

The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith Study Guide

The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith by Thomas Keneally

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Plot Summary

The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith, by Thomas Keneally, tells the story of Jimmie Blacksmith, a man of mixed race, who goes on a killing spree in Australia in 1900. Keneally traces Jimmie's life, showing how he faced discrimination and oppression based solely on his race and how this eventually boiled over into an uncontrollable wrath. Taken from a fragment of Australian history, Keneally weaves together a fictional account of Jimmie Blacksmith's actions and his subsequent fugitive journey.

Jimmie is initiated into the Mungindi tribe, but he grows disillusioned and travels with Rev. and Mrs. Neville as they move to a new town. They encourage him to aim for a higher social status. They tell him that he should work to earn money for land and that he should marry a white girl from a farm. Driven by his ambitions and pride, he seeks work but finds that the white world wants little to do with him. His employers, including the police, treat him with contempt and distrust. They cheat him out of hard earned pay and Jimmie has little recourse but to accept it.

Meanwhile, Jimmie engages in a sexual relationship with a white kitchen maid named Gilda. When she becomes pregnant, they make plans to marry and find housing. Jimmie goes to work for the Newby family doing fencing and then sends for Gilda. When her baby is born, he realizes that the child is not his.

Several of Jimmie's relatives, Tabidgi Jackie Smolders, Mort, and Peter, arrive to bring him his initiation tooth from the tribe, which they believe will offer him protection from his white marriage. However, Mr. Newby seeks to drive off Jimmie's relatives, refusing to advance Jimmie money for food for his family. Goaded by Mr. Newby's arrogance and harshness, Jimmie reacts with revenge, killing Mr. Newby's wife, daughters, and a schoolteacher, Miss Graf. Thereafter, Jimmie and his family flee. Eventually Gilda, her baby, Peter, and Tabidgi are left behind, and Jimmie and Mort continue on.

In further retribution, Jimmie then enacts revenge on the Healy family, who he also worked for and was cheated by. He and Mort are almost caught on several occasions but manage to evade their pursuers, who include Miss Graf's fiancé, Dowie Stead. They take a schoolteacher hostage and force him to continue on with them. The schoolteacher, McCreadie, manages to convince Jimmie that he should go on without them as he is damaging Mort's native soul. Mort, who carries McCreadie to a farmer's house and sets him free, is later killed. Still on the run, Jimmie is shot trying to cross a river. He eventually takes refuge in a convent, where he hides in the guest room, coming out only when the nuns go to pray, but he is eventually captured and sentenced to death. As the novel ends, Tabidgi is hanged and Jimmie is awaiting the same fate.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

During the summer of 1900, Tabidgi, or Jackie Smolders as he is known to the white world, learns that his maternal nephew, Jimmie Blacksmith, has married a white girl. Jimmie is a "half-breed," a result of some white man's visit to the Brentwood blacks' camp. In an effort to protect Jimmie from his white marriage, Jackie sets out with Jimmie's initiation tooth, obtained during a ritual in which it was knocked out of his mouth by Mungindi elders when he was thirteen.

It is explained that as part of Jimmie's initiation in 1891, he'd been taken away from the camp. His mother had presumed him dead at the time, thinking that a great Lizard had swallowed him and would later give birth to a complete Mungindi man. Jimmie was gone for several weeks and during that time, the mission station superintendent, Rev. Neville kept asking where he was.

Ten days after Easter, Jimmie reappeared. When Rev. Neville asked him where he had been, Jimmie replied that he'd been catching possums.

Chapter 1 Analysis

In the opening chapter of *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, Keneally sets the stage for the events of the chapters to come. We learn that Jimmie, a half-black, has married a white girl and that his uncle is concerned about this, believing that it may harm Jimmie.

We are told of Jimmie's initiation into the Mungindi tribe and that he is an aborigine at a time when race tensions are high. We also observe how some whites (Rev. and Mrs. Neville) think that if Jimmie becomes "whiter" then he will become more socially acceptable and able to obtain a better life. The subsequent chapters prove just how wrong they were in their thinking.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Over the next three years after his initiation, Jimmie comes to question both his initiation and his tribal manhood. In 1894, Rev. Neville is given charge of the Methodist church in Muswellbrook and he asks if Jimmie would like to join he and his wife as a sort of servant or houseboy. Thinking that this might improve his status in life, Jimmie goes with them. Once there, he also comes to believe, with the convincing of the Nevilles, that it would be better to have children who are scarcely black and that he should try to marry a nice white girl from a farm.

In Muswellbrook one day, Jimmie is en route to the butchers for Mrs. Neville when he sees a kinsman, Wongee Tom Carstairs. Jimmie asks him if there are other kinsmen around but Wongee Tom says no. They watch a mother and three girls who pass by without glancing at them. Jimmie falls in love with the oldest girl on sight. In keeping with his aspirations, Jimmie tells Wongee Tom that he wants to get a job in the open-cut, digging coal.

Wongee Tom invites Jimmie out that weekend. "The Saturday night was a visit to hell. All creeping through fences, tripping on tussocks, passing money to white boys, who, on the whole, were honest and brought back sherry" (pg. 12). Things do not end well when Jimmie is arrested and Rev. Neville comes for him.

