing the stone like a weapon, they becomes an actual threat—"It flew in all directions, developed a capacity to multiply, accelerate, leave wounds; and the wounds were real even if the stone was not, and would not heal." The lie about the stone results in the settlers' attack on Gemmy, and so serves as a symbol of the very real power of baseless fears.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Remembering Babylon* published in 1993.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ After a time the man began to grunt, then to gabble as if in protest, but when Lachlan put the stick into his spine, moved on faster, producing sounds of such eager submissiveness that the boy's heart swelled. He had a powerful sense of the springing of his torso from the roots of his belly.

Related Characters: Gemmy Fairley, Lachlan Beattie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

Having just spied Gemmy emerging from the bush for the first time, young Lachlan takes him prisoner by pretending a stick he is playing with is a rifle, and he feels powerful as a result. Lachlan, like most men of the settlement, believes that the mark of a man is to be powerful or at least to be *seen* as powerful. For Lachlan, the purest expression of this power is to dominate another human being, in the hope that the other settlers will later regard him as strong and capable.

While Lachlan's "capture" of Gemmy seems like a boyish stunt, it is worth noting that the connection between power and domination actually is present in various aspects of the settlement—particularly because the men make the decisions. For example, the settlers try to cultivate their land, essentially dominating and mastering it, to resemble and produce the fruits of their homeland, rather than adapting themselves to the natural sustenance it offers. Similarly, rather than having any peaceful dealings with the Aboriginal Australians, many of the settlers simply want to eradicate them, or in the best-case scenario, make them into servants.

❝ The smallest among them, their young faces very grave and intent, looked up to see how their parents would take it, and when no protest appeared, wondered if some new set of rules was in operation, and this blackfeller's arrival among them was to be the start of something.

Related Characters: Gemmy Fairley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

While the settlers are seeing Gemmy for the first time, he begins to remember a handful of English words—which he had long forgotten—including the word "arse," which causes a stir among the children. Although the moment is brief and never again mentioned, the young children's perception that a new set of rules is operating within the settlement is astute. The sudden presence and lack of repercussion for a foul word reflects the entire dilemma that the settlers face with Gemmy in their midst. Gemmy, whom they perceive primarily as a "black" man, represents something foul and forbidden to them, something that has no place in proper white society. And yet, since he is undeniably a white man as well, the adults have no choice but to begrudgingly accept his presence, at least for the moment. This foreshadows the larger dilemma of whether to accept and allow Gemmy—who seems to them, among other things, foul and detestable for his resemblance to the Aboriginal Australians—within their small society, which becomes a central tension throughout the story.

Chapter 2 Quotes

Since [Gemmy] had somehow found his way into the world, his object, like any other creature's, was to stay in it by any means he could. He had a belly to feed.

Related Characters: Gemmy Fairley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

When, as a 13-year-old child, Gemmy is discovered washed up on the beach by Aboriginal Australians, he ingratiates himself to them by acting silly like a pitiable fool until they are willing to give him food and allow him to take shelter with them. Although Gemmy initially seems pathetic and even off-putting, Gemmy is ultimately a survivor, endearing himself to people with his simplicity and enduring such horrific hardships and abuse—suffering seems to be the only constant in his life—that by the end of the novel, his mere existence is in itself heroic. The simplicity of Gemmy's motivations—to survive, but not to harm anyone else in the process—make his character a pure expression of what George Abbot will later call "naked, essential humanity," a man unstained by selfish ulterior motives.

So when news drifted up from the south of spirits, white-faced, covered from head to foot in bark and riding four-footed beasts that were taller than a man, he was disturbed, and the desire to see these creatures, to discover what they were, plucked at him until he could not rest.

Related Characters: Gemmy Fairley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

After Gemmy has lived with the Aboriginal Australians for 16 years—more than half his lifetime—rumor spreads of white settlers colonizing their way up the coast. The fact that neither Gemmy nor his fellow tribesmen immediately recognize that the white-faced "spirits" are people and do not recognize their garb as clothing suggests that the Aboriginal peoples know as little about the settlers—who appear alien—as the settlers do about the indigenous Australians. This suggests that the same xenophobia that propels the settlers to rash and violent actions is present as well in the Aboriginal Australians' community. However, it's notable that the indigenous people react to this uncertainty in a much less destructive and hateful way.

Additionally, the fact that Gemmy feels he must discover what such spirits are, rather than recognizing that they are white people like himself, reveals just how much of his past life in England has been lost to him. The only reality that he has any recognition of is that which he presently lives in, aside from his recurring feeling of having lived a past life.

Chapter 3 Quotes

The man was troubled. Gemmy saw it and was watchful. Jock's fear of getting on the wrong side of his friends might in the end be more dangerous to him, he thought, than the open hostility he met in the settlement, where he was always under suspicion, and always, even when no one appeared to be watching, under scrutiny.

Related Characters: Ellen McIvor, Jock McIvor, Gemmy Fairley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

After Gemmy moves in with the McIvors, he observes Jock's insecurity and need to be thought well of by his friends, noting that the frailty of Jock's ego is a greater danger than open resentment. Gemmy possesses an uncanny ability—trained by years of abuse—to read people's weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Jock's dependence on his friends and neighbors for establishing his sense of self is typical of the men of the settlement, who all seem preoccupied by their images as perceived as others. Because Jock lacks the self-assuredness to maintain his sense of self independently—as his wife Ellen does—any action that may embarrass Jock or set him at odds with the respect of his peers would be a threat to Jock's ego and sense of self. This insecurity represents a potential threat to Gemmy, as a man whose sense of manhood is at stake may become desperate. For Jock, it reveals a need for personal growth.

It was the mixture of monstrous strangeness and unwelcome likeness that made Gemmy Fairley so disturbing to them, since at any moment he could show either one face or the other; as if he were always standing there at one of those meetings, but in his case willingly, and the encounter was an embrace.

Related Characters: Gemmy Fairley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

The majority of the settlers find Gemmy remarkably unsettling, in part because, like the Aboriginal Australians, he walks silently and seems to appear out of nowhere. However, more off-putting than Gemmy's sudden appearances is his resemblance to both the white settlers *and* the black Aboriginal Australians. In the settlers' minds, there is a clear categorical distinction between white and black, an "us" and a "them" that keeps the world ordered. Gemmy's position as neither entirely white nor entirely black—being ethnically European but speaking and behaving like an Aboriginal Australian—contradicts the idea of a firm distinction between the races. This walking contradiction suggests to the settlers that they are all human beings, different in culture and appearance but only on the surface. In this way, Gemmy's existence threatens the settlers' long- and tightly-held worldview, forcing them to realize that they are not so utterly different from the Aboriginal Australians; there are shared and interchangeable characteristics in all of them. This challenges the settlers' xenophobic racism, a belief so so binding among them that it seems nearly religious.

Chapter 5 Quotes

The struggle between them was fierce. Till Lachlan came, [Janet] had been used to going her own way, unconditioned and free. She had no limit to herself. Now she resented his easy assumption that he was superior, should take the lead in all their doings, and that she must naturally yield to him.

Related Characters: Lachlan Beattie, Janet McIvor

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

Lachlan's arrival in the McIvor family reveals to Janet that as a girl and eventually as a woman, she is expected to be subservient to men due to societal norms, regardless of her own capability. Janet and Lachlan's relationship illustrates the irony of enforced gender roles on nearly every level. Although young Lachlan fancies himself a great man and feels assured that he will be recognized as a hero in the future, Janet is effectively superior to him in every way. She is older, tougher, braver, and more compassionate. Her societal limitations as a woman thus mean that not only is Janet's personal potential hampered, but so is the positive impact she might have had on the settlement as well, since the men will never recognize her potential as a leader. That Janet felt "unconditioned and free" and without "limit to herself" before Lachlan's arrival further suggests that such gender roles and enforced deference are not a natural state for women, but rather something society impresses upon them.

Chapter 6 Quotes

When [Gemmy] first came among them he had been unable to tell from their wooden expressions, and the even more wooden gestures, what they had in their heads. They hid what they felt as if they were ashamed of it, or so he had decided; though whether in front of others or before themselves he could not tell.

Related Characters: Gemmy Fairley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

Gemmy observes that the settlers seem fearful to communicate what they truly feel or even recognize it in themselves. Once again, Gemmy proves remarkably astute at reading people, despite his overall simplicity. This shameful hiding of feelings is particularly notable amongst the men of the settlement, who spend much of their time and energy in a dance of social posturing, trying to maintain their reputations and good standing before their peers, or projecting an image of power and control. This need to project, to appear powerful and masculine—and thus hide any weakness or tenderness—belies not only a strong sense of insecurity among the settlement's men, but also a fear that, perhaps, each of them is not so powerful as they try to believe. To reckon with such powerlessness even internally, especially in a difficult and potentially dangerous environment such as the Australian bush, seems to require more strength than any of them possesses, and Gemmy's

perspective reveals this dissonance.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ Barney, in his anxious way, was forever out there pacing the line and looking for signs of trespass; except there was no line, and the trespass too might be no more than a shadow on Barney's thoughts, and how could you deal with *that*?

Related Characters: Gemmy Fairley, Barney Mason

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

Even after Gemmy has lived with the McIvors for months, Barney Mason, their closest neighbor, still obsesses over whether or not Gemmy is ever walking across his property. As a character, Barney embodies the settlers' fixation on property, which differentiates the white settlers from the Aboriginal Australians—who have no concept of property and no need for it, since they are nomadic—and forms the basis for colonialism. Barney's constant need to patrol his boundaries when there *are* no literal boundaries highlights the absurdity of such an emphasis on property rights, particularly so far removed from organized and densely inhabited society. Although the narrative suggests that no trespasses occur on Barney's property anyway, it is also worth asking: why it should even matter if Aboriginal Australians cross his land, since they leave no marks, no trace, and no damage? Barney's fixation on his exclusive use of his property highlights the concept of land ownership as one of the fundamental differences between the white settlers and the Aboriginal Australians, and it brings up the question of whether such distinctions should matter at all.

❝ [Ellen] lived in the demands of the moment, in the girls, in Lachlan, and was too high-spirited, too independent, to care whether other women approved of her.

Related Characters: Janet McIvor, Lachlan Beattie, Jock McIvor, Ellen McIvor

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

Although life in Australia is certainly difficult, Ellen has "few regrets" for the life she left behind in Scotland, and anyway she is too driven to dwell on them. Ellen is arguably one of the strongest characters in the story, exhibiting an internal strength and self-assuredness that Jock, Lachlan, and most of the other men in the settlement notably lack. Pointedly, Ellen's self-confidence and lack of concern for how she is perceived by her friends—which Janet shares with her—exposes the weakness of Jock and Lachlan's constant desire to be perceived as powerful or respectable; Ellen shares none of their insecurities. The obvious contrast between the male and female characters suggests that although, in a patriarchal society, men are seen as stronger and more capable and expected to be leaders, women often possess as much if not more power within themselves. If women like Ellen were given the same roles as men, it seems that the settlement would be stronger for it.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ [Janet] saw something else as well. That in playing his part, Mr. Abbot had no more to do than Hector had. They only thought they were playing, because Leona managed things so cleverly, putting words into their mouths they they had never in fact spoken, and taking both parts herself.

Related Characters: Hector (Hec) Gosper, Ellen McIvor, George Abbot, Leona Gonzalez, Janet McIvor

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

At Mrs. Hutchence's house, Janet watches as Leona playfully but cleverly flirts with both Hector and George at the same time, carefully balancing her attention between the two so that neither individual feels put out. While Janet and Ellen possess an internal strength and fearlessness that makes them more powerful than the settlement's men, Leona displays a different form of power. Using her charm and wit, Leona can easily disarm Hector and George, both of whom are otherwise very concerned with projecting an image of power and authority, and convince them to set aside their egos for a time. Although Leona is gracious and never abuses her position to hurt either of them, she nevertheless exercises power over both men in such a way that they willingly give up their own sense of power so as to please her. In this manner, Leona represents an alternative form of women's power, showing that women can not only persevere and be brave, but also cleverly charm and

manipulate so as to control a situation without the men realizing it. In this manner, yet again, the narrative depicts women as just as powerful as men, or even more so, despite their societally disempowered position.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ At one point, out in the open, [the Aboriginal Australians] paused and looked up, bold as brass, to where he stood, pretty well hidden he had thought, and saw him, he was sure of it; any road, recorded he was there. Then boldly turning their backs on him and with no further interest, in whether or not he was observing, the old one, high-shouldered and floaty, still in front, walked on. The bloody effrontery of it! The cheek! The gall!

Related Characters: Gemmy Fairley, Andy McKillop

Related Themes:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

While Gemmy is mending a shed, two Aboriginal Australian men appear out of the brush and approach him. From a distance, Andy watches, incensed by their trespassing and what he regards as a treachery by Gemmy. Andy's indignation that the two men should see him witnessing their trespass on settlement land and be unbothered by it reveals an arrogance in Andy, and the other settlers by extension. His reaction here suggests that in Andy's mind, the authority of the white man is both sacred and powerful; any breach of it, such as trespassing, ought to be a source of fear or shame. However, the Aboriginal men brazenly ignore the settlers' claims to property. This reveals that not only do they not obey the specific laws of the white settlers, they also show no regard for their authority whatsoever. To Andy, whose own sense of power and self lies at least partially in his presumed authority as a white man, this seems the greatest "effrontery." Andy and his power are not even given the dignity of being challenged; they are simply ignored.

❝ And the stone, once launched, had a life of its own. It flew in all directions, developed a capacity to multiply, accelerate, leave wounds; and the wounds were real even if the stone was not, and would not heal.

