



The Great Shame: And the Triumph of the Irish in the English-Speaking World

Thomas Keneally

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"Thomas Keneally recounts history with the uncanny skill of a great novelist whose only interest is to lay bare the human heart in all its hope and pain. As he was able to do in **Schindler's List**, he shows us in **The Great Shame** a people despised and rejected to the point of death, who in the face of all their sorrows manage to keep their souls. This story of oppression, famine, and emigration--a principal chapter in the story of man's inhumanity to man--becomes in Keneally's hands an act of resurrection; Irishmen and Irishwomen of a century and a half ago live once more within the pages of this book."

--Thomas Cahill, author of **How the Irish Saved Civilization**

In the nineteenth century, Ireland lost half of its population to famine, emigration to the United States and Canada, and the forced transportation of convicts to Australia. The forebears of Thomas Keneally, author of **Schindler's List**, were victims of that tragedy, and in **The Great Shame** Keneally has written an astonishing, monumental work that tells the full story of the Irish diaspora with the narrative grip and flair of a great novel. Based on unique research among little-known sources, this masterly book surveys eighty years of Irish history through the eyes of political prisoners--including Keneally's ancestors--who left Ireland in chains and eventually found glory, in one form or another, in Australia and America.

We meet William Smith O'Brien, leader of an uprising at the height of the Irish Famine, who rose from solitary confinement in Australia to become the Mandela of his age; Thomas Francis Meagher, whose escape from Australian captivity led to a glittering American career as an orator, a Union general, and governor of Montana; John Mitchel, who became a Confederate newspaper reporter, gave two of his sons to the Southern cause, was imprisoned with Jefferson Davis--and returned to Ireland to become mayor of Tipperary; and John Boyle O'Reilly, who fled a life sentence in Australia to become one of nineteenth-century America's leading literary lights.

Through the lives of many such men and women--famous and obscure, some heroes and some fools (most a little of both), all of them stubborn, acutely sensitive, and devastatingly charming--we become immersed in the Irish experience and its astonishing history. From Ireland to Canada and the United States to the bush towns of Australia, we are plunged into stories of tragedy, survival, and triumph. All are vividly portrayed in Keneally's spellbinding prose, as he reveals the enormous influence the exiled Irish have had on the English-speaking world.

"A terrible and personal saga, history delivered with a scholar's density of detail but with the individualizing power of a multi-talented novelist."

--William Kennedy

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