After this, Jimmie comes to understand that owning property is the key to bettering his life. He tells the Nevilles that he is going to leave and find a job so that he can eventually own property. He has trouble finding work but finally gets a contract from an Irish farmer to make a forest fence.

Jimmie goes to the Department of Agriculture office in Muswellbrook to get a leaflet on wood that should be used in fencing. Behind the counter, two white clerks argue with each other about Australian federation and black-white relations. Jimmie leaves with his leaflet.

It is hard work digging the holes. Jimmie has to spear the soil again and again to loosen it. He sleeps in the Healy's hayshed and receives two meals a day. After a week, he has built a hundred yards of fence. Healy stops to inspect it and says it isn't so bad.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Although Rev. and Mrs. Neville mean well, they encourage Jimmie to engage in pursuits that will eventually lead to his demise. Rather than encouraging him to develop his talents or to live a life that is satisfying to him, they drill into him that the only way to be successful and happy is to marry a white girl and own land. They see these things as salvation for Jimmie's blackness and his tribal heritage.

We also see in this chapter the discrimination and racism that Jimmie faces as he tries to accomplish these goals. Because of his race, he is distrusted and vulnerable. He has trouble finding work because of his race and even when he does, he is met with distrust.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

One night, Jimmie goes to a party in Verona. The next morning he returns to the Healy's home and sees Mr. Healy talking with another man. They are dressed for church and Mrs. Healy is waiting for the two men to finish their conversation. He thinks that it would be nice if Mrs. Healy strayed with him once he became a recognizable man and a property owner. "What he had done, without understanding it, was to elect her to the stature of ideal landowner's-wife...In a second she had become a symbol, a state of blessedness, far more than a woman. It could almost be said that he did not choose her as a woman at all, rather as an archetype" (pg. 21).

When Jimmie finishes the fence early, he is surprised to find that Healy has taken offense to this. Healy gives him less money than he had agreed on, saying that some of the posts are three inches out. Jimmie tries to argue that they are placed correctly, but realizes that if he continues to push the subject there will be havoc. Healy also will not give Jimmie a reference for future work and tells him that he wants Jimmie off of his property by the next morning. When Jimmie responds that Healy can't give him a reference because he can't write, Healy hits Jimmie.

The next day, Jimmie is traveling west when the Healys pass him, their eyes averted.

Chapter 3 Analysis

We see in this chapter Jimmie's ambitions. He sees in Mrs. Healy what he strives for: land, money, status, and a white wife. Although Mrs. Healy doesn't encourage Jimmie's idolization of her, it is this idolization that will ultimately lead to her death. Unlike some of the women in later chapters, her actions and thoughts are largely unknown to us, but she is an icon of status to Jimmie.

Jimmie also faces discrimination as Healy refuses to pay him the agreed upon amount of money for his work. Healy knows that Jimmie can't really do much about this as no one is going to listen to Jimmie's complaint or do anything about it. Healy's status as a white gives him a great deal of protection against Jimmie.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Jimmie takes other work up and down the valley. Word reaches Brentwood that he is making sums of money, and the members of his totem begin to associate tasks like fencing with sums of money.

One evening Jimmie is awoken by someone from Verona who tells him that Harry Edwards has killed a white man and that he is needed to help bury the man. The men take a blanket and carry the dead man from the house in it. They manage to dig a hole about two feet deep, and they bury the man in it. This is the second to the last time that Jimmie goes to Verona.

Jimmie works for a Scot, Claude Lewis. Lewis mistrusts Jimmie's half brother, Morton, who has come to visit. Mort often doubles up with laughter. Lewis finds fault in whatever he can of Jimmie's work and threatens that his wages will be cut. One morning, Jimmie and Mort simply walk away.

They get casual work, and Mort gains a reputation as a horse-breaker. In the fall of 1899, the two brothers go home to Brentwood. Tabidgi Jackie Smolders waits for them at their mother's house to receive his maternal uncle's share of their goods and money. Jimmie does not want to give up the money that he's made but eventually relinquishes some of it to the waiting tribesmen.

He stays for only two days. His mother has remarried, and he cannot seem to find rest there.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The incident in Verona is recalled in a later chapter. In this chapter, Jimmie helps bury a white man who has been killed in the blacks' camp. He will later return to this murder, helping the white police find the killer and grave.

The chapter again documents the discrimination and vulnerability that Jimmie endures as he tries to work for the money to buy land. Yet, we also see that Jimmie's ambitions are thwarted not only by whites but also by his own kin, who want their share of his money for alcohol. His ambitions are not the same as their ambitions and traditions.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Jimmie leaves Brentwood early and takes an unexpected direction to the west. He has only his essentials for fencing with him. He meets a mounted trooper who asks if Jimmie can track. Jimmie says yes and tracks a rabbit for him. The officer, Farrell, tells Jimmie that he has been told to find a tracker and that if Jimmie wants the job, it's his. Jimmie thinks it will be good to work for the police and that he'll be fortified against his kinsmen there. Jimmie realizes his mistake when they give him a uniform that doesn't fit properly. He finds that with them he is more a black than his kinsmen. There is little tracking to do, but Jimmie is expected to go with the constable whenever he has to arrest a black person.