Related Characters: Ellen McIvor, Barney Mason, Gemmy Fairley, Andy McKillop

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

When Andy reports Gemmy's visitors to Barney Mason—hoping that doing so will finally make Barney trust him—he embellishes his report by saying (untruthfully) that the Aboriginal Australians gave Gemmy some sort of stone wrapped in bark. Andy's lie quickly stirs the fear and curiosity of the settlers. The stone works as a symbol of the settlers' fear of the Aboriginal people, particularly when it's stoked by rumors like the one Andy spreads. Although the stone itself does not exist, just as the threat of invasion by the indigenous Australians does not truly exist, the idea of it is enough to cause actual irreparable damage. In the same manner that a stone can be harmless if left alone or lethal if weaponized, the settlers' fears are not inherently dangerous in themselves—for example, Ellen admits to being afraid of indigenous people at times, but she does not let it rule her behavior. However, when the stone and the settlers' fears and imaginations are weaponized to stir public outrage, the results, particularly in such a small and high-strung community, are disastrous, leading to harassment and eventually a vicious attack on Gemmy by other settlers.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ "For God's sake, man, when did ye ever tak heed o' what Andy says? We're no' scared o' stones. Ah thought that was the difference between us and them."

Related Characters: Jock McIvor (speaker), Gemmy Fairley, Andy McKillop, Barney Mason

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

Although Barney is initially wary of putting too much stock in Andy's breathless report of Gemmy's visitors, the mysterious possibilities of the stone supposedly given to Gemmy set him into a panic, which Jock attempts to calm. The stone, which plays upon the settlers' fears and lets their

imaginations run wild, takes on a mystical quality in the minds of the settlers, as if it possessed some magical powers—even though a single stone clearly poses no real danger to a group of men with guns.

This sudden superstition on the part of the settlers is painfully ironic, since those same settlers have formerly looked down upon the Aboriginal Australians for harboring superstitions and irrational spiritual beliefs of their own. If rationality and a denial of all forms of superstition are the marks of civilized men—white men—then the settlers are by their own definition no different than the Aboriginal Australians. Yet again, though the settlers try to maintain a categorical distinction between white people and black people, their own behavior suggests that there is far less that divides European settlers from Aboriginal Australians than they would like to believe. And, by extension, their belief in their own racial superiority is effectively baseless as well.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ They got him to his feet, brushed him down, told him he wasn't hurt, that he was a good fellow and that they had meant no harm. (It was true. They thought they didn't.)

Related Characters: Gemmy Fairley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis

Although Gemmy has not yet been attacked, many of the settlement's men often roughly jostle and shove Gemmy around, pretending even to themselves that it is all in good humor. Because Gemmy is such an enigma, his presence lays bare many of things that the people around him mean to keep hidden, even from themselves. For many of the settlers, his alien quality draws out their own suppressed animosity towards people they do not understand, and thus fear. Although the men do not realize it, Gemmy's presence, which reminds them of the unseen Aboriginal Australians who live all around them, summons their fear of being overwhelmed and their hidden insecurity about their own power and ability to defend themselves and the settlement. Gemmy does not do anything to provoke the settlers—quite the opposite, he tries to be helpful—but even so, they resent him, because in looking at him they are subconsciously reminded how little control they have over their own fates. This is particularly poignant due to the settlement's isolation, which causes the settlers to be particularly aware of their own vulnerability, no matter how much they try to suppress such such thoughts.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ Laying aside his rifle, [Jock] crawled with [Gemmy] into that musty, dark-smelling place, and did a thing he could not for his life have done a week, perhaps even an hour ago: he sat huddled close to him in the dark, and when he shivered, drew him closer, pulled the old moth-eaten blanket round the two of them.

Related Characters: Gemmy Fairley, Jock McIvor

Related Themes:

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

After a group of settlers abduct Gemmy from the McIvors' home during the night and attack him, Jock rescues Gemmy and brings him back to the lean-to, staying awake for most of the night to comfort Gemmy, who is stricken with terror. This moment represents a monumental change for Jock, who had previously been too self-conscious, too intent on appearing masculine and strong, to stomach any sort of physical touch or affection from another man, especially Gemmy. Jock's willingness to hold Gemmy close as if he were a child, to share a blanket and offer the safety of his embrace, illustrates that Jock is growing. In the gravity of the moment, his affection for Gemmy and desire to protect him outweighs the insecurity of his ego. Not only does this represent a newly-developed selflessness, but it also signals a shift in Jock's perception of himself as a man. No longer is he preoccupied with being regarded as powerful and respectable; now, he sees that to be a man and truly come of age is to care for and protect the people he values.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ *I think of our early settlers, starving on these shores, in the midst of plenty they did not recognize, in a blessed nature of flesh, fowl, fruit that was all around them and which they could not, with their English eyes, perceive, since the very habit and faculty that makes apprehensible to us what is known and expected dulls our sensitivity to other forms, even the most obvious.*

Related Characters: Mr. Frazer (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 129-130

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Frazer writes these words into his report on Australian botany and agriculture, positing that rather than trying to cultivate the land and force it to produce English crops, the settlers ought to make use of what already grows plentifully in Australia. Mr. Frazer's report makes somewhat odd interludes multiple times in the narrative, and seems in part to represent the author's own concept of an alternative form of colonial settlement. While still certainly colonial in that a foreign group of people are establishing themselves in the homeland of an indigenous population, Mr. Frazer's proposed alternative seems much more naturalistic and far less destructive. Rather than trying to dominate the land and strip it of "every vestige of the native" to make it resemble England, the settlers would instead embrace the land and the people who live on it, learning from the Aboriginal Australians' knowledge rather than seeking to destroy or enslave them. However, regardless of how much better—or at least, less destructive—such a colonial strategy seems, history and English colonialism had already taken their ruinous course by the time the novel was written. This subtle sense of hopelessness is reflected by the fact that Mr. Frazer utterly fails to change the minds of the other settlers or the government.

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ [Janet] loved the way, while you were dealing with [the bees], you had to submit yourself to their side of things.

Related Characters: Mr. Frazer, Mrs. Hutchence, Janet McIvor

Related Themes:

Page Number: 139

Explanation and Analysis

Janet begins learning the practice of beekeeping from Mrs. Hutchence and appreciates the manner it which it forces her to adapt herself to them. Janet's appreciation of the need to meet the bees on their own terms decidedly contrasts with most of the settlement's men's desire to dominate and control the landscape, the Aboriginal Australians, and even each other. Rather than violently assert herself over the bees, even over life itself, Janet understands that success means adaptation rather than domination. This notion rejects what is portrayed as the masculine need for power and domination and thus models a comparatively feminine strength. Moreover, Janet's approach to the bees also resembles Mr. Frazer's theory on botany, suggesting that in dealing with the bees, Australia, or life in general, greater success may be found by accepting the limitations of one's situation or environment and working within those constraints, rather than trying to domineeringly assert oneself over them.

Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ [Lachlan] was sorry for it. But it was absurd to have Gemmy always tagging at his heels, and he blushed now to recall a time when he regarded it as a sign of his power. How puffed up he had been with his own importance! What a fool he must have appeared to the very fellows he had meant to impress!

Related Characters: Gemmy Fairley, Lachlan Beattie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 158

Explanation and Analysis

As Lachlan grows older, he begins to distance himself from Gemmy. Lachlan is in a transitional phase, in the process of coming of age but not yet having arrived. Although Lachlan selfishly pushes Gemmy away from himself, the shame he feels at realizing that he toted Gemmy around like a badge of power suggests that he is finally developing some level of self-awareness and realizing that his fantasies and theatrics of power only reveal that he is weak and insecure. In light of that, although his relationship with Gemmy has suffered and caused pain to them both, such distance is arguably better than treating his companion as a token of conquest, which is dehumanizing even if Gemmy plays along with it. Although several characters grow throughout the story, Lachlan's coming of age journey, more than anyone else's, demonstrates how painful that process can be, especially when one who formerly envisioned himself as powerful and noble is forced to reckon with the fact that he has been foolishly mistreating those around him.

❝ Something had been destroyed in [Jock] that could not be put right. [Lachlan] watched his uncle drift back after a time to his friends, to Barney Mason, Jim Sweetman, but the days of unselfconscious trust in his standing among them, and the belief that to be thought well of by such fellows was the first thing in the world, were gone.

Related Characters: Barney Mason, Jim Sweetman, Lachlan Beattie, Jock McIvor

Related Themes:

Page Number: 161

Explanation and Analysis

After Gemmy is attacked by fellow settlers, by the very neighbors on whom the McIvors have always relied, Jock loses faith in his friends. Although the coming-of-age journey that Jock experiences is ultimately a positive development—he becomes more self-aware, more attentive to his wife, and less preoccupied with what other people think of him—it is still a markedly painful one, again suggesting that all such journeys inevitably involve a loss of innocence, and thus pain. The pain that Jock feels is two-fold, since not only do his and his family's social relationships suffer—in such an isolated, insular community, their few friends make up their entire world—but the peace of mind that their trustworthy neighbors once offered is now gone. Although it does not appear that Jock's neighbors intend him any greater harm than what already has occurred, the few people that Jock once depended on for support and mutual protection have proven themselves to be cowardly, wicked, and even treacherous. Thus, Jock's divergence from his friends, though it helps him grow and occurs for the sake of protecting Gemmy, costs him not only his friends but also his family's overall safety in the community.

Chapter 18 Quotes

Sir George, [Mr. Frazer] decides, exudes a magnificent air of unreality that includes everything he looks upon. He has got close enough to feel its disintegrating effect in every part of him.

Related Characters: Lachlan Beattie, Sir George, Mr. Frazer

Related Themes:

Page Number: 169

Explanation and Analysis

After Mr. Frazer realizes that the other settlers will never get behind his proposal to grow Australian crops, he takes his idea to the Governor of Queensland, Sir George, but quickly realizes the man is useless. Sir George, in this brief appearance, functions as parallel to Lachlan, demonstrating what the boy might have become had he never experienced the painful journey of growing up and realizing his own limitations. Just as young Lachlan fantasized about his own grandeur and the inevitable success of his future self, Sir George has similar delusions of his own apparent greatness, with very little to actually show for it. While such delusions are obnoxious but acceptable for a young boy, Sir George's delusions make him seem a fool, and worst yet, make him an impediment to others who, like Mr. Frazer, have useful ideas. Here, Sir George demonstrates the destructive effects of never growing up. Because he is a dreamer, Sir George lacks the follow-through to ever accomplish anything and believes that his greatness emanates merely from the *thinking* about great things. As Mr. Frazer can almost immediately sense, such childish delusion—which impedes any actual progress—is disastrous when held by someone in an administrative role, particularly someone whom others are depending on to govern, build, and manage a new settlement.

Chapter 19 Quotes

"Grandeur" was the word that came to [George], and he did not reject it. It did not seem too large for what he saw at times in a man [Gemmy] who had been kicked from one side of the world to the other, not even knowing perhaps what part of it he was in, except that he was there in his own skin.

Related Characters: Gemmy Fairley, George Abbot

Related Themes:

Page Number: 180

Explanation and Analysis

After Gemmy has left the schoolhouse—which will be the last time any of the settlers ever sees him—George reflects on the way in which his perception of Gemmy has changed from revulsion to admiration over the course of the year, and how his own ideas about suffering and greatness have also changed as a result. As a youth, George believed that suffering would harden a man's soul and make him capable of greatness, which typically implies physical or intellectual achievements that set one apart from the rest of humanity. However, when George recognizes Gemmy's "grandeur" simply in the fact that he survives hardship and trauma after hardship and trauma, the narrative suggests that greatness itself does not have to involve conquering others or being victorious over anything. Gemmy's inordinate suffering has obviously not created the spirit of a great explorer or wizened intellectual, but it has created a spirit that, though

tortured in its own way, possesses a remarkable resiliency and kindness. The story suggests that in light of so great a man as Gemmy, who not only survives all manner of hardship and abuse but also refuses to react with violence of his own, such achievements as George might once have imagined for himself pale in comparison.

Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ [Janet] was surprised, reading his letter, by its courtesy, its tentativeness, its tenderness she might have said, and recalling her own prickly tone felt foolish.

Related Characters: Gemmy Fairley, Lachlan Beattie, Janet McIvor

Related Themes:

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

When both Janet and Lachlan are older adults and have not spoken for many years, Janet makes a presumptuous request to Lachlan by letter, and he responds graciously, surprising her—though the exchange and the request eventually cost Lachlan his post as a politician. Although the years between Lachlan's parting with Gemmy and the current moment are not described in the novel, the tone of his letter clearly demonstrates that he grown up. His kindness indicates that he has finished the coming-of-age that his relationship with Gemmy and the strife that it caused brought about. Where Lachlan was once demanding of Janet, assuming his own authority and superiority over her because he was boy and she a girl, Lachlan's letter is not only polite, but also tentative, suggesting that he is wary of overstepping his bounds or infringing on Janet's sense of agency. The domineering, arrogant child that Lachlan was has been replaced by a kind, considerate, and gentle man. Such tenderness is even more striking considering the powerful position Lachlan has ultimately achieved for himself, which once would have only intensified Lachlan's belief in his own greatness.

❝ "I sometimes think that that was all I ever knew of him: what struck me in that moment before I knew him at all. When he was up there [on the fence] before he fell, poor fellow, and became just—there's nothing clear in my head of what he might have been before that, and afterwards he was just Gemmy, someone we loved."

Related Characters: Janet McIvor (speaker), Gemmy Fairley, Lachlan Beattie

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

As Janet and Lachlan sit together reflecting on the events that happened decades before, Janet finds herself returning to the oft-revisited memory of Gemmy balancing on the fence, the first time they saw him. Although Gemmy was an enigma to the settlers and struggled himself to know who he was or where he belonged, Janet names him simply as "someone we loved," regardless of where he came from or whatever suspicions the other settlers had of him. The fence represents the divide between the world of the Aboriginal Australians, which Gemmy (unintentionally) left behind, and the world of the white settlers, which Gemmy fell into. It is significant, then, that Janet's image of Gemmy comes from before he fell, when he was still balanced precariously between the two worlds. This suggests that the the love she feels for him reaches across race and the distance between the two worlds. Who Gemmy was, whether English, Aboriginal Australian, or somewhere in between, is ultimately less important than the fact that he was simply a human who formed loving bonds with others.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

In the mid-nineteenth century, partway through the settlement of Queensland, Australia, three white children are playing in a clearing, pretending to hunt wolves. Only the boy, Lachlan Beattie, is actually engaged with the fantasy. The two girls gasp, and Lachlan can see a "black" indigenous man in the distance who has emerged from the trees, balancing himself on the **fence** before falling off. At first the children fear a raid, but they soon realize it is only one man, skinny and strange-looking with a blue cloth tied around his waist. Lachlan raises the stick he has been pretending is his rifle and aims at the man, who throws his arms in the air and pleads in shaky English, "Do not shoot, I am a B-b-british object!"

