Purely technical things to conclude: Keneally has done his homework on Australian anthropology. The mood, the attitudes are right. But I know of nowhere where Australian aborigines erected "molars of rock eight feet tall." Such things can jar.

The printer stuffed up on page 49 – got lines out of order, and I suspect, left something out. The error is transcribed from the Angus & Robertson edition of 1972. Almost anywhere else it wouldn't matter. But poor insipid Gilda, and the awful consequences of the weakness of her flesh, call for more precision at this point.

The cover is brilliant. Most paperbacks sport clever mindless little designs, intended to induce a psycho-motor picking-up reaction. Jack Newnham's cover evokes the content of this novel powerfully. On finishing, you can turn back to the cover and derive satisfaction from it as an integral part of what has been experienced. And something powerful has been experienced.

PETER BELL

THOMAS KENEALLY : A DUTIFUL DAUGHTER, Angus and Robertson, 1971, 183 pp., $3.95.

A Dutiful Daughter, although not the latest of Keneally's novels, has not been exhaustively reviewed. Most of the reviews have, to date, assessed it by comparing it with Keneally's previous works. This review assesses A Dutiful Daughter as a novel whose success or failure depends only on the extent to which all its aspects meet the demands imposed upon them by the distinctive central plot.

The novel revolves around the night of Barbara Glover's first realization of her puberty, her bewilderment, her fears, and her needs which spontaneously arise with this realization. Her parents fail, through their own weakness of character, to meet her fears and fulfil her emotional needs, and demonstrate their inability to cope with their children's change into adulthood. Keneally then immediately deprives the adults of their own human adult responsibilities and privileges, making their lower trunk take the form of the hind-quarters of a bull and cow.

The assumption of such centaur-like qualities and roles automatically suggests that the story is a fable. However, there are within the novel elements of realism which detract from its being completely mythical. Nevertheless the response made by Barbara and her brother Damian to the parents' transformation accepts the phenomenon as real even though unexplained.

However, this realism is not sufficiently pervasive to evoke a strong sense of reality in the novel. Thus the entire atmosphere of the novel is one of uncertainty and vagueness: of a hovering between myth and suggestions of realism, because the characters are forced into the acceptance of the inexplicable.

Yet in spite of this vagueness, one's immediate impressions when reading the novel are of an absolute intensity – an intensity induced by the horrors of physicality and anything connected with physical relationships. The source of this is, naturally, in Mr and Mrs Glover's own revolting transformation into half-beast creatures; but as if this in itself were not enough, Mrs Glover contracts an animal disease, the horrors of which are suggested through nauseating detail – for example,

> "A shiver ran down her sad red flanks, you could see purple knottings in her udders and the course of the violet veins that ran, noticeably distended, as far as the front legs. She moved with the back legs ludicrously propped apart. You might consider shooting a mere cow that had to move like that." 1

Nothing which is physical can have any beauty. All which is physical is associated with violence. Sex is portrayed as a base physical act, an expression of nothing apart from violent physical desire. Mr Glover's meeting with the heifer cows is a revolting thing, yet it is partly justified in terms of his sheer physical "desire fulfilled". He does feel guilt for his sexual behaviour, however, to result automatically in violence and brutality. This accounts for his drowning of the heifer trapped in the swamp, after his sexual intercourse with her. He brutally attacks a newborn freak calf, apparently fearing that it may have been his own offspring.

Barbara's sexual relations with firstly her brother Damian and with Frederic are placed on the same level as her father's sexual intercourse with the heifers. Especially in her act with Frederic, fulfilment and satisfaction are seen solely in terms of their physical relevance, making the human act of sex merely an act of the basest of human desires – no "higher", different from, or more beautiful than animal play. Keneally presents the act as brutal in its harshness, in its portrayal merely of the conqueror and the conquered. This complete divorce of a grotesque physicality from anything pertaining to spirituality is the consequence of the horrible ugliness which Keneally's imagination has initially created in the half-man, half-beast figures.

The novel achieves much of its intensity from such "real" events which take place; but still more of this intensity is communicated by the author's own style. There is indisputable power in Keneally's imagery and symbolism arising from his skilful manipulation and combination of simple but hard-hitting words. For example,

> "Now it was appropriate for her, her rare chance to break open, jabber, sweat, scream. A glimpse of his thighs brought her to a completely simple and unmixed will to founder on them". 2

The intensity brought about by his continual economy of words to convey so much is unmistakably linked with the touches of realism which prevent the novel from being merely a fable. The novel loses its intensity in side-tracks such as Barbara's tales of, and identification with, Joan of Arc, and thereby it loses something of the reality which only Keneally writing through the third person, can give it.

There is little of the real outside world which penetrates into the Glover's isolated household at Campbell's Reach. When snippets and glimpses of the real world are introduced into the novel, they are made to seem out of place – out of context. It is the author's conscious manipulation of words which gives this effect; for example,

> "Already you felt the burden, however, of his hope and half-conviction that your academic life was hearty, both full-blooded and stylized, at a pitch somewhere between The Student Prince and A Yank at Oxford." 3

The realism of the novel is most striking when the author allows his words to be his means of expression, rather than individual pieces of grammar to be manipulated for effect. For example, it is only when the reader can see Barbara through the eyes of an outside admirer, and learn something of his feelings for her, that her person becomes a fully "real" nature, and she is the independent person from the confines of the physical world. It is Damian's words to her (about Frederic):

> "No, he's crazed. You're his dream. You're Heaven. Honestly. The guts of creation. You're it." 4

Reality, moreover, is seen not in tangible things but in intangible things such as relationships and feelings which go beyond the physical world with which Keneally is both obsessed and disgusted. In this way, the novel very adequately meets the demands which the initial vulgarity and horror of the purely physical realm create in Mr and Mrs Glover. The physical world does, in the remainder of the book, show itself incapable of redeeming itself from its baseness. The grotesqueness of the physical world is demonstrated through contrast with realities which only the non-physical world can give.

In spite of the intensity of style, and in spite of this conflict between the physical and the non-physical world, the reader's immediate impression after reading the book is that there is some inadequacy. The violence which is the novel, is not matched by a convincing or satisfying finale. It is inadequate because of its futile failure to come to any conclusions. The end of the novel merely presents Barbara and her parents trying pitifully to gain freedom through death, and trying to justify themselves in doing so. Damian is seen "in the awful tower of his freedom", and merely shows his incapacity to be complete in himself and to handle this new-found freedom, and the discovery that he is no longer able to rely on Barbara for his basic needs – were they physical or spiritual?

Certainly, the novel is brilliant in its imagery and style. In this way, it adequately meets the demands made on it by its peculiar central plot. But such a plot becomes merely a vehicle for the author's own mind-probe; it does not solve any of the grotesque problems presented by its initial nature. Under this criterion of sufficiently meeting its own demands, then, the novel has failed.

Footnotes

1. Thomas Keneally, A Dutiful Daughter, Penguin Books, 1972. p. 51.
2. Ibid, p. 132.
3. Ibid, p. 52.
4. Ibid, p. 86.

RHONDDA EVANS