The postmaster's son appears one day and says that a boy named Jack Fisher had disappeared a year ago. They'd been drinking earlier in the evening, and Jack said he meant to ride into Verona to sleep with one of the black women. He hadn't come forward before because he didn't want to hurt Jack Fisher's father who is now dead.

As a result, Jimmie goes with Farrell to Verona. He is in a vindictive state of mind, wanting to punish the Verona people for their vulnerability. He could have told Farrell who was responsible or where the grave was, but he chooses not to. Finally, he tells Farrell that one of the men told him it was Harry Edwards who killed the man. Farrell finds him, and they find someone willing to take them to the first grave. From there, Jimmie tracks where they've moved the body and feels justified.

Farrell is happy with Jimmie when they return to the station, saying how he likes blacks who show talent and how blacks and whites could work together. However, he gives Jimmie only a small portion of the reward. Farrell begins to drink in his office. Jimmie is afraid that Farrell will hurt Harry Edwards, but he leaves anyway.

The next morning, he makes Farrell's tea and brings it to him in the office. Farrell is asleep. Jimmie finds Harry Edwards hanging from the roof of his cell. Farrell tells him that Harry hung himself with his belt and that he's going to see the magistrate, but Farrell orders Jimmie to take the corpse down. Jimmie does so and finds that the belt is Farrell's. He lays it on Farrell's blotter to show his contempt. He burns the uniform that they gave him and puts on his old clothes. He has walked ten miles by noon.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Jimmie joins the police as a tracker thinking that this will help give him the status that he desires. Yet, he finds that by doing so, he becomes even more black, rather than more white. But at the same time, Jimmie is also at his "whitest" in this chapter as he helps Farrell go after the people in Verona. He clearly sides with the police over the people,

wanting to dish out violence and punishment to them, even though he was involved in the situation.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

The next November, Jimmie is working as a sweeper on a shearing floor and helping the cook at the Hayes's. One day he sees the cook hypnotize the kitchen maid, a small woman with a narrow face and lank hair. During the whole season, Jimmie works for the shearing contractor. As it's ending, he is sweeping the floor on a station forty miles from the Hayes's.

A week before, Mrs. Hayes and the maid, Gilda, had come to visit the station owner's wife. Jimmie had found the maid and the cook talking again, but the maid sought out Jimmie and they made an arrangement to meet. The contractor tries to pay Jimmie less than what he'd earned, but Jimmie tells him that he is marrying a white girl and that she is pregnant. Jimmie had seen Gilda as a chance of white marriage soon after he met her. He thinks that Gilda is stupid. The plan now is that Jimmie will find them a place to stay and then Gilda will leave the Hayes's to join him.

A month later, Jimmie is fencing for a man named Newby. He cuts wood from the property and makes a one-room house for his bride. Mr. Newby, like his other employers, seems to wait for Jimmie to behave in the character they expect from blacks. Jimmie tries to indicate to him that he won't. When the time comes to get Gilda, Mr. Newby tells Jimmie to take one of his hacks, as she won't be able to walk the whole way.

Jimmie goes to the Methodist church to arrange for their marriage. "He had always presumed that to marry a white raised a person in the community. Now it came to him that if one reject married another, the facts of their individual rejections might be added or even multiplied" (p. 53). The minister's wife assumes that he is trying to earn money by cutting their wood and tells him that they don't need that done. The minister tries to talk him out of marrying Gilda but agrees after Jimmie tells him she is pregnant. Jimmie is almost ready to go when the minister's wife demands that he cut logs and stack them. She tells him that if he stops, she'll go to the police.

Two weeks later, Gilda arrives. Newby gives Jimmie a horse to bring Gilda back on. She clings to Jimmie, but Jimmie finds it difficult to look at her. They go to the church and are married. Once at home, Mrs. Newby visits and tells Gilda to make a list of the things they need and she'll buy it for them in town on Friday. She also tells Gilda that she can have the baby at the main house. Gilda is glad because there is an outside chance that the baby is not Jimmie's, and if it's not, he won't be able to make a big fuss at the Newby's. From that point, every Friday Gilda brings her list to the house and every Saturday she goes to collect what they'd bought. Miss Petra Graf, the schoolmistress, also lives with the Newby's.



When it was time for Gilda to have the baby, Mrs. Newby takes her to the homestead. The birth is normal, and Gilda has a boy. When Jimmie sees the baby, he knows that it is not his but rather the shearing cook's. He tells Mrs. Newby that it isn't his baby

Chapter 6 Analysis

It is in this chapter that Jimmie's dreams begin to fall apart. Although his dreams are of earning money and marrying a white woman who is carrying his child, or so he believes, he still faces the same discrimination and prejudice as before. Newby doesn't treat him with any respect or helpfulness because of these circumstances. Instead, he treats Jimmie the same as Healy and Lewis did. Mrs. Newby and Miss Graf try to get Gilda to leave Jimmie. Jimmie realizes that marrying Gilda didn't raise his social status, but rather brought her down to his level.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Five days later, Tabidgi Jack Smolders arrives with Jimmie's initiation tooth. With him are Mort and a cousin, Peter, who is still a boy. When they see Jimmie, Tabidgi chants and Mort dances. Jimmie tells them that he doesn't have any booze. Tabidgi takes the initiation tooth out and gives it to Jimmie to keep him safe.