This introduction immediately establishes racism and xenophobia as central elements of the story by creating tension between the Commonwealth children and what they presume is an Aboriginal Australian—though the narration and the settlers only ever refer to them as "black people." Lachlan's raising of a pretend rifle also introduces his fantasies of power and control, which nod to both his gendered concept of himself as well as his delusions of grandeur, which he will later need to overcome. Additionally, the key symbol of the fence hints at the importance of land ownership within the settlement.

What the children had thought was a black man is actually a white man with filthy blond hair and skin darkened by the sun. However, he speaks the Aboriginal Australians' language, which unnerves Lachlan since he cannot understand it. Lachlan shouts at the man, who begins crawling on all fours in the dirt, and a sense of power and domination fills Lachlan's young heart. Lachlan shouts another order and begins marching the man back towards the settlement to show the girls' father, still pointing his stick as if it were a rifle. The man has a hobbling limp; one of his legs is shorter than the other.

The children's confusion over whether this man is white or black, Commonwealth settler or Aboriginal Australian, immediately suggests that the concept of race is not as strictly categorical as many characters in the story will presume. Additionally, Lachlan's fear of a language he cannot understand also suggests that such racism is tied in with xenophobia, the fear of language or people that are unknown and foreign.

Within an hour, the other settlers have arrived to see the strange man. The settlement is sparse and isolated, with a number of family-owned properties, a single store, a bare post office, and a shack that acts as a pub. They are twelve miles from the nearest town, which is itself quite small. The settlers look on, wondering if the odd man is mute, though they realize he can't be, since he spoke some English words. Lachlan feels briefly insecure, being only a small twelve-year-old child, but he quickly recovers, feeling empowered by this hostage he has captured and hoping that the feeling of power does not leave him.

The settlement is established as isolated and sparse, suggesting that the settlers themselves are exposed and vulnerable to misfortune and violence, with no one near enough to offer aid. Although this isolation does not justify the settlers' xenophobia or racism, it does explain their insular and fearful dispositions, which will play a major role in the latter half of the story. Notably, Lachlan senses that his newfound power may leave him, demonstrating even now, he knows on some level that it is merely a façade.

Janet McIvor, one of the two girls, reflects on how strangely her cousin Lachlan suddenly behaves, as if he were a powerful man and not a mere child like the rest. Her mother Ellen frets over Lachlan running about "like an actor on a stage" until her father Jock, Lachlan's uncle, cuffs him upside the head, shaking him from his fantasy of power. Janet remarks that she and her sister Meg found the man just as much as Lachlan did, but no one is interested in their perspectives. They continue to observe the man, odd and hobbling, with the "baffled, half-expectant look of a mongrel that has been often whipped but still turns to the world, out of some foolish fund of expectancy."

Throughout the story, Janet will both feel oppressed by her own gender and its narrowly-defined role in the mid-1800s and annoyed at men's social posturing and delusions of power, as hinted at here. This contrast between women's cool-headedness and simple resolve and men's need to self-aggrandize appears constantly throughout the novel, setting the baseline from which both Janet's and Lachlan's characters must grow.

The man came from lands to the north that are unexplored, foreign, and hostile. His presence reminds the settlers that all around them, even among the settlement at night, tribes of Aboriginal Australians roam, crossing over borders and boundaries. Such borders can be enforced by a shotgun by day, but by night they become meaningless, mere features of the vast landscape that has always been there. At night, there's no indication that the Lands Office in Brisbane, hundreds of miles away, dedicated each parcel of land to a certain family as their exclusive property. So the settlers do their best during their days to strip the land of "every vestige of the native," to turn it civilized and cultivate it into a copy of their homelands.

The settlers' own recognition that their borders mean very little at night and are easily crossed by traveling Aboriginal Australians suggests that such property lines are themselves rather meaningless, based on the flimsy authority of an office hundreds of miles away. By challenging the notion of settler-owned property, the author also challenges the concept of colonialism itself, since the seizure and development of lands is the fundamental basis of colonialism.

Gemmy Fairley, as the "black white man" calls himself, manages to sign and summon the occasional English word. Over the course of the afternoon, the settlers form an idea of where he seems to have come from. As far as they can tell, Gemmy lived with the Aboriginal Australians for 16 years, before which he was aboard a ship until he was thrown overboard. Lachlan is particularly adept at interpreting Gemmy's signs, and the man begins deferring more and more often to the boy. The excitement of it all—compared to the daily drudgery of the settlement—gives the whole encounter a "carnival" atmosphere; the young children especially enjoy it. Lachlan feels his sense of power return as he becomes the interpreter between the adults and the strange man.

Although Lachlan is no longer holding Gemmy as his hostage or exerting his willpower to dominate another person, Lachlan still feels empowered by proving himself useful and vital to the community. This suggests that Lachlan's fantasies of power are not necessarily based on violence itself, but rather on the act of taking charge and being admired by his community. This fits with Lachlan's ideas about gender that come up later, because he believes that, as a man, he ought to be the center of attention to whom everyone turns.

Gemmy passes the blue rag from his waist to the adults and they examine it, noting that it seems to be part of a salt-stained sailor's jacket, before Jock McIvor hands it back to him. Jim Sweetman, a former blacksmith and respected figure among the settlers, is ashamed at the spectacle the settlers are making of the man, who is hardly clothed and dancing about like a "plain savage, or marionette or imbecile."

This section briefly introduces Jim Sweetman, who will function as the primary voice of reason and temperance outside of the McIvor family. Jim Sweetman's shame at Gemmy's state of undress suggests that he is a modest man propriety, less prone than others to gawk at a man for his own amusement.

Gemmy starts pointing to features of his body and shouting their names in uncertain English, his proximity to the white settlers seemingly restoring his faculties for the language. Gemmy pulls a hammer away from a surprised young man with a harelip—Hector Gosper—who is embittered when the other settlers laugh at him, since he is "very sensitive of his standing." After Gemmy has pantomimed hammer and nail and remembered the names for both, he hands the hammer back to Hector, who strikes him in the chin and calls him a racial slur.

Hector's shame at being laughed at and sensitivity about his "standing" suggest that posturing and concern for one's appearance in the community is not limited to Lachlan, but rather seems to be a trait common to men in the settlement. This insecure male concern with social position and image will later contrast with the self-confidence and independence of the female characters. Additionally, Hector's use of a racial slur against Gemmy—who is actually white—shows both how toxic racism can be and how the lines between races are essentially arbitrary.

The next afternoon, Mr. Frazer, a minister and botanist, sits in the schoolhouse with George Abbot (the settlement's 19-year-old schoolmaster), Gemmy, and Lachlan, though they soon send Lachlan away. Gemmy's English continues to return to him as Mr. Frazer spends the afternoon interviewing him, getting as wide a grasp of Gemmy's life as he is able and instructing George to transcribe all that he hears. George resents this and also resents Mr. Frazer generally, feeling that acting as a "mere clerk" is beneath him and will disrupt the image of power and authority that he has tried to foster for himself amongst the settlers and students. However, George "dared not challenge the older man, despised himself for it, and resented the occasion all the more."

Mr. Frazer and George Abbot are introduced and established immediately as contrasting characters. While Mr. Frazer seems genuinely interested in understanding who Gemmy is and where he came from, George is immediately depicted as petty, obsessed with the same illusions of power and authority as most other men in the settlement. However, the fact that George is too weak-willed to actually challenge Mr. Frazer confirms that his illusions of strength and authority are only that: illusions.

As George is transcribing the interview into **pages** of writing, he intentionally misrepresents a phrase every so often as an act of passive rebellion against Mr. Frazer, and feels an impish glee at his betrayal. Frazer does not notice, however, and when they are finished, he hands the seven pages of transcription to Gemmy. Gemmy regards them very seriously, even though he cannot read them, and sniffs them intensely, smelling the black ink. Mr. Frazer stores the pages in his pocket, though Gemmy hopes that they will reappear, for to him they seem magical, containing some of the essence of himself, which he feels has been lost to him. He is grateful to Mr. Frazer for wanting to know about his life, but imagines that if he could steal the pages back and sit with them, the whole of himself might return; Willet, the rats, all of it.

The pages containing Gemmy's life story symbolize his connection to white civilization, in that they are the only record of his life as an ethnically European man. On the one hand, this seems positive, as the pages reflect that someone has taken the time to know him as a person, not just as a vagabond or a curiosity. On the other hand, the greatest abuses of Gemmy's life have come at the hands of white men, and by the end of his time with the settlers he will feel as if the pages, to which he attributes a mystical power, are in some way draining his spirit and keeping alive the demons of his early childhood. However, in the moment, Gemmy is thankful that the pages have been written and imagines they might restore the parts of his life he has forgotten.

CHAPTER 2

16 years before, Gemmy wakes on a beach, unsure of where he is or even entirely who he is. His body is frail, mottled with open sores and tiny creatures feeding on them. A group of Aboriginal Australians finds Gemmy, unsure of what sort of creature he may be until they see his stomach and belly button and realize that he is human like them. Gemmy is confused; he had expected to see Willet there, standing above him. The native people give him water and carry his frail frame with them back to their camp. In the evening, he manages to sit upright and crawl toward them. They are stunned into silence, so he grins and makes silly faces as he had once done on the streets back home to earn sympathy. The Aboriginal Australians eventually burst into laughter and toss bits of food to him, which he takes and eats.

The author's description of Gemmy's life is fragmented, working slowly backwards over the course of the novel, seemingly reflecting Gemmy's own fragmented memories as they return to him. The fact that the indigenous people do not immediately realize he is a human being suggests that they are unfamiliar with white people and so are wary. This suggests that xenophobia is not strictly limited to white people but is rather s a common human behavior. However, the reception that the "black" Aboriginal Australians give a white man is markedly kinder than the reception the white settlers give a man they perceive to be black.

In the morning, when the Aboriginal Australians rise to leave, Gemmy follows after them at a distance, inching closer until he folds himself among the stragglers of the traveling group. When they stop, Gemmy stops with them and establishes himself amongst them, on the outskirts of the group. The people "though wary, made no dispute." As Gemmy learns the language and ways of this new world—which he discovers is not altogether different from his old world—he loses the language, customs, and even his memories of home, though he had not known very much to begin with. Though occasionally memories of objects or words float through his psyche and cause a sense of loss, he imagines that they must belong to some other person, some other life.

Gemmy's transition between the world and identity of a Commonwealth citizen and the world and identity of the Aboriginal Australians seems almost fluid, suggesting that in spite of what the settlers believe, there are no true categorical differences between white and black people. Gemmy's realization that this new world is not so different from his own world again suggests that though appearances and cultures may differ greatly, the essential elements of human society remain the same everywhere.

Gemmy becomes one of the native Australians. After a time, when they tell the story of his arrival, it seems to him as if they are talking of someone who lived eons ago. Although he is an accepted member of their tribe, many things are restricted from him (including women), which keeps the thin strands of his old life present in him and prevents him from falling entirely into his new identity. At night, he still hears the echo of former words and objects; the word "boots" enters his mind along with a picture of leather and laces that he cannot comprehend. Although the tribespeople tell him that it is because his spirit does not rest, Gemmy imagines that there must be something more tangible to his visions than the spirit world.

Although Gemmy is able to transition from one world to another, the restrictions placed on him as an outsider and a white person suggest that the Aboriginal Australians, though they are more accepting of Gemmy than the settlers will be later, still harbor their own feelings of insularity and xenophobia. Gemmy is accepted among them, but he is still not taken as a total and equal member of their society, suggesting that on some level, they still regard him as a white man, a foreigner, and an other.

Eventually, news arrives from the south that there are "spirits, white-faced, covered from head to foot in bark and riding four-footed beasts that were taller than a man." Gemmy is determined to find out what such things could be. Gemmy begins seeing signs of white people: horse dung, which brings to mind a memory of clattering hooves that he cannot quite understand; a child and mother, which gives him a rush of affection; a bearded man with a flannel shirt and an "axe," the name of which rushes into his head; a woman feeding chickens; and a clothesline hung with shirts that seem to Gemmy like colorful ghosts.

The confused description of white people suggests that the Aboriginal Australians have never come into contact with white people or horses before, other than finding Gemmy on the beach. Thus for both the white settlers and the black Aboriginal Australians, contact with another civilization represents an unknown and potential fear, which again suggests that xenophobia—and the racism it can fuel—are not unique to white society. Notably, however, the Aboriginal people don't seem eager to harm the white strangers, which shows how individuals and societies can control their reactions to racist impulses.

One day Gemmy spies the McIvors' hut and sneaks up to it in the evening, listening to the voices and trying to remember the words, believing that if he can do so, some part of him will return, and perhaps he can be recognized. The next day, when Gemmy runs towards the **fence** on which Lachlan, Janet, and Meg had spied him, he is not intending to abandon his tribe. He only wants to close the distance between himself and the children, to prove to himself that he is connected to such people somehow, that all that separates them is the length of the ground. Gemmy climbs atop the fence, gripping with his toes and balancing with his arms, waiting to be struck down by the bullet from Lachlan's rifle. When Meg gives a shriek, Gemmy loses his balance and falls "on all fours on the other side."