Since giving birth, Gilda has been sickly. She fears and hates Tabidgi Jackie Smolders. Jimmie tries to get them to leave and every morning he hopes for their departure. But he can't expel them because he feels unequal over his white marriage and son that isn't his. He works automatically.

One Friday morning, Gilda goes to turn in her weekly order. Mr. Newby tells her that he told Jimmie that he wouldn't give him any more advances on the groceries since Jimmie has turned the place into a blacks' camp. Miss Graf tells Gilda that she and her future husband would employ Gilda at their new property, but Gilda knows that such employ would be tenuous. The women are appalled that Gilda has left the baby in the care of the blacks.

Chapter 7 Analysis

In this chapter, Keneally sets the stage for the killings that will happen in the chapters to come. First, Jimmie's relatives arrive, wanting to protect him from his marriage to Gilda. Their arrival makes Newby even more harsh and unfair, as he wants to drive Jimmie's family away. Newby fears that his homestead is becoming a blacks' camp.

As part of his plan to drive them off, Newby refuses to fill Gilda's grocery list. The women support this and illustrate the prejudice that exists both within the family and society. They express their horror that Gilda would leave her baby with a black and try to convince her that she should go to work for Miss Graf. Yet, Gilda realizes that although she is white, her class status means that Miss Graf still has an upper hand and will offer her no real protection.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

The Blacksmiths have very little food left. When Jimmie comes in at dusk and Gilda tells him about what had happened, Jimmie calls on Jackie Smolders. Tabidgi suggests a magical revenge, but Jimmie thinks that Mr. Newby must feel the bite tonight.

When Jimmie and Jackie visit the Newby's, Mrs. Newby opens the door and tells them that Mr. Newby is at the old farmhouse bagging wheat. She refuses to listen to Jimmie's pleas or demands for food even though he tells her that Mr. Newby owes him for nine hundred yards.

Newby tells Jimmie that he doesn't think he's working as hard since his relatives came and that he looks like he's going to give up the job. Jimmie argues that this isn't so and that Newby already owes him for the work he's done. When Jimmie says that he's got a wife and child to feed, Newby says that Miss Graf has made Gilda a generous offer. Jimmie points the rifle at Newby but doesn't shoot him. Jimmie thinks that Newby is not who he wants to kill. Instead, he wants to kill Miss Graf.

Tabidgi knocks at the door of the main homestead and tells Mrs. Newby that her husband said to give he and Jimmie some flour, but she refuses. Jimmie runs yelping at her and hits her above the shoulder blade. Then he chops Miss Graf between her hip and ribs. He keeps striking and striking though he is aware that Jackie is striking also out of terror. Then, Jimmie cuts off one of the daughter's hands as she comes at him. Another daughter lays half-scalped in her mother's lap.

Jimmie knows that he has become incurable. "Therefore he was to spend the rest of his life in tenuous elation and solid desolation between self-knowledge and delirium" (p. 81). Jimmie takes some of the food in the house, more or less Gilda's shopping list, and takes some ammunition for his and Mrs. Newby's guns. He promises himself that he will march for Queensland.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Jimmie has finally been goaded beyond his limits by the Newbys and by extension, the white world that he tried to fit into. He reacts to Mr. Newby's decision not to get them any more supplies with revenge. Newby's actions are driven by his fear and distrust of the blacks; he is afraid that his homestead will be turned into a blacks' camp. Like Jimmie's other employers, he tries to cheat Jimmie out of the money that he'd already earned while trying to get Jimmie's relatives to leave.

Jimmie's actions are perhaps not altogether surprising. There is little that he can do in the face of discrimination and Newby's unfair actions. Jimmie has accepted his employers' contempt and their cheating him out of the money they'd agreed to pay him

until now. The Newbys in their discussions with Gilda and their actions with Jimmie symbolize the greater white society. Jimmie strikes back against this with violence.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

The Blacksmiths, Tabidgi, Mort, and Peter flee east. Mort and the girl have been told that there had been a battle and that some of the Newbys were hurt. Seven hours after they have started out, Jimmie lets them rest. Jimmie gives Mort his knife and tells him to kill some farmer's sheep, as it would be easier to get fresh meat now than after news has spread.

Gilda tells Jimmie that she really believed the child was his. It frightens him that he wants to forgive her, so he tells her to go to the road and that she and the baby will be rescued. He wants her to tell the police that he has declared war and that he had done all the damage.

In the late afternoon, they are forced to leave a mumbling Jackie Smolders and the boy Peter by a road. The boy is told to say that Jackie Smolders is innocent. Jimmie is happy to have them all gone except for his half-brother, Mort. Jimmie is already finding it hard to believe that he has killed the Newbys. It is almost an alien truth to him. Pursuit is also hard to believe, but already preachers are spreading the news in their services.