Although Gemmy's balancing upon the fence is not detailed much in the first scene, the image will be revisited multiple times throughout the story, symbolizing the divide between the world of the settlers and the world of the Aboriginal Australians, with Gemmy balancing precariously between them. Gemmy's falling over the fence, rather than intentionally coming down to meet the white children, also symbolizes the manner in which he is unintentionally drawn into the world of the settlers and away from the Aboriginal Australians.

CHAPTER 3

Gemmy is taken in by Janet, Lachlan, and Meg's family, the McIvors, who let him sleep under a lean-to against their wooden hut with a blanket to cover himself. Gemmy is eager to work and help, though his mind often wanders and he struggles to stick to tasks. Even so, he teaches the girls how to forage and Lachlan how to track, as he learned to do from the Aboriginal Australians. The children lead Gemmy around like a dog, but he complies, feeling bonded to them and particularly to Lachlan by the power he had exuded that first day, even after Gemmy realized his "rifle" was only a branch. When they are in public, Lachlan swaggers, but in private, Lachlan is affectionate toward Gemmy.

In his eagerness to help but inability to focus, Gemmy behaves rather like a child even though he is a grown man, which is reinforced by his bond to the McIvor children. Lachlan's response to Gemmy typifies male behavior in the story: bragging in public, eager to project an air of confidence and power, though privately sentimental and affectionate. The disparity between Lachlan's public and private behavior towards Gemmy once again suggests that he is insecure about his own manhood.

Janet enjoys fretting over Gemmy's appearance, combing his hair and trying to make him look presentable. However, there are moments when Janet gazes at him as if she can see through him and sees that he should not be "treated as a child or plaything." In these long stares, which Gemmy felt the first time he saw her, while he balanced upon the fence, he feels vulnerable and exposed even to himself, but Janet is in turn so open and vulnerable that he allows it and even enjoys the feeling of being seen and laid bare. Gemmy often returns to the moment on the fence in his mind, when Lachlan chose to dominate him and Janet chose to see him, each establishing their permanent relationship to him in that moment.

Janet's maturity in recognizing—even if not all the time—that Gemmy is a human being who must be treated with dignity casts a damning light on Lachlan's self-centered belief that Gemmy is a token of Lachlan's power to command and dominate. Here, as often throughout the story, Janet is depicted as far more mature and astute in her ability to understand people and to respect them, which makes restrictions placed on her because of her gender seem all the more unjust.

Gemmy feels affection for Ellen in a way that he has not experienced before, never having known a motherly figure. Jock and Gemmy, however, are immediately uneasy with each other. Though Jock tries to be gentle with him, his presence makes Gemmy want to flee. However, Gemmy can see that "the man was troubled" and that Jock's insecure concern with maintaining his good standing among the men of the settlement could potentially be dangerous.

Like Janet, Gemmy possesses an uncanny ability to read people's emotions and insecurities, an ability which the novel suggests is often fostered by a particularly hard early life. This notion is reinforced by Gemmy's fear of Jock, hinting that he has known harsh and insecure fatherly figures, even though he has never known the love of a motherly figure such as Ellen.

The other settlers treat Gemmy with "open hostility," fearing that he is "in league with the blacks" and will bring some sort of invasion or attack. Most recognize that Gemmy is mentally deficient, though some believe that it is because some part of himself still lives among the native people. Even Ned Corcoran, himself a scheming and thieving fellow, feels that Gemmy is exploiting their generosity. He seems to the settlers a "parody of a white man" and many wonder if he could even still be called such. Obviously he had "started out as white," but they wonder if perhaps, after spending over half of his life with the black Aboriginal Australians, Gemmy could have lost his whiteness.

The settlers' general fear of Gemmy and his association with the Aboriginal Australians frankly exposes their racism. Ironically, their consideration of whether Gemmy could have somehow lost his whiteness exposes their belief in a categorical distinction between white and black people while also revealing the absurdity of it. There seems to be no way to quantify or define what whiteness even is, since it apparently has little to do with skin color, and yet the settlers are convinced that some such quality exists.

For all the washing and clean clothes and soap that Ellen gives Gemmy, he still keeps "the smell he came with, which was the smell of the myall, half-meat, half-mud, a reminder, a depressing one, of what there might be in him that could not be reclaimed." Gemmy's presence is a constant, unwelcome reminder of the Aboriginal Australians in the bush (wilderness) all around the settlement. There is a recent rumor that nineteen white people were killed by Aboriginal people at another settlement, and the settlers fear being "overwhelmed." This fear is particularly strong at night, when even the bravest man cowers at every snap of a twig. It is the echo of childhood fears of "the Bogey, the Coal Man, Absolute Night," and Gemmy seems the very embodiment of this imagined monster, showing signs of both whiteness and blackness within the same grinning, eager face.

It is telling that Gemmy's position as a man between worlds—not fitting into the settlers' categorical notions of white people or black people—is so disturbing to the white settlers. Their frustration that Gemmy does not fit within their already-established view of the world once again demonstrates their racist xenophobia and suggests that what truly frightens them about Gemmy, and perhaps about all Aboriginal Australians, is that the settlers do not understand them. The fear of an unknown people or of a single man who defies easy explanation seems to stoke their racial animosity.

CHAPTER 4

George Abbot is only 19, though he gives the impression of being in his mid-twenties by his stern demeanor, his habits of a much older man, and his refusal to recognize his own youth in any manner whatsoever. George despises Australia and the roughness of the settlers and the isolation of his position, feeling that it does not give credit to his own "fineness" and "high prospects," though a part of him recognizes such things are thin illusions. His demeanor keeps him isolated, despised by the other boy his age and embarrassed by the girls, so he takes out his repressed anger by being severe to his young students, beating them for wrong answers or misbehaviors. Such violence makes him feel briefly relieved until the their looks of pain fill him with shame and sadness.

Like Jock and especially Lachlan, George is established as a man with illusions of grandeur. Although George's fantasies are less about the power to dominate and more about his intellectual and cultural prowess, the resulting insecurity and delusional grasp of reality are the same. It is revealing, then, that George takes out his frustrations with himself and his predicament through violence towards his young students, suggesting that even for a man of such supposed refinement, the base instinct for violence is dormant as the easiest way to feel briefly powerful and in control.

George "never meant to come to Australia." As a child, he lives a privileged life with a fine education funded by his eccentric godfather, Mr. Robertson, who dotes on him and gives him gifts. Although he is a quick and charming child, as he grows older, his charm seems childish and people pay less attention to him; "the beginnings of a terrible plainness began to declare itself." Cousin Alisdair, who is obsessed with appearance and aesthetics, subsequently begins to ignore him, though still funding his education.

Like Lachlan, George struggles with the fact that, despite his childish conviction of his own greatness, the rest of the world has no particular interest in him. George's physical plainness, apparent already, foreshadows the general mediocrity that will define his life and trajectory, and that George will eventually be forced to make peace with in order to mature.

George, disenchanted with his own life, begins to dream of exploring Africa, feeling that the harshness of the continent would refine his plain self into the greatness he feels he is destined for. When he brings his request to Mr. Robertson as a young man, his benefactor instead insists that he go to Australia, which is just beginning to be settled, and where the land is fertile and rich by all reports.

George's belief that suffering will make him a great man is only an extension of the childish delusion that he is destined for greatness. Rather than accept that he is a person like any other among the masses, George casts the blame for his mediocrity on the notion that he simply hasn't suffered enough, though this notion will also be challenged later in the story.

Instead, George's life in Australia is "desolate, without hope," and mean to him. While he believed Africa "would have tempered his soul to hardness," Australia simply causes him to languish with its clammy heat and dull people. When the McIvor children bring Gemmy to school, George strictly forbids it, partly in revulsion to Gemmy but also because he resents Lachlan, who is sharp, quick, and easily his best student. Lachlan also yearns for the affection of his elders, and so George pointedly and pettily refuses it, even mocking Lachlan for always having Gemmy around, until "it [becomes] Lachlan who now [keeps] Gemmy away."

It is revealing that George comes to despise Lachlan for his sharp wit and eagerness to please and be praised, since Lachlan seems a mirror image of George as child, and not altogether different from George as a young adult. George thus unwittingly condemns his own behavior by scorning Lachlan and demonstrates a notable lack of maturity and self-awareness, unable to recognize that he himself exhibits traits he despises in other people.

CHAPTER 5

Before Lachlan arrives from Scotland to live with the McIvors, Janet and Meg are thrilled when their mother announces that her nephew is coming, even though it is due to the death of his father. Janet loves the stories her mother tells her about Scotland and her life before Australia, where Ellen lived in a mining family until she escaped by marrying Jock, even though he occasionally drank too much and "had an eye for the girls." Janet is excited for Lachlan to arrive so she can introduce him to all the interesting bits of their life there, but when Lachlan arrives he is sullen, acting pointedly uninterested in whatever Janet and Meg try to show him. He longs for Scotland, and "nothing here [is] good enough for him."

Although Lachlan acts bitter, Janet exhibits her own youthful immaturity in her inability to realize the pain that Lachlan must be experiencing having lost his father and his homeland. It is worth noting that Lachlan seems to share Jock's own dour and gloomy demeanor—as will soon be described—which again depicts the major male characters (aside from Gemmy) as struggling to persevere and endure, setting up the contrast between men and women that highlights women's power and self-assuredness.

Although Lachlan is younger than Janet, he expects her to always defer or yield to him on account of his being a boy, which frustrates her to no end. Lachlan is prideful and tries to project an image of power and toughness, but Janet can easily make him cry, though she feels shame each time she does it, knowing the pain it causes him. Lachlan often brags about his own accomplishments, many of which are untrue, which further infuriates Janet. Although they are occasionally close, it never lasts. This is all the more painful since Janet wants to love him and show affection, if only he would not be so arrogant and demanding, if he would only "admit need, [but] he would not."

Janet's frustration with Lachlan's sense of superiority is the clearest depiction of the gender and power dynamics at play throughout the story. Lachlan's position as male in a male-dominated society seems to encourage his delusions of grandeur and even his outright lies of his own greatness, even though he is insecure and often weak. It is also notable that Janet would perhaps accept such a situation if Lachlan—and other men, by extension—would admit that women play a vital role in their community, but he doesn't, because this would contradict his illusions of power and capability.

Lachlan eventually realizes that he will need to learn the ways of Australia if he is ever to become anything there, so he commits himself to becoming a "bushman" with "fierce, little-mannish tenacity" that earns him the reluctant respect of even Jim Sweetman. This frustrates Janet further, however, since she is easily as tough and brave as Lachlan is, but still trapped by the expectations of smallness and domesticity placed on her as a woman. "She resented bitterly the provision his being a boy had made for him to exert himself and to act." Janet sees no such future for herself, only the confined lifestyle modeled by her mother, whom Janet admires and who herself is tough and more than competent in such an environment.

In contrast to Lachlan's insecure tendency to lie and boast, Janet is far tougher and more capable, as well as more compassionate. However, her strength goes unrecognized simply because she is female, pointing to the clear gender disparity in the settlement and the injustice of her position. Janet's position, in which she can envision no future for herself that it seems would match her rising potential, establishes the basis from which her character will develop.

Ellen watches her daughter pouring herself into books, stitching with an almost frantic energy, and punching fiercely into bread dough, and sees a well of untapped potential and energy. Ellen is concerned for her. One day, as Janet is standing in the yard, she walks across the dusty ground and looks at the vibrancy of the earth and a feeling wells up in her, a vision of her alternate self. Janet names this self Flora Macdonald, which seems suitably grand to match her capability. But the moment and the vision passes as it usually does, and she holds it within herself, careful not to "put too much store by them."

The capability and latent potential welling up in Janet is obvious both to herself and to her mother Ellen, suggesting that if Janet were allowed to be Flora Macdonald, allowed to pursue her own goals unconstrained, she could do truly great things. However, Janet's maturity shows itself in her decision not to dwell in her fantasies as the male characters often do.

Lachlan, on the other hand, shares such visions of grandeur and future heroism, which "ma[kes] things difficult for him" amongst the other settlers. He often has visions of himself as a grand explorer with Gemmy at his side, bravely questing, gaining a noble injury or two, discovering the bones of famed explorer Dr. Leichardt and returning to society, where a monument would be built to honor his greatness. To Janet such egotistical goals seem pointless, even "ordinary," but Gemmy shares in Lachlan's visions and is honored that he himself has a place in them.

The gendered distinction between Lachlan and Janet is clear: Lachlan is insecure but imagines that his capability is limitless, while Janet is confident and capable but confined by the societal limitations of being a woman. Once again, this suggests that women possess an inherent strength that plays a critical role in their community, but such strength often goes unrecognized and unappreciated.

CHAPTER 6

Some settlers, like Ned Corcoran, think they should go raiding and simply kill all the Aboriginal Australians they can find. Others favor a more compassionate approach, imagining that someday, when a town can be established, the native people might even join them as laborers or house-servants. These settlers also fear the reprisals that such violence as Ned Corcoran hopes for would inevitably bring. Both types of settlers want information from Gemmy, often sidling up to him and attempting to wheedle information out of him.

Ned Corcoran is a shallow character, existing primarily to embody the worst impulses of the white settlers. The fact that even those who are more "compassionate" towards the Aboriginal Australians still only envision them as laborers, servants, or slaves, demonstrates just how deeply ingrained their notions of racial superiority truly are.

The settlers who favor violence are easy to deal with and predictably friendly to Gemmy to draw information from him. When they try to ask how many Aboriginal Australians there are and where they live, Gemmy—feeling a "heavy responsibility" to protect his friends—delays as long as he can and then, finally, says there are more of them than there really are and declares that they live much farther to the north than they actually do.

Gemmy's felt responsibility towards the Aboriginal Australians and lies about their location and power indicate that he distrusts the settlers as much as they distrust him, reinforcing the tension and even animosity between the two groups.

But those who favor "the soft way" give him far more trouble, angrily shouting at Gemmy for not telling them what they want to hear, which is usually where and how the Aboriginal people live. Part of why Gemmy is reluctant is the fact that English is not an adequate language to describe the spirit world by which the Aboriginal Australians navigate and survive. When Gemmy tries to teach them a "native word," they become angry, "as of the mere existence of a language they did not know was a provocation."