Jimmie loves living cleanly in the forest with his brother. Yet, he also knows that he has to tell him about the murder of the women. Mrs. Newby lives for three days and says that the old one did most of her damage. Mr. Newby is tranced from the rum and whisky that people keep bringing him. He thinks that he will sell his place now and go into business in Sydney. By mid-afternoon on Saturday, the first party of police and volunteers ride out. Everyone feels that an arrest is close.

On Monday morning, Dowie Stead, Miss Graf's fiancé, rides up to the Newby homestead with five friends. Dowie is not shattered by her death but pretends to be. He decides to give chase. It does not fully occur to him that he didn't love Miss Graf, but had been awed by her. "It worried him that he was lightened every time he remembered that now he did not have to marry her" (p. 91). A clerk arrives with the news that Jackie Smolders has been found. Dowie rides out independent of the mounted auxiliaries to the police.

In Balmian, a suburb of Sydney, Wallace Hyberry, the public hangman for the State of New South Wales, keeps a butchery. Everyone knows that he is the hangman, but they can't imagine him hanging anyone as hangings have not been public for some time now. Ted Knoller comes into the butchery and tries to engage Mr. Hyberry in conversation about hanging and the murders.



Chapter 9 Analysis

The Blacksmith family flees from the Newby homestead before the killings are discovered. Gilda and the baby are soon left behind, followed by Peter and Tabidgi. Tabidgi seems to have undergone some sort of mental breakdown. The chapter also introduces the reader to several new characters who will play a role in the Blacksmith brothers' demise: Dowie Stead and Wallace Hyberry. Dowie will lead a chase for the brothers, continuing on when others quit because he thinks that it shows the grief that he doesn't feel. Hyberry is also caught up with the fate of the brothers. As the public hangman, it is likely that he will have to hang the brothers if and when they are caught. He appears as a thoughtful, good man whose job just happens to be hanging criminals.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Jimmie and Mort cross to the rainy side of the mountains. Jimmie is still concerned about whether he should tell Mort about killing the women or not. They discover that they are carrying too much food and drop some of it. Jimmie waits for the slump in spirits, which could be expected after Friday night, but it fails to come.

Mort talks of an Irishman, Mullet, that he knows who lives near where they are. They walk nearly twenty-five miles to get to the man's house. When they enter his hut, they tell him that they are in trouble with the police. Jimmie is tempted to stay another night but thinks that the news of the murders may be traveling fast. They move toward the Healy's.

Jimmie realizes when they reach the Healy's that he has traveled there for Mrs. Healy. He tells Mort to run away, but Mort does not. A woman shoots at him but misses. Mort shoots her but is distressed that he has shot a woman. Jimmie goes inside. Mrs. Healy, with a baby in her arms, stands up. She runs to the corner trying to hide. Jimmie shoots her in the throat and she dies. Mort calls to him, but Jimmie is already focused on the child, reloading and firing at the child.

Mort asks if Healy deserved this, telling him that it's woman and child blood. The woman who they first saw tries to crawl away, continuing past the woodheap. Mort lays his head down on the table. Healy rides up and the woman tells him what has happened. He comes at them with his rifle. Mort staggers out and when Healy shoots, he misses Mort. As he tries to reload, Jimmie steps out and shoots Healy through the heart.

Jimmie promises Mort that he won't kill any more women. They leave, but they feel exposed, thinking that the people after them would be forewarned. Then, they come close to Verona where they see mounted police camping there. They go west, finding an empty house to take supplies from. The household things restore Mort.

Dowie Stead and his friends arrive at the Healy's only a day after Jimmie and Mort. They talk about the war in South Africa and the relations between blacks and whites. Mr. Neville tells his wife that if he could, he'd go after Jimmie unarmed. He knows what sickness Jimmie is suffering from.

In Sydney, Ted Knoller waits for Mr. Hyberry to get to him. Mr. Hyberry tells him that he would never hang a woman. Hyberry generally went to the jail the day before the hanging, surveying the man to be hung. The gallows were inspected, and Mr. Hyberry set up and adjusted the rope. Then he'd go home and would be called at dawn the next morning. He'd go to the prison and look over his preparations. The two warders would bring the man to him, and he'd arrange the noose. Three seconds later, he'd trip the lever.



Chapter 10 Analysis

When Jimmie began working, Mrs. Healy became a symbol of an ideal landowner's wife, the type of woman that he could only aspire to in his status as a half-black. She took on a stature of more than a woman to him. She stood for what he wanted: land, money, status, and recognition. It is perhaps not surprising, given this, that Jimmie seeks her out for more killings. Striking back at society brings him to strike back at the woman who epitomized the society that didn't want him and treated him unfairly.

We also see Mort's horror over how Jimmie killed women. Somehow killing a man is different for Mort and for the great society. Killing a woman crosses a boundary that killing a man did not. Jimmie has violated sacred tenets by killing women.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Twelve days after the Healy's, Jimmie and Mort are still in the forest. Mort speaks of visiting women. They find Pilbarra camp one night, where Mort knows a woman named Nancy. She sends her children away, and Mort sleeps with her. Meanwhile, a small force, headed by Farrell, has met Dowie's party. When Nancy goes outside at eleven to call her children back, she sees a bonfire where the police are guarding all the men in the camp. Jimmie and Mort take their rifles and slip out towards the fringe of the camp. Someone glimpses them, stepping in front of them. Mort shoots him in the stomach. They sprint east, with bullets firing randomly after them. After a mile, they hide their rifles and climb into a tree. Both men are bare-feet as their shoes, along with their food and blankets, are back at Nancy's. Some men pass below them. Jimmie and Mort climb down later and move on.