The narrative following Gemmy occasionally alludes to the spirit world of Aboriginal Australians and indicates that Gemmy uses it to interpret his inner turmoil. Though the novel never thoroughly delves into this spirit world, it does provide a small clue into how differently the Aboriginal Australians perceive the world from the white settlers. Once again, the settlers' fear of an unknown language illustrates their xenophobic fear of things or people they do not understand.

However, Gemmy finds a friend in Mr. Frazer, who seems to more easily understand his still-limited English and who does not press for information Gemmy would rather not share. Although a minister, Mr. Frazer is also a botanist and often walks with Gemmy into the surrounding bush to learn from his knowledge of the roots, fruits, and herbs. Gemmy locates a source of food or useful plant, teaches Mr. Frazer how to pick and eat it, and Frazer makes painstaking notes and detailed sketches in his notebook, writing down his best interpretation of the native word that Gemmy supplies him with. All of this delights Gemmy.

Although Mr. Frazer is technically a minister, his primary role in the story is as a botanist eager to learn from Gemmy's knowledge. Mr. Frazer's interest in what Gemmy has to teach him without any ulterior motive sets him apart as the single settler outside of the McIvor family who appreciates Gemmy as a person, rather than a device to achieve some self-motivated aim, and respects his right to privacy and secrecy.

Sometimes Mr. Frazer incorrectly repeats the name to comedic or even "blasphemous" effect, accidentally speaking spiritual words that ought never be uttered. Gemmy is sensitive to such occasions, especially since by teaching Frazer about the plants, he is giving the man a small glimpse into the spirit world that he himself sees wherever they go, as it was taught to him by the Aboriginal Australians. As they travel, Gemmy occasionally spots other Aboriginal Australians in the brush, observing them, though Mr. Frazer never sees. Gemmy secretly signals his acknowledgement and they are allowed to pass.

Although the settlers rarely see Aboriginal Australians, the fact that Gemmy often spots them gives some merit to the the settlers' fears and feelings of exposure. However, the fact that the Aboriginal Australians are constantly present and yet do not interfere with the lives of the settlers suggests that they are primarily peaceful, rather than savage or violent as the racist settlers imagine them to be.

CHAPTER 7

Five months after Gemmy began living with them, Jock McIvor constantly tries to convince his neighbors—especially Barney Mason—that Gemmy is harmless. Even so, Jock is still ill at ease around Gemmy. He had agreed to let him live with them at the request of Ellen and the children, but internally he feels a revulsion towards the man; Jock thinks that Gemmy seems "pathetic," and whenever Gemmy tries to touch Jock out of appreciation or affection, Jock gets angry. Jock's appeals to Barney not to worry are thus only half-honest, but Barney is a natural worrier as it is. Barney distrusts Gemmy, and Jock resents the distance the situation puts between himself and his closest friend.

Jock's wariness of Gemmy and of physical affection from another man suggests that he too is insecure about his masculinity and public image, consistent with the running depiction of men as being insecure about their own power. Significantly, Jock's insecurity and his fretting about his neighbors establishes the basis from which he will begin his own coming of age journey toward greater maturity.

In such isolation, good neighbors are a critical asset, and Jock and Barney's wives and children are close to each other. But when Gemmy arrives, Barney begins watching the boundaries of his property, always checking to see if someone has trespassed, though he never finds signs that someone has. Jock meets the "ritual complaint" with "ritual reassurance." Ned remarks, however, that he wonders if Gemmy is in secret contact with his former tribesmen and notes that Jock should be worried about leaving Gemmy around his wife. Jock is embarrassed and disappointed that none of the other men defend him, not even Jim Sweetman. However, Jock now begins to recognize the shallowness and posturing of these men, something that he never used to consider. It saddens him to realize it.

The tension that Jock feels between his family's care for Gemmy and his community's derision of the strange men illustrates the insularity of small communities. Notably, although Jock formerly took part in the men's social posturing, as soon as he has reason to separate himself from the group, the shallowness of such people, even his friends, becomes immediately obvious. Jock's experience suggests that when one participates in such an insular—even petty—community, it is difficult to judge relationships objectively from within it.

Watching Jock react to Gemmy, Ellen thinks back to the version of her husband she was initially attracted to, a ruddy "mixture of forcefulness and almost girlish modesty." In their early years, although they talk of moving to Canada, together they choose Australia instead, drawn to its sunlight and open air. However, as soon as they arrived in Brisbane, "Jock turned gloomy, and she saw for the first time that the sunniness she had seen was not his real nature." Life in Brisbane is harsh and the people dour, so they move to Darling Downs for menial work. Ellen gives birth to Janet, then loses a boy and a girl. Jock's gloom worsens. When land to the north opens, they move again to homestead, but the harshness of the environment makes Jock even more stern and joyless, taking the last of his youthfulness out of him.

Jock's gloom and inertia once again establishe the contrast between the major male characters—aside from Gemmy—who tend towards insecurity, weakness, and inertia, and the female characters who demonstrate strength, aptitude, and resolve. The fact that Jock is sent into a depressive gloom by the harsh environment of Australia and Ellen is not, even though she shares the workload and suffering of homesteading, suggests that Ellen possesses a stronger resolve and ability to endure hardship without sinking into misery.

Although Ellen misses home like Jock does, she is tough and cares little for what others think of her, putting all her energy to meeting "the demands of the moment." The other wives visit sometimes, always with nervous question about Gemmy, fearful of what he represents. Ellen chides them and reminds them that Gemmy is white. She has her own fears, which arise sometimes at night when she's thinking about the strange man sleeping next to their hut, but she breathes deeply until they pass.

Ellen's self-confident tenacity again contrasts with her husband's insecurity and inertia, suggesting—as with Lachlan and Janet—that despite their societally disempowered position, women provide a vital source of power and toughness to a family and a community, often above what men can summon themselves.

Each morning, before sunrise, Ellen rises, lights the fire, and coaxes everyone else from sleep. In the waking hours, Jock's gloom is always at its worst and the household cannot function without her pushing them forward and setting the pace for the day's work ahead. Lachlan always drags his feet as well, trying to avoid his chore of chopping wood until Ellen threatens him with a stern voice.

Ellen, though she is a women and thus has little authority within the settlement, yet again proves to be the driving force within the family and the key to their survival, particularly in light of Jock's gloominess. This again suggests that women provide a critical source of strength, power, and endurance to any group of people.

CHAPTER 8

In late afternoons, George likes to wander off with a French book and read, transporting himself away from the drudgery of the settlement to a land of refinement. As he is walking, he is accosted by Mrs. Hutchence, an older woman who lives, with a young woman named Leona, in the single actual house in the settlement. Mrs. Hutchence is dragging a heavy branch and asks George to take it for her. He considers this work beneath him, annoyed that she does not feel the same way, but he takes it anyway. The house seems like it belongs to a different place and time; though simple enough, it has multiple rooms, making it the most luxurious building anywhere near the settlement. Mrs. Hutchence herself is hardy, wearing boots like a man and doing physical work, which unsettles many of the settlers, George included.

Mrs. Hutchence yet again exhibits the characteristic strength of women throughout the story, maintaining the most impressive home in the settlement without the presence of any man to direct, protect, or provide for her. The contrast between Mrs. Hutchence, who is capable and tough, and George, who is believes he is too refined for hard work, is obvious, and it both contradicts and condemns the presumptions the settlement's men make about gender roles. Mrs. Hutchence's characterization once again argues that, despite what society may believe, women are at least as powerful and capable as men, if not more so.

They arrive at Mrs. Hutchence's house and George deposits the branch before accompanying her inside. It is the first real room George has seen in over a year, and he is taken aback. Gemmy, Janet, Meg, and Hec Gosper are there. Leona, beautiful and elegant, stands at the stove. Hec seems irritated to see George's arrival; he has been flirting with Leona all afternoon, assuming that Janet and Meg are unaware. Janet, however, can easily see all the dynamics at play, though she is confused since Hec is only 17 and Leona is at least 25. Janet has spent part of the afternoon helping Mrs. Hutchence tend to her beehives and has learned much more about her and Leona than anyone else in the settlement knows, which still is not much.

Mrs. Hutchence's house functions as an oasis throughout the narrative where several characters—Janet, George Abbot, and Hec Gosper, most notably—are allowed to be themselves , away from the social pressures of the settlement. For Janet, this is particularly important, as Mrs. Hutchence's house is the only place in the story where she is not restrained by her gender and is allowed to develop and explore her own potential and power as an individual.

Leona plays the dynamic between the two young men—both of whom are entranced by her elegance and refinement—and is careful to balance her affections and keep either from feeling neglected or disheartened. Although in her mind, her interaction with Hec is only a child's game, George gives her pause; she is not sure what to make of him. Leona acts playfully bossy towards both, and they cheerfully comply with her every whim. This surprises both Janet and Meg, who have never seen Mr. Abbot the schoolmaster being anything but stern and authoritarian. Janet observes, with an acuity that surprises herself—though the world, it seems, becomes more clear to her by the day—that Leona masterfully maintains complete control the entire time, manipulating both Hec and George to play into her flirtations.

Though consistent with the theme of powerful women, Leona displays a different form of power than that shown by Janet, Ellen, or Mrs. Hutchence. While each of the aforementioned characters possesses a toughness and tenacity that the settlement's men desire but lack, Leona's power is more in line with stereotypes of femininity. By utilizing her grace and charm, she is able to completely disarm the façade of toughness that both Hec and George keep up. This suggests that women may find power not only through their inherent toughness or tenacity, but also by allowing people to simply be who they are.

Janet and Mrs. Hutchence leave to tend to the bees. As the conversation fades, Leona remarks that she calls Mrs. Hutchence "Ma," even though they're not related, and that the old woman has a powerful insight into people which allows them to speak freely and self-assuredly in her presence. As George watches Mrs. Hutchence work the hives, blowing smoke from her sleeves, he feels a "pleasant drowsiness and lack of concern for himself, an assurance that he could leave now and come back, and when he did there would be a place for him." George excuses himself and walks home feeling light and airy. He notices Gemmy, waiting to escort the McIvor girls home, and tries to greet him, but Gemmy does not lift his head when he passes.

Leona's observations about Mrs. Hutchence quite literally depict her house as an alternative setting for the story, where the reader can see how several characters interact when freed from the social pressures of the settlement. This is immediately apparent in George, who is lulled by the peacefulness of Mrs. Hutchence's house into letting go of his pretenses of authority and superiority. This change is demonstrated by the fact that he tries to greet Gemmy on the road, even though he formerly despised the man as someone beneath him.

CHAPTER 9

After Gemmy has lived in the settlement for nearly a year, he is approached by two Aboriginal Australians who emerge from the brush while he is mending a shed. He acknowledges them and the three sit cross-legged on ground to speak. One of Barney's workers, Andy McKillop, is constructing a fence on a ridge 100 yards away, and he spies the men approaching Gemmy. Andy begins following them and though he tries to remain hidden, they look straight at him, obviously seeing him, but turn their backs and continue on their way to speak with Gemmy, which they do for a brief time. Their nonchalance enrages Andy, who eagerly anticipates telling what he has seen to Barney, and he rehearses his story to himself as he walks.

The general disregard that the Aboriginal Australians have for Andy, even though they are knowingly trespassing on a white settler's land, suggests that they give no regard whatsoever to the white people's claim of exclusive property rights. This disregard for the settlers' authority challenges the notion of colonialism altogether. Why, the scene implicitly asks, should the Aboriginal Australians who have walked that same land for countless years give any heed to white settlers who have only been there a handful of years?

Andy has worked for Barney for two years but has yet to earn his trust, even though Andy has as much animosity towards the indigenous Australians as Barney does. Ever since his wife ran off with another man in Brisbane years before, Andy has been a heavy drinker. In a fiery rage, and confident that this witness of treachery will bring him into Barney's good graces, Andy accosts Gemmy. But Gemmy simply ignores Andy, pretending he is not there, and continues mending the shed.

Andy's belief that mutual hatred of people who are different will earn him the trust and respect of his employer demonstrates a grotesque social element to racism and xenophobia, one that seems particularly strong in a small, insular, homogenous community such as the settlement. The animosity towards the Aboriginal Australians seems to be a unifying element within their community.

Andy is convinced that Gemmy is pretending that his visitors are merely a fancy of Andy's imagination, cooked by the sun or his drinking habit. Andy's fury increases and he now feels the need to "justify himself," and by the time he finds Barney he is so worked up he can barely speak. Andy screams to Barney about the Aboriginal men he has seen, but Barney is hesitant to take him at his word, particularly because he has no trust in or love for Andy. Gemmy himself has been less bothersome in the past weeks as it is. Although news of Aboriginal people near the settlement is disturbing, Andy's unhinged behavior seems even more troublesome.

Andy represents the worst example of male insecurity in the story, providing an example of how toxic such a need for recognition and power can be if stretched to its limits. Andy feels powerless and disrespected, but his own solution for his low standing is to direct vehement racial animosity towards other people. This is ultimately self-defeating, as the other settlers respect Andy even less, but he still serves as a dire warning against an unrestrained male ego.

Jim Sweetman happens to come wandering up the hill and over to Barney and Andy, and Andy immediately starts yelling and cursing about the invading indigeneous people. Jim is annoyed by Andy's foul language, but Barney slowly begins to share Andy's distress. Although Jim's own property is the most isolated, he has "no quarrel" with the Aboriginal people, and he trusts Andy, who is "always half off his head," even less than he trusts the native people. However, Jim still fears for his granddaughter's safety, and when Andy claims that the Aboriginal Australians gave something to Gemmy, his curiosity is finally piqued.

Although Jim Sweetman represents the best of the settlers—in the same way that Ned Corcoran represents the worst—his understandable fear for his granddaughter causes him to consider Andy's outrage. That even Jim Sweetman should be pulled in suggests that although fear is the basis of racism, often that fear is understandable, if not based on fact. Jim's reaction here adds nuance to the novel's depiction of the settlers' xenophobia.