The next morning when Jimmie returns to where he and Mort slept, he finds Mort has painted his face white to aid the killing of the men. Jimmie finally tells Mort that he killed the Newby women and not the men. Jimmie doesn't want to be seen as a woman killer. He sets off at a jog and Mort follows. They make false tracks and ride on some cows to hide their tracks.

By midday, Jimmie and Mort come to some water. At three, they come to a little home in a clearing. They circle the house, and an old man comes out. The brothers go forward. The man asks if they are the Blacksmith brothers, and they say yes. Mort tells him that they are not killing anymore women. Jimmie asks for some food and blankets. The man's wife, who is sick, says they need the blankets. Jimmie takes a shawl and a loose blanket, along with some food.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Jimmie and Mort are almost caught. They have stopped by the house of a woman that Mort knows. While they are there, the pursuing parties catch up with them. They gather up the men in the blacks' camp and get ready to capture the brothers. When the brothers realize what is happening, they try to sneak off. One of Dowie's party sees them and Mort has to shoot him. They are able to avoid capture.

The brothers also continue on their path of raiding houses. Trying to stay ahead of news that will make people ready for them, they are able to surprise individuals and gain food and other supplies. This helps keep them alive, but it also provides a path for their pursuers to follow.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

In Dubbo, Gilda is released from custody. Two Sisters of Mercy take her and the baby away.

After Toban's funeral, some of Dowie's party goes home, thinking that the Blacksmiths cannot be found. In October, Jimmie and Mort cross the Divide and come down to the western slopes. They travel at night. They come on a hut whose owner has left for town. The brothers spend the day there, and Jimmie finds some newspapers, which talk of Toban's death and how Jackie Smolders has been sentenced to death. He reads about Gilda's testimony and begins to compose a message to her and the child to leave in the hut, but he ultimately decides not to leave the letters. He also reads about a bill created in response to the brothers that increases the penalties for harboring fugitives and gives people the right to shoot him and Mort on sight.

A constable spots Jimmie and Mort as they turn back to the mountains, and they are chased by a group of citizens. Jimmie and Mort find that Friday is the best day to loot houses, for the country people go into town that day. They find an empty selector's house and here, Jimmie writes to Dulcie, Jackie, Gilda, and the child.

Dowie is more indecisive than ever. He has forgotten his relief over Miss Graf's death, and the slaughters have become remote in his mind. Dud Edmonds has begun to suggest that they should all return to normal lives. But Dowie thinks that he has become a figure of sentiment that must be maintained. They speculate about where the brothers might have gone. Dud says that he knows that Dowie is relieved not to have married Miss Graf. Dowie is shamed and he begins to weep, not for Miss Graf but for not having wept for her in the first place.

One day, Jimmie and Mort come across a schoolhouse. Children are on their way out, heading home for the day. The teacher comes out and begins to chop wood. Jimmie and Mort approach him, and the man says he knows who they are. Jimmie tries to shoot him, but the bullet goes wide. His wife screams from their house next to the school. The man, McCreadie, talks them out of killing him and his wife. He shows them a cartoon depicting the brothers outsmarting the police.

Jimmie remembers the article about how Jackie Smolders wouldn't be hung until the brothers were caught. He thinks that if they have a hostage, they might be able to exchange that person for Jackie. He decides to take McCreadie, even though the schoolteacher argues that he is sick and won't be able to keep up. Jimmie quickly becomes disenchanted with his hostage, but Mort takes to him. Jimmie thinks about shooting McCreadie, but knows that the bullet won't hurt him on the plane that Jimmie wants it to.



Mr. Hyberry is also scrutinized outside his butcher's shop. The Master of his Balmain lodge is a State Member of Parliament. The man tells him that the Premier has put his name down for a M.B.E. on an early list of nominations for royal honors. He tells Mr. Hyberry that he can't get the honor until the Blacksmiths are caught and hung. Mr. Hyberry wants a royal honor and thinks that it is his due.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Dowie's indecision continues. He feels guilty because he doesn't feel overtaken with grief. He continues on with the search even though many in his group leave to go back to their families. Feeling relieved that Miss Graf died torments him.

When the two brothers come across a school and a schoolteacher, Jimmie decides that they need to take the man with them as a hostage. He has the idea that he can trade the man for Tabidgi who has been sentenced to death. McCreadie, the schoolteacher will ultimately help end the journey, although not in ways that benefit the brothers.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

McCreadie becomes a habit. He talks to Jimmie at night about the murders and about black-white relations in Australia. McCreadie and Mort argue about their killings. Jimmie and Mort argue with each other, with McCreadie as the mediator. They are not moving at random, but following an easterly direction. McCreadie is getting thinner and sicker, but the brothers need a third party to fill and divert their attention. One time, they even let him rest for two days.

As they near the coast, McCreadie tells them that he grew up in the area. He has something he wants to show the brothers: a holy place of stones shaped like a womb that was used for initiation. As they get near the place, Mort flays his body and Jimmie's with a branch. The place is compelling, with rocks eight feet tall outlining the womb and smaller stones within. Jimmie and Mort look around, and Mort sings a chant. Jimmie is afraid and confused. McCreadie is disturbed by the state of the place for many of the large stones have been toppled and messages have been written on some. He feels ashamed and says to the brothers that they must build up the place again. Jimmie argues with him, but Mort agrees. They work on this. At the end of the day, McCreadie tells Jimmie that he must leave Mort. Jimmie says that he needs Mort, but McCreadie argues that Mort will have a chance if Jimmie leaves him.

Dowie and Dud decide to go to Taree, and there they will make a decision about the future of their pursuit. They read an article about the Boer war in South Africa and then they go to a bar and talk politics. Later, Dowie is surprised that on his word the citizens have formed a committee to patrol the town and river for the Blacksmiths.

Chapter 13 Analysis

McCreadie helps the brothers on their journey. He mediates between them as the stress makes them argue and fight with one another. McCreadie also plants the seeds of ending things in Jimmie's mind. He takes them to a sacred place that he remembers from his youth. But when they arrive, they find that the place has fallen into disrepair and has been vandalized. McCreadie convinces Mort and Jimmie that they must right the place, building it up again. In this native place, McCreadie argues that Jimmie needs to leave Mort. Mort is losing himself and his nativeness as he continues to hide out with Jimmie. McCreadie says that Mort will have a chance to live and to maintain his self if he is not with Jimmie.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

McCreadie is now very sick and Mort and Jimmie carry him on their backs. Jimmie says that they ought to put him on a farmer's veranda so that he will get help. That night, Jimmie lays McCreadie down in his tracks and leaves. He hears Mort calling to him but he continues on, leaving Mort native. Mort carries McCreadie to a farmhouse. The inhabitants shoot at them and tell Mort to put McCreadie down. Mort runs north and is awoken in the morning by a farmer riding past. The man comes back later with three others, and they lay in wait for Mort. Mort is aware that they are there. He is shocked by two bullets from his left and two from his right, which kill him. Eight hours later, Dowie and Dud ride to the barn where Mort's body has been taken. A photographer takes their picture.

Mr. Hyberry's friend has news. The Premier has said that if Jimmie were shot down like Mort, there would be no reason why Mr. Hyberry shouldn't be honored in the 1902 list. He wonders if he should resign and spends the night writing letters of resignation in his mind.

Jimmie has not heard the shots that kill Mort. Upstream from the ferry, a patrol of three citizens sees him wading into the shallows with rope tied to his rifle and bag. Jimmie sees them and swims out. He is convinced that some sort of salvation awaits him, and he thinks that he can make arrangements for meeting death. Then, he feels a pain in his left cheek and upper lip. A bullet has struck him. The bullets have entered below the cheekbone and tore out some of the teeth of his upper jaw before leaving through his upper lip.

Jimmie marches all morning, coming at noon to a place where some Chinese are tending a garden. He goes into the house and gets some water, eats some of their food and looks in a mirror at his injury. Then, he continues on. The pain in his mouth becomes the pain of the tooth excision during his initiation, and he is fevered. He finds some honey and eats it. He comes to another small residence next to a school. It is locked, but Jimmie finds his way in through a window. He looks through the soft feminine things in the bedroom, finding some letters. He reads them and goes to sleep in the schoolteacher's bed.

Jimmie wakes to a noise and sees two men outside. He goes out the back door. Several minutes later, Dowie looks down and sees the blood on the pillow of the bed.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Jimmie leaves Mort and McCreadie behind, believing that Mort will lose his nativeness if he remains with Jimmie. He realizes that Mort's loyalty to him will keep him with him whether it is good for Mort or not. By leaving them, Jimmie is trying in his own way to

save Mort. However, in the end, this salvation is short lived as Mort is found and shot soon afterward.

Jimmie is also shot but survives. As he has done all along, he pushes on, trying to find some place where he will be safe and free. Dowie pursues him closely. While Dowie appears to want to catch Jimmie, it is unclear whether this is because he feels guilty about Miss Graf or whether he truly sees Jimmie as evil and wants to stop him. In some ways, it appears that Dowie sees catching Jimmie as somehow making up for his relief over not having to marry Miss Graf, and thus, not feeling great grief over her death.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Jimmie crosses to a town called Kaluah where he hears nuns praying. He skirts the chapel and comes to a two-story house. There, he drinks some milk and eats a little beef. Down the hall, he can see a nun who is dying. She is sitting in a high-backed chair. He fights the urge to give himself up to her as a surrender of special merit. He decides to go to bed and finds a room that has been labeled for guests. He closes the door gently and goes to sleep. When he wakes it is daylight, and he thinks he hears Dulcie's voice. He waits to go out until later that day when he can only hear the chant of the nuns. He eats and drinks in the kitchen again. Then he goes back to his bed and falls into delirium.