Andy says that they gave Gemmy a mystical-looking **stone**, wrapped in bark, though he knows this is a blatant lie and instantly regrets it, cursing himself for letting his mouth get away from him. Even so, Andy doubles down on the image of the stone, hoping—though not convinced—that the settlers will trust him over "this blackfeller." Rumor spreads quickly about the visit and the stone, and Andy finds himself wishing he had never made up the stone in the first place.

The stone functions as a brief but noteworthy symbol of the settlers' fear—as initiated by Andy—and its ability to cause harm. A stone can be harmless lying on the ground or cause great injury if thrown at another person. In the same way, the settlers' fear could be dealt with appropriately, and hurt no one, or it can be weaponized to disastrous effect.

CHAPTER 10

Jock hears the news within the hour from several different sources. Barney comes to him in "exasperation" looking rather "miserable," and Jock pities him. The distance between them has been steadily growing, and this event, putting Gemmy at odds with the settlement, seems as if it will only make things worse. Jock feels sad and lonely contemplating this. When Jock promises to speak to Gemmy about it, Barney mentions the **stone**, fearful even of the concept of it. Jock regards this as absurd superstition and is "sickened" that the settlers have sunk so far into their fear. Ned Corcoran approaches, making accusations, and Jock loses his temper defending Gemmy—which the other settlers see as a "disturbing confirmation of change."

Jock's angry defense of Gemmy marks a critical moment in his personal growth and a departure from the norms of the settlement. Although Jock was formerly preoccupied with maintaining a good standing among his friends and neighbors, his defense of Gemmy suggests that he is putting his commitment to Gemmy, his family, and his sense of ethics before the will of his small community, which is beginning to act like a mob. Jock's loneliness suggests that by standing up for what he believes in, he is alienating himself from his insular community.

Jock wonders if he has changed, if the time that Gemmy has spent with his family has spurred some new development in himself. He feels as if he has only ever seen the world through the eyes of others, eyes that demanded he be socially respectable amongst his peers. Now, looking through his own eyes, his "singular self" as he walks his property, the land seems beautiful, full of color and complexity, teeming with insects and birds and life. There is an "easy pleasure" to the world that Jock has never known before. But as pleasurable as this is, it is also "disturbing," since he knows that such feelings lie outside the boundaries of "what was common."

Jock's newfound pleasure in the earth, in Australia's color and sounds and wildlife and nature, suggests that the change he is undertaking is a positive one, and if anything, his preoccupation with being seen as respectable held him back from the simple joy of living. This is an important step in Jock's development both as a man and as an adult, when he begins to let go of the need to be seen as powerful and recognizes that there is more to life than social standing.

Ellen notices the change in Jock, and though at first she worries about the soured relationships with their neighbors and Jock's withdrawal from his friends, the "sense of being wronged drew them together." Jock takes a renewed interest in understanding his wife beyond the day-to-day work that she does, gazing at her intensely as if they had just begun courtship. They take to walking to the ridge together in the evenings and looking at the land.

Jock and Ellen are drawn together by adversity; his newfound interest in his wife suggests that letting go of his obsession with being perceived as powerful has freed his attention to focus on his love for his partner. This further depicts Jock's character change as difficult, but healthy.

Jock asks Ellen if she longs for home, implicitly asking if they made a mistake in coming to Australia. Ellen internally considers the struggle each day is here, though more than the labor it is the sheer size and vast loneliness of the country that oppresses her. She finds it strange that none have lived here before, that there are no graves to precede their own, and that they will be the first dead. What Ellen misses most, however, is the two children who died when they lived in the Downs.

Ellen's feeling about being the first people to die in this place is understandable on the one hand, but on the other shows a lack of awareness or consideration of the Aboriginal people who have walked those lands for generations, Ellen's perspective suggests that even good and decent settlers struggle to consider the Aboriginal Australians as people in the same manner that they view themselves.

Ellen tells Jock about a tightrope walker she once saw in Scotland with her father, pantomiming the acrobat's cautious walk. Jock watches her, entranced, and says that he wishes he had been there to see the wonder in her eyes.

Jock's careful attention to Ellen and desire to know her as a person, rather than just a wife, again suggests a change in his perception of both himself as a man and Ellen as a woman.

CHAPTER 11

In the subsequent few days after "Gemmy's visitors had appeared," the other settlers begin harassing the McIvors, breaking fence and slitting the throats of the family's pet geese. The children are saddened and disturbed, as are Jock and Ellen. Lachlan is filled with a righteous anger, wanting to prove his devotion to Jock and Ellen with some act of brave retribution, but Jock does not want him to carry the burden of it all. In his eyes, Lachlan is still too young, and should not have to consider such things.

The hostility the McIvors experience from the other settlers is even more threatening since they are the only people the McIvors can depend on. If even the neighbors are a threat, then the McIvor family is truly alone, demonstrating the difficulty of defying one's peers—even for a righteous reason—when one lives in an isolated or insular community.

Three days after the "slaughter of the geese," Jock sees Gemmy running across the yard, terrified, as if something were pursuing him. Jock ventures down to where Gemmy had fled from, finding the shed smeared "with shit." Jock is enraged, knowing this is the work of one of his neighbors, someone he knows personally and well, though he does not know who specifically. The thought of standing face to face with the man who defaced his shed, a man whom he once considered a friend, "horrifie[s] him."

The settlers' harassment of the McIvors is pointedly ironic: although the settlers have long feared attacks by the Aboriginal Australians—who have never done anything threaten at all—it is the settlers themselves who hurt and prey on each other. This flatly contradicts whatever notions the settlers have of the Aboriginal peoples as being savage, violent, or uncivil.

CHAPTER 12

Although the Aboriginal men who visit Gemmy do not bring him a **stone** as Andy said, they do offer him a reminder of the life and the world he left behind when he joined the white people in their settlement. As they sit together, communing and wandering together through the spirit world, Gemmy realizes that his time with the white settlers has made him weak, separated as he is from the wilderness that he considers "his mother." Gemmy's visitors offer him the gift of remembrance, concerned that Gemmy is falling back "into the thinner world of wraiths and demons that he had escaped, though never completely, in his days with them." Having offered Gemmy the chance to commune, to feel the presence of the land and be reinvigorated by its strength, the two Aboriginal men leave.

For Gemmy, this seems to be the first time he considers he may have made a mistake in joining the white settlers, that even though he looks like them, he may have been better off leaving such a life behind. Once again, the narrative refers to the Aboriginal Australians' spirit world, this time positing that it is in some sense more real or substantial than that white settlers' world. Yet again, the brief glimpse given of the Aboriginal Australians' spirit world reiterates how different their perception of the world is from the settlers'.

Andy arrives minutes later and Gemmy feels as if the air is immediately "infected" by his presence, by the hollow and restless look in Andy's eyes, the "emptiness" that makes him mad. Gemmy knows how to handle Andy—by simply ignoring him until Andy loses his steam—as he knows how to handle most of the men in the village. He has learned to see each man through their own eyes and deal with them "as they dealt with themselves." All the men of the settlement often harass or cajole Gemmy, but he can handle it and they always insist that they "meant no harm." However, his dreams are truly oppressive, summoning distant memories of men who beat, harassed, and abused him as a boy.

The instant deadening effect that Andy's presence has on Gemmy suggests that the white settlers' society is itself toxic in some way, perhaps because of their preoccupation with power or their need to dominate and recreate the landscape. The sickening effect that Gemmy feels in the presence of white men such as Andy is likely furthered by his history of abuse at the hands of other white men, men who were insecure about their own sense of power.

Gemmy awakes from one such dream with another's hand pressed over his mouth, believing it to be only an extension of the dream, but fearing that, perhaps, the demons in his dreams have discovered how to step into the real world. Rough hands pull Gemmy out of the darkness and force a bag over his head. They drag Gemmy out into the open, where he can hear the whispers of a whole group of men, and he is pushed back and forth, beaten, and knocked off his feet multiple times. As they continue to jostle him, Gemmy feels water around his legs and when he falls again, his head is forced underwater and his arms are pinned back. Amidst the splashing and the gasps, Gemmy hears Jock's voice. His attackers flee, and the sack is pulled from his head.

Once again, the settlers who fear the Aboriginal Australians and imagine them to violent and savage ironically commit egregious acts of violence themselves, contradicting any notion that white people are superior for being more civilized or peaceable. This irony further suggests that the white settlers' racism towards the Aboriginal Australians is essentially xenophobic, based in their own fear of a people, language, and way of life which they do not even attempt to understand.

CHAPTER 13

In the hut, Ellen hears Gemmy cry out and wakes Jock, who immediately grabs the shotgun and goes to the window where he can see an odd shuffling group of figures carrying someone through the moonlit yard. As Jock dresses, Janet also wakes, and follows her father and her mother quietly out into the yard. Jock pursues the group; Ellen stands to watch some distance from the house. In the moonlight, Janet watches her mother and is overcome by affection for Ellen's courage and presence, and finds that she is thrilled by her own presence as well. Janet is completely unafraid, even though the dark bush poses many dangers, and she feels pride to be the one standing there, witnessing this event, rather than Lachlan.

Yet again, although Lachlan tries to project an image of power, bravery, and responsibility, Janet quietly surpasses him, demonstrating the power of women once again. It is noteworthy that in the same way that adversity drew Jock and Ellen together, seeing her mother be present and aware in the midst of danger kindles Janet's affection for Ellen as well. Although her mother, as an adult, represents Janet's own narrowly defined future as a woman in a patriarchal society, Janet also gets the chance to see the depth of Ellen's bravery and fortitude.

Ellen walks towards the hut, joining Janet, and touches her gently. Together, they see Jock half-carrying Gemmy up the slope, returning from the creek in the ravine. Jock meets Ellen and Janet's eyes, and "the look he gave them she would never forget." Jock accompanies Gemmy back to the lean-to he sleeps in, while Ellen and Janet return to their beds.

Janet and Ellen's shared experience of this particular hardship, which draws them together, parallels the renewed closeness Jock and Ellen have together due to the other settlers' harassment, demonstrating the manner in which people who suffer together for a common cause often draw closer to each other.

When Jock arrives at the creek, Gemmy's attackers are already fleeing and he cannot see any of their faces, which both angers him, since they are cowards, and also relieves him, since he fears meeting them "face to face." When Jock sees Ellen and Janet waiting for him, a deep anger fills his heart that his wife and daughter should be out in the darkness, exposed, while his neighbors who attacked Gemmy are rejoining their own wives in their beds. Although Jock could never have done so before this moment, he crawls into the lean-to with Gemmy and hugs him tightly against himself, wrapping the blanket around them both.

Jock climbing into Gemmy's lean-to with him and spending the night holding the terrified man close signifies yet another major change in Jock's character. Where he previously had been wary of having Gemmy touch him at all, since he felt such physical affection between men to be weak and shameful, Jock now spends hours holding him close to comfort him, suggesting that Jock's care for Gemmy now overrides any ideals he once held about masculinity or image.

Janet lies awake for several hours before she hears Jock return to the hut. The following morning, neither of her parents speaks of what happened, though Ellen comes to her and kisses her. Janet feels as if "a kind of knowledge had been passed to her" and in the future, she regards this is as the moment she truly grows up.

Although Janet did not do anything other than be present and witness what took place, she still feels as if she has grown up merely by knowing and seeing the hardships her parents and Gemmy face. This suggests that one's loss of innocence is a critical step in growing up and coming of age.

CHAPTER 14

Over the months since Gemmy's arrival, Mr. Frazer makes painstaking observations and detailed illustrations of each plant and root Gemmy teaches him about. Amidst his notes, Frazer writes that he believes that the settlers are wrong about Australia: it is not a harsh, unfriendly territory that must be dominated to produce sustenance—the native peoples thrive without cultivating by using their knowledge of the land, which is itself naturally abundant with food. The settlers should, he thinks, "humble ourselves and learn from them." The settlers must change themselves, rather than the landscape, and Gemmy thus is a "forerunner" in Frazer's opinion, a hybrid of European and Australian characteristics that make him the ideal specimen to exist in such a world.

Mr. Frazer, aside from being Gemmy's friend and supporter, functions within the narrative to suggest an alternative form of colonialism, one which embraces the naturalism of the Aboriginal Australians. It is worth noting that although the story is generally critical of colonialism and the author often questions its presuppositions, it never outright rejects colonialism. Instead, the author suggests a healthier, less destructive model that perhaps would have had less disastrous impact on the indigenous people. However, when this book was written in the 1990s, domineering British colonialism had already had its ruinous effect.

Mr. Frazer thinks back to when he tried to explain this concept to Jim Sweetman, who "for all his lack of imagination, was the best of them." One day, Frazer finds Jim Sweetman playing with his granddaughter and tries to share his vision, offering him a small native fruit. Sweetman, however, is skeptical and does not taste the fruit, being more concerned with his fussy granddaughter's antics. Frazer is disheartened, realizing that if Jim Sweetman is not interested, none of the other settlers will be either. He resolves to present his vision to someone with more authority and begins organizing his notes into a report.

By testing Mr. Frazer's hypothesis against the settlement's most decent man, the author criticizes his own alternative proposition for how the colonization of Australia could have been done: the settlers of the time are simply too set in their ways, unable to conceive of building a new society in any manner unfamiliar to them. This is especially true given the arduous life of the settlers and their daily demands, as represented here by the granddaughter.

Mr. Frazer watches his wife reading sheet music, hearing the score in her mind. They do not have the money for an instrument in Australia. His wife does not share his passion for botany, and he likewise does not share her interest in political economy or her longing for their adult children. Although there is a quiet distance between them, and though "she is cleverer than he is but does not make him feel it," she has supported his journey even when it took her away from her children, knowing that her husband is searching for a "revelation."

Mr. Frazer's wife appears only in this scene, functioning primarily to illustrate that her husband's passion for botany and idealistic quest leave him rather withdrawn and detached from the rest of life—demonstrated by his lack of interest in their children—and particularly from their small community. Although Mr. Frazer escapes the insularity and racism of the other settlers in this way, he also loses the capacity to participate in the life of the settlement.

As they are preparing for bed, Mr. Frazer's wife tells her husband about Gemmy's visitors and the men who attacked him in the night, all of which Frazer is completely unaware of. Frazer's wife agrees with her husband that Gemmy is harmless, but since the settlers fear him so much, he is still at risk. Accordingly, Jim Sweetman's wife has arranged for Gemmy to live with Mrs. Hutchence, where he will be further from sight and safer. Mr. Frazer is bothered that none of the settlers thought it worth asking his input.

That Mr. Frazer could be oblivious of so many tumultuous events in their tiny community reinforces the detachment his dreams and passions have fostered. Again, while this allows Frazer to be untainted by the other settlers' racism and derision towards Gemmy, it also keeps him from participating in his neighbors' lives or having any say in the community's dealings. Frazer dilemma here suggests that there is an inherent trade-off between being an individualist and being an active part of a community.

CHAPTER 15

Janet has been helping Mrs. Hutchence tend her bees for many weeks, and she feels that the older woman is her "first and [...] greatest friend." The two first meet through Gemmy, whom Mrs. Hutchence sometimes employs to build hives for her or retrieve swarms of bees from the wilderness, since he "knew about these things." As soon as Janet sees Mrs. Hutchence working with the bees, blowing smoke to keep them calm, Janet feels the sight stir something deep inside her.

For Janet, the bees represent possibility, the potential for her to grow and utilize her intelligence and aptitude in a field not dominated by men, as she will continue to do later in her life. In the same way that Gemmy spurs character growth in Jock, Gemmy also forms the initial connection between Janet and Mrs. Hutchence, once again making him a catalyst for positive change in others' lives.

From that moment on, Janet often spends time with Mrs. Hutchence and learns about the bees, which she appreciates for the way they force humans to operate on the bees' own terms, adjusting to "their side of things." Janet feels that if she could step outside her own mind and enter into their communal hive mind, she would understand what it might be like to be angelic. Janet soon has her own bee-keeping equipment and her knowledge nearly matches Mrs. Hutchence's.

Janet's appreciation for the fact that she must handle the bees on their own terms—while still getting what she wants from them—is again markedly different from the need to dominate others that Lachlan exhibits. Again, the two characters demonstrate the contrast between men's and women's typical approaches to power and achieving their aims.

One day, an event occurs that locks Janet into beekeeping "for life." Late in the day, after Janet has removed her protective clothing, a swarm of bees rises suddenly from their hives and sets upon her, covering her skin and blotting out her vision. Janet's mind tells her to be still, that she will be safe since the bees have already fed and are content. She gives herself over to them and hears a new voice in her mind say, "You are our bride." Janet can hear people calling out to her, but they seem to be in another world. When the bees finally peel away like "a crust," though Janet is completely unharmed, her skin feels new to her.

Janet once again displays an uncanny strength and resolve—despite the fact that she is a woman, and thus assumed to be weak by her society—through her ability to remain calm and trust in her own knowledge of the bees' behavior. The voice in her head, calling her its bride, not only foreshadows her future life's work—discovering how bees communicate—but also that she will never marry, instead devoting herself as a nun to the study of beekeeping.

Later in her life, Janet will become a master apiarist and an expert on bee biology, history, and behavior, even producing her own distinctive, cross-bred varieties. But in the present, Janet goes to comfort Mrs. Hutchence, who is overcome with fear and whose faith in the fairness of the bees had faltered while Janet's "faith had been absolute." Janet feels that she was saved by "the power of her own belief, which could change mere circumstances and make miracles." Although she looks the same to Mrs. Hutchence, Janet feels that she has been given a new body, a simpler form refined by the crucible of the bees. When she meets Gemmy's awestruck glance, she is convinced that she now see herself as he sees her.

Although Janet is not recognized for her toughness or tenacity because she is a woman, her discovery of the power and purity of her conviction represents its own form of power. Such resolve and confidence in what she knows to be true once again contrasts with the common insecurity of most men in the settlement, who constantly try to project an image of power or control but internally doubt themselves or question their own abilities.

CHAPTER 16

Mrs. Hutchence and Leona move Gemmy into a small, sparse room—though cheerfully painted—and Leona tends to the injuries he sustained during the attack. However, Gemmy feels panicky and restless in the room, both because of the sense of enclosure and the smell of a small chest, made from foreign wood, which gives him the feeling of "his spirit being touched and interfered with." The scent draws him back into distant memories, his "maggot stage," when as a tiny child he and many other toddlers lived on the floor of a timber mill. He was kept there to sweep sawdust, surviving by eating the oily grime that collected at the base of the machines until, at five or six years old, he was taken away and became "Willet's boy."

After living in the bush with Aboriginal Australians and under an open lean-to with the McIvors, four walls seem rather like a cage to Gemmy. This markedly contrasts with George's earlier reaction to stepping into such a room, which reminded him pleasantly of civilization, suggesting that Gemmy belongs to a different world, one in which human boundaries lack meaning. Gemmy's definition of his own earliest memories as his "maggot stage" suggests not only horrific trauma and abuse, but also dehumanization so thorough that he does not even recall himself as a human toddler or child.

The room in Mrs. Hutchence's house sets Gemmy into a different kind of sleep, "a sleep that belonged to a different life and produced different demons; the kind that live in rooms." Gemmy dreams of Willet, who is the first human he can remember and who turns Gemmy from a maggot into a boy. Everything in Gemmy's world, including himself, belongs to Willet and exists to serve Willet. "He is Willet's boy, as the boots are Willet's boots." Willet alternates between beating Gemmy or giving him "slobbery kisses." Gemmy cannot imagine that any other life exists.

That Gemmy finally recognizes himself as a "boy" when he belongs to Willett suggests that Gemmy places an inordinate amount of value on belonging, either to a place or a person. This revelation of Gemmy's past and glimpse into his sense of self sheds light on his relationship to the McIvors, who also give him a sense of belonging.

Willet is a rat-catcher, using Gemmy, some ferrets, and a dog as the tools of his trade. Willet is also a collector of stolen and discarded keys, and Gemmy often wonders what they open. He often dreams of stealing one of the keys, finding the box that it opens, and hiding in it until Willet finds the box and claims him. They work together, six days a week, flushing rats out of Regent's Park's ponds, and Gemmy finds small joys amidst the crowds of people. Seeing all the other "street urchins," Gemmy is grateful to belong to someone. Gemmy has to handle rats often during the day, so his arms and ears are riddled with bite marks and sores, and at night he dreams of being consumed by them.

That Willet occupies a nearly god-like position in Gemmy's mind, despite his lowly social position, further suggests the weight that Gemmy places on belonging to someone, especially in the way that it offers him a sense of identity. In a perverse way, Gemmy's journey from maggot to Willett's boy and onward represents a manner of growing up, of moving from a non-person (in his own mind) to a human being with a name and a "family," even if that family member is brutal and abusive. Gemmy's story hints at how even the tiny communities of individual families can become toxic when they're too insular.

One night when Gemmy is 11 or 12 years old, after Willet has fallen asleep, drunk, Gemmy lights the little room they live in on fire out of a sudden desire to assert himself and his buried "resentments." Though Gemmy tries to wake Willet to show him what he has done, Willet is still unconscious and the fire spreads. Gemmy, in a panic, climbs out the window and runs until he no longer recognizes any of the streets, climbing a rope and tumbling into a lidless crate where he decides to take shelter.

Although Willett occupies a god-like position in Gemmy's mind and is the closest thing Gemmy has to a father figure, Gemmy's sudden act of violence proves that some part of him understands the injustice of the cruelty with which Willett treats him. It seems, though, that Gemmy did not actually mean to murder the man, only to show him he could act in retaliation.

Though Gemmy expects Willet to find him and wake him, he is instead woken by a sailor, and Gemmy discovers that he fell asleep aboard a ship that is now sailing through the ocean. Gemmy spends the next two years of his life on ships, moving from one to the next as crews and captains tire of his presence, until one crew simply throws him overboard.

Suffering and rejection are the only consistent elements of Gemmy's young life. That he survives such abuses at all suggests an extraordinary, even heroic level of resilience and ability to endure various hardships.

Gemmy is thus returned to the present, sickened and tormented in Mrs. Hutchence's little room. He thinks often of the McIvors, whom he misses terribly even though he sees Janet often, and of the **pages** that George and Mr. Frazer wrote about Gemmy's life. In time, Gemmy becomes convinced that the pages are the keys to his suffering, to releasing the demons of his past that were magically contained in the letters written on the paper. He decides that he must retrieve them.

Though the pages symbolically represent Gemmy's life and connection to white society, Gemmy believes they hold an actual magic power as well. There is a tragic irony in the reader's knowledge that merely possessing pages of writing cannot truly have any power over Gemmy's demons or return the parts of himself that he feels are not whole, particularly since he cannot read.

CHAPTER 17

Lachlan feels as if the world "had come apart." His old friendship with Hec Gosper, a friend and mentor, has been subdued by Hec's long-held grudge against Gemmy and Lachlan's defense of him, which wounded Hec's reputation. Lachlan, now 13, will soon leave behind the other boys to join the ranks of the men, though this means that Gemmy can no longer hang around with him. Previously, Lachlan had to discourage rather severely Gemmy from following him around, but at times Lachlan wishes he had never done so. With shame he reflects on his behavior as a younger child, parading Gemmy around with a sense of power and dominance.

In the process of growing up and coming of age, Lachlan is ashamed to realize how foolish he was as a child and how wrong his conceptions of the world have been. However, although Lachlan is growing up, he falls into the same trap as most of the settlement's men—which Jock himself must overcome—of being more concerned with his social standing and appearance before his peers than with his ongoing relationship to Gemmy.

It is around the time of Gemmy's visitors when Lachlan realizes the full distance that separates him from the other boys. The other children—one of whom is Ned Corcoran's—mock Lachlan for his friendship with Gemmy and play-act shooting the man dead, like their fathers think someone ought to. Days later, these same boys tell Lachlan about the attack on Gemmy at night.

Lachlan's peers' play-acting of shooting Gemmy down illustrates their desire to find power by dominating others, which is typical of the men of the settlement. Their play also painfully summons the first moment that Lachlan saw Gemmy, when he had the exact same thought: this is not someone to care for, but someone to dominate and feel powerful over.

When Ellen finally explains the whole event to him, Lachlan feels betrayed that he was not told and that he slept through the attack like a child. Moreover, he feels both powerless and fearful, not of danger, but of the fact that he had not recognized the wickedness of the world and "how his failure to see it was a weakness in him." Rather than go to school, he spends the day crouched in the bush, clutching a rifle for no particular reason, wondering how the world can ever go back to the way it was. Midway through the day, Hec arrives and sits with him quietly. As he does so, Lachlan feels the distance and hostility between them melt away.

A key component of Lachlan's coming of age is the realization that the world is not easily divided into heroes and villains or good and evil. Rather, he realizes that wickedness can show itself in anyone, even in the white settlers and even, perhaps, in himself. The narrative thus argues that such a loss of innocence—painful and complicated though it is—is an essential part of growing up and entering the world as a mature individual.

After Gemmy moves to Mrs. Hutchence's, life for the McIvors returns to a semblance of normality, though Lachlan observes that Jock is dispirited, that "something had been destroyed in him that could not be put right." Although Jock eventually returns to his old friends, he no longer trusts them or feels that being thought well of by such men is "the first thing in the world."

Jock's dispiritedness suggests a loss of faith in the other settlers, an almost cynical realization that the respect he once strived for means nothing if it comes from cowardly, even wicked men. Although Jock's realignment of priorities is beneficial for his relationships with Gemmy and with Ellen, it also comes at great cost.

When Lachlan goes to visit Gemmy at Mrs. Hutchence's house, he discovers that in the dance of interactions between Leona, Hector, Mr. Abbot, and Janet that he witnesses, all his conceptions of manhood and power have no bearing. Janet herself has become more and more independent lately, less concerned with Lachlan—he had taken for granted "that her chief concern must be him"—and more focused on her own wishes and desires. "In the revelation that a power he had taken for granted might have limitations, he felt much of it fall away."

Lachlan's realization that much of the world has little regard for him or his visions of manhood and power marks another critical milestone in his coming of age. This moment shows the frailty of Lachlan's power and suggests that for individuals to grow up, they must realize that the world and its people do not revolve around themselves, and likely do not even care about their presence at all.

Lachlan leaves the gathering at Mrs. Hutchence's house and Gemmy accompanies him. They walk for a short while, not speaking. Lachlan knows that Gemmy's spirit is not well, and he feels that he himself is not either. They part ways, both turning to look at each other one last time when they are 60 yards apart, moving in opposite directions down the path. Gemmy's face is too far away for Lachlan to read his expression, but for many years after, in his dreams Lachlan tries to discover what Gemmy felt in that moment, always unsuccessfully. Even as an adult, Lachlan awakes crying after these dreams.

Lachlan's recurring dreams about this moment—the last time he ever sees Gemmy—even as an adult imply that he is burdened by guilt that is never quite resolved. He never knows if Gemmy feels betrayed by his imposed distance or if he understands. Regardless, both seem to understand that change is imminent, and that neither of them can continue with the way things have been going.

CHAPTER 18

Mr. Frazer travels to Brisbane—which he finds disappointingly small and unimpressive—with his finished report to pitch to the Governor of Queensland, Sir George. However, Sir George proves to be useless; initially he is suspicious that the report is somehow a political threat against him by his opponents, and upon realizing that it is merely one botanist's passion project, he quickly loses interest.

Mr. Frazer's unsuccessful attempt to make the government share his vision of a better form of colonialism reflects the fact that, although a better manner of settling Australia may be imagined, the historical reality is that it was done in the same domineering, ruthless, and destructive manner as so many other British colonial operations.

Sir George is a dreamer, but not a doer, placed in charge of creating a "self-governing state" out of the territories of Queensland. He is alternately pleased by the grandeur of such a charge and depressed by the fact that he is spending the last decades of his career so far from respectable society. He writes pestering letters to English politicians each day and makes grand allusions to Greek mythology to give himself a feeling of meaning and purpose.

Sir George operates as a kind of parallel to Lachlan, suggesting what the boy might have become if he was never forced to recognize his own limitations and grow up. Like Lachlan did as a child, Sir George fantasizes about his own grandeur, believing that his life and ambitions must naturally be the center of all that surrounds him.

While Mr. Frazer is speaking with him, Sir George pontificates about his own achievements, which bear no relation to the conversation at hand. Frazer decides, privately, that Sir George "exudes an air of magnificent unreality that includes everything he looks upon." Considering the report, Sir George does see in it some possibility of grandeur several centuries in the future, which reviving his interest and gives him visions of vast orchards and gardens. But in his mind, the dreaming of such a thing is as good as accomplishing it: "To descend to detail would be to miss the wood for the scrubby little trees." Sir George invites Mr. Frazer to have dinner with himself, his wife, and the Premier Mr. Herbert to further discuss the matter, but Frazer suspects that this is not truly a victory.

Again, Sir George parallels the behavior of young Lachlan, boasting of exploits that he may or may not have accomplished and clearly envisioning himself as a great achiever. To see such behavior in a child is understandable; to see it in such a man as Sir George is pathetic. This contrast suggests that coming of age, with all the pain and self-limitation it involves, is nonetheless critical, Otherwise, one may turn out to be an utter fool and useless individual who just gets in the way of the progress of others.

Two days later, Mr. Frazer dines with Sir George, Sir George's wife, and Mr. Herbert. While Sir George believes he deserves greatness—though now fears that he will never see it, through the fault of others but not himself—Mr. Herbert, by contrast, "seems made for success but winces at it." The entire conversation never touches upon Mr. Frazer's report, but instead circles itself and seems to be passively combative, as if Frazer is watching three people "who have been too long shut up together." Trapped by the strange politics at play, Mr. Frazer never speaks of his botanical vision, and neither does Sir George.

Although Mr. Herbert himself seems the opposite of Sir George, he represents the same futility of governments and systems that Sir George embodies, even though he himself seems quite capable. The observation that the governing figures seem as if they have been stuck together for too long is poignant, suggesting that politicians and governors themselves often seem more interested in their petty internal squabbles and tensions than in actually accomplishing anything on behalf of society.

As Mr. Frazer leaves, Sir George gives him such a reproachful look that he presumes he must have failed in some way, though he cannot determine what his role was even supposed to be. The next morning, Frazer receives a note from Mr. Herbert offering Gemmy, whom they had spoken of, a position as a customs officer with a respectable salary in the port of Bowen. Mr. Frazer is confused and disappointed that he has been so misunderstood. His botanist's dream disappears "into a future that appeared increasingly remote."

The overall futility of Mr. Frazer's quest to envision a new, better form of colonialism seems reflective of the fact that although a better could theoretically exist, the sad fact of history is that the colonization of Australia was achieved in the same manner as in so many other Commonwealth territories: through land seizure, violence, and domination.

CHAPTER 19

On the day that Lachlan and Gemmy part ways, Gemmy walks down the road toward the schoolhouse, "going to claim back his life" by retrieving the **pages** George and Mr. Frazer wrote in that afternoon interview so long ago. Gemmy believes that the magic of the writing has "drawn the last of his spirit from him" and the pages are "drawing him to his death."

Gemmy's mission to retrieve the pages symbolically reflects his desire to lay his connection to white society—which has done him such harm in the past and created so many demons in his mind—to rest, even though the magical release and return of his spirit that he hopes for is obviously futile.

Gemmy finds George Abbot alone at the schoolhouse, correcting assignments from his pupils. When George understands that Gemmy wants the **pages** he had helped transcribe about Gemmy's life, George realizes that the pages are with Mr. Frazer, and Mr. Frazer is away in Brisbane to meet the Governor. Instead, George offers Gemmy seven of the worksheets he is grading, one at a time, while Gemmy sniffs the ink on each one of them and seems satisfied. Gemmy rises to leave but seems weak, so George goes to fetch him bread and water. When he returns, Gemmy is gone, having taken the papers with him.

The fact that the pages Gemmy receives are not even the true pages but only students' worksheets increases the ironic tragedy of the scene and reiterates the futility of Gemmy's hope. However, though the writing on the worksheets has no magical quality, the psychological effect upon Gemmy and symbolic effect in the narrative are the same: Gemmy is taking his connection to white society into his hands so that he can destroy it once and for all.

George reflects that his reaction to Gemmy now is entirely different than his reaction had been on the day he bitterly helped Mr. Frazer take down Gemmy's life history. Then, he had believed suffering would inevitably lead to greatness. Now Gemmy, who once seemed such a pathetic specimen, contradicts that notion. George suspects his initial revulsion stemmed in part from the fear that he saw too much of himself in Gemmy, a "naked essential humanity." Now, he realizes, Gemmy possesses a "naked endurance," an ability to survive and persevere through abuse from one continent to another. This gives Gemmy, even when he seems "dumb and ox-like, a kind of grandeur that went painfully to the heart." George leaves the schoolhouse to follow Gemmy, hoping to see him safely home.

Just as Gemmy's very existence denies any categorical separation between white and black people, his character also contradics George's prior belief that suffering will harden one's soul and imbue him with greatness, at least in the manner George had initially expected. In his ability to endure such long and arduous suffering, Gemmy's very existence speaks to a different sort of grandeur, one which comes not from being recognized for grand accomplishments or dominating others, but for simply surviving such abuse for so long and not returning becoming violent in return. For such a high-minded fellow as George, recognition of Gemmy's grandeur implies a radical shift in his thinking.


Gemmy leaves the schoolhouse with the **pages** in his pocket, feeling free for the first time and thinking that he can go anywhere. His life in the settlement is over, but it will give way to a new life, just as a brushfire encourages new seeds to open and sprout. As Gemmy walks into the bush, rain begins to pour. He pulls the rain-soaked pages out of his pocket, and as he walks they dissolve in his hands, black ink flowing into the puddles on the ground.

The fact that, after severing his ties to white society, Gemmy finally feels free reveals what a spiritual burden living amongst white people truly was for Gemmy, with their constant need to dominate or destroy. As the pages dissolve into nothing, so Gemmy's life as a white man dissolves as well, which again shows how meaningless racial categories often are.

CHAPTER 20

Decades later, as an old man, Lachlan Beattie arrives—wearing a three-piece suit and carried by a modern car with a personal driver—at St. Iona's to see Janet, who is now a nun named Sister Monica. The other sisters watch eagerly and suspiciously, knowing that Lachlan and Janet are the subject of a scandal that has not yet resolved. Even so, Janet meets Lachlan, kisses him on the cheek, and walks with him to the garden where they can be alone.

Although the narrative jumps ahead, it effectively shows what both Lachlan and Janet have become, resolving each of their personal journeys toward adulthood and maturity. Janet's position as a nun fits with her frustration with male dominance as a child, since a convent is a society run exclusively by women.


They go to their favorite spot to visit—for Lachlan has been visiting for the past five weeks—which is a small, bare terrace with a bench to sit on. Janet gives him an apple, which he cuts with a knife in the same manner that Jock once did. She notes that his hands are scabbed, like hers and her father's, since they have "the wrong skin for this country."

The idea of "the wrong skin for this country" suggests that Janet now recognizes that the colonists, who have largely displaced the Aboriginal Australians, are ill-suited to living in such an environment. This observation perhaps suggests that they never should have come.

Prior to the previous month, they had not spoken for many years, with Janet consumed by her work as a nun and dedicated apiarist, and Lachlan by his work as a politician and Minister. Janet finally reaches out to him in hopes that he can help her regain contact with an associate, a German Catholic priest who is threatened by the war and the public's anti-German sentiment. Lachlan treasures the letter for the glimpse of her it gives him and uses his political authority to fulfill her request. He also writes a letter in return to congratulate her on her accomplishments and ask if he might come visit, especially now after the death of his wife. Janet is touched by the "courtesy" and "tenderness" of his letter, though she fails to reply for an entire year, until one morning she finds both their names in the local paper amidst a storm of public anger.

The tenderness of Lachlan's letter suggests that he has truly and fully grown up as a man. As a youth, Lachlan was domineering and arrogant, and he assumed that he should naturally have his way over Janet because he was a man. His new tenderness implies that, even though he is successful in his career, he is much humbler and less demanding than he once was and is now able to respect the feelings of others. Such a change in demeanor is evidence that the painful process of growth that began with Gemmy's arrival reached its fruition during Lachlan's adulthood.

The public scandal arises when a German baker is harassed and then arrested on the grounds of his ethnicity, and he and his family are threatened with deportation and their assets are seized. Lachlan is among those who defend the man against fierce public sentiment, and in response his home is broken into and several documents are seized and made public. Among these documents is the damning letter from Janet, which seems pro-German and provides an embarrassing example of a government official misusing his power to grant a personal favor. Although Janet's fellow nuns do not take the scandal seriously, parents stop sending their children to the convent for music or beekeeping lessons or to while away their afternoons. Someone throws a stone wrapped in the Union Jack through one of the convent's windows.

The racial animosity towards the German baker—presumably stemming from the actions of Germany during World War I—mirrors the senseless racial animosity leveled against Gemmy due to his association with the Aboriginal Australians. Particularly for Janet and Lachlan, who have seen the same racism and the destruction it can cause, the parallels to their own childhood suggest that sadly, such racism and xenophobia are far-reaching and enduring. The novel suggests there that human beings have a constant urge to take out their anger and fear on those who are different from themselves, or those who somehow represent a threat in their own minds.

The first time they meet after the scandal, Janet is apologetic but Lachlan will hear none of it, telling her that he does not place any of the blame upon her shoulders. The other politicians simply want him out, and though he will fight them for as long as he can, they will inevitably have their way. Janet shows Lachlan her beehives, where she still investigates "the great secret" that has consumed her life since Mrs. Hutchence taught her to keep bees: discovering how the bees communicate within the hive. Lachlan tells her of his son Willie, who was killed in the war in France ten months before, with the same pen-knife and an apple with a single slice cut out found in his pocket after the body was retrieved. Janet imagines along with him that when Lachlan's son died, he may still have had the wedge of apple in his mouth.

Once again, Lachlan displays his growth and maturity by his gentleness towards Janet and the graciousness with which he accepts his hardships. Where a much younger Lachlan might have raged at the injustice of the situation, Lachlan as a mature adult accepts his own responsibility in the matter and does not simply surrender, but rather accepts that his career will end and recognizes his own limitations in the matter. Janet's continued beekeeping and investigation into bees' communication reveals that she, too, has kept on her journey of growth and successfully found a pursuit in which she is not constrained by being a woman.

The intimacy between them makes Janet think of love, though she cannot bring herself to speak it, and when she takes Lachlan's hand he seems startled, so she quickly releases it. Even so, it seems they have recovered some of the distance between the present and the day that they, along with Meg, first spotted Gemmy balancing himself upon the **fence**. Janet reflects that in that first moment, she knew all she would ever know of Gemmy: that he was "someone we loved." Lachlan looks at Janet with red-rimmed eyes, thinking about the boy who'd aimed his make-believe rifle at Gemmy's heart, intending to bring him down.

Since the fence symbolizes the divide between the world of the Aboriginal Australians and the world of the white settlers, it is significant that Janet declares that she loved Gemmy in the moment he still teetered upon the fence. That is, the McIvors loved Gemmy not because he chose to be white—as the settlers demanded—but simply because he was there. Such unconditional love in the first moment contrasts greatly with Lachlan's first impulse, which was to dominate Gemmy by "shooting" him down, which his red-rimmed eyes suggest he now regrets.

Janet knows how the story ends. Nine years after Gemmy leaves the settlement, Lachlan is working on a government surveying crew, clearing track for a highway to be installed. Whenever the crew meets a group of indigenous Australians, Lachlan asks if they have heard of Gemmy, until he meets a young woman who tells him Gemmy was killed in a "dispersal" of natives six years before—"too slight an affair to be called a massacre." The young woman leads Lachlan to where the bones of the dead were laid, bundled in bark is as the custom, and Lachlan inspects them until he finds one set with a distinctive jaw and enlarged joints. Although he does not know if these are Gemmy's bones, he chooses to believe they are so that he may close the wound upon his conscience, "which might otherwise have gone on bleeding forever."

Lachlan's guilt confirms that he regrets his treatment of Gemmy and the way that he treated Gemmy first as a badge of power and later as an annoying tag-along. Tragically, there seem to be no true resolution for Gemmy himself. Despite his "naked endurance" and ability to survive, he was still ostensibly killed by white men. Within the frame of the narrative, although Gemmy has his own motivations, he functions more as a catalyst for change and growth in other characters, especially Jock and Lachlan, who seem to reach more resolution in their own character arcs than Gemmy ever does.

That was fifty years before, when Australia was "another country" than it is today. After Lachlan leaves, Janet sits alone in her room, staring through the glass window, and reflects on all of the events in her life that have led her to this. She thinks of of Jock and Ellen and Meg and Lachlan, but most of all of Gemmy and of her family's unconscious "need to draw him into their lives." She can see him balanced on the **fence** and thinks once more of love, love for all things that live in Australia.

Speaking of their unconscious need to draw Gemmy in, the narrative suggests in its closing that the McIvors somehow sensed that Gemmy would be such a catalyst for change, someone to love and who would love them but also teach them in turn to love all that surrounds them. This seems particularly true for Lachlan and Jock, consumed as they once were by their concerns of power and authority. The final mention of all things that live in Australia also reinforces the idea that the divisions the settlers imagine, whether between different races or different pieces of property, are ultimately meaningless.

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