There is a newspaper article about Jimmie's capture. It tells how Jimmie was found in a country convent. He was in the guest room that had been prepared for the visit of Bishop Thomas Grogan, and a nun found him. Reverend Mother Evangelist made a citizen's arrest. Jimmie is now in lock-up.

Dowie and Dud are one day too late to Kaluah to catch Jimmie. It makes Dowie feel ridiculous. He goes south and joins the army. Rev. Neville writes a letter to the editor of the *Methodist Church Times*, but it is not published. In it, he writes that he feels some responsibility for Jimmie for he was the one to encourage Jimmie to work so that he could own property and marry a white woman. He is permitted to see Jimmie twice. Jimmie undergoes a fundamentalist conversion in the jailhouse. There is a swift trial where he tells how innocent Jackie, Mort, and Gilda are.

Australia becomes a country. It is deemed too much to hang two black men in the early days of the federation. Easter comes, bringing happy days. Jackie Smolders has been sequestered for nine months now. In May, he is hanged. The next day, Mr. Hyberry peers through the Judas window at Jimmie.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Jimmie is finally caught. He takes refuge in a convent after being shot and is eventually discovered there. While he has killed a number of women and been labeled a woman-killer, he takes refuge in a place full of women, feeling no desire to kill any of them.

In the end, Mr. Hyberry hangs Tabidgi, even though his mental capacities seem to have suffered from the actions he and Jimmie took at the Newby's. Jimmie is awaiting his hanging and at the end of the novel, Mr. Hyberry looks in on him, part of the pre-hanging ritual. From an earlier description, we know that this means that Jimmie will be hung the following day.



Characters

Jimmie Blacksmith

Jimmie is a half-black living in Australia at the turn of the 20th century. He was born in 1878 and has been initiated into his Mungindi tribe. He becomes disillusioned with the tribe and decides to go with the Nevilles when they move to Muswellbrook. After staying with them for awhile, Jimmie decides to get work of his own. He is ambitious and wants to own land someday and marry a white girl, thinking that these things will improve his social status.

He first gets a contract with Mr. Healy, and Healy short changes him at the end of the contract. After that he works for a number of different people with much the same result. He works as a tracker for the police in Merriwa until the constable mistreats and kills a black in his custody. He then works as a sweeper on a shearing floor and meets Gilda. They begin meeting for sex, and Gilda becomes pregnant. They move to the Newby homestead. When Mr. Newby refuses to advance Jimmie money for the work he's done so that the family can buy supplies, Jimmie and Tabidgi kill Mrs. Newby, her daughters, and Miss Graf.

Jimmie, Gilda, Mort, Tabidgi, and Peter set out. Soon, everyone but Jimmie and Mort has been left behind. The two men evade their would-be captors. They are almost caught at one point, but they kill one of Dowie's party and escape. Arriving at the Healy's, Jimmie and Mort kill Mrs. Healy, her child, and Mr. Healy. They take a schoolteacher hostage later as they hide out.

Jimmie eventually leaves Mort, feeling that Mort has a better chance of survival and keeping his native self if Jimmie is not with him. Jimmie is shot in the cheek as he crosses a river. He ends up sneaking into a convent and is discovered several days later. He is sentenced to death.

Tabidgi Jackie Smolders

Tabidgi is Jimmie's uncle and Dulcie's brother. He is a member of the Mungindi tribe and is an alcoholic. When he hears about Jimmie's marriage to a white woman, he sets out to give Jimmie his initiation tooth to protect him. Keneally depicts Tabidgi as a contradiction. On the one hand, he is concerned about Jimmie and travels to give him the tooth. On the other hand, he is an alcoholic and seems to take advantage several times of Jimmie's generosity and loyalty.

Tabidgi is caught up in Jimmie's initial killing spree. He kills Mrs. Newby. After the group has fled from the scene, Tabidgi is eventually left with Peter for someone to find. It appears that he has had some sort of mental breakdown from the killings. He is caught and sentenced to death. At the end of the novel, Mr. Hyberry hangs Tabidgi.



Mort

Mort is Jimmie's half-brother and is a member of the Mungindi tribe. He often doubles over in laughter over little things. He first comes to stay with Jimmie in 1898 and he gains a reputation as a horse breaker. He is thin, with big child-like teeth. Keneally depicts Mort as innocent and very loyal to Jimmie. He follows Jimmie unquestioningly and pays the price for Jimmie's crimes without taking into consideration his own innocence. When he does have to use violence, Mort is repentant and concerned about the welfare of those that they have to hurt for their own survival.

Mort arrives at the Newby's with Tabidgi and Peter to give Jimmie his initiation tooth. When the group flees, he goes along and continues on with Jimmie when the others are left behind. Mort is forced to kill a member of Dowie's party so he and Jimmie can escape, and he also shoots a woman at the Healy's. When Jimmie takes McCreadie hostage, Mort often protects McCreadie and tries to help him when he becomes sick. After Jimmie leaves them, Mort brings McCreadie to a farmer's house.

Mort is discovered soon after Jimmie leaves him. He is shot several times and dies.

Gilda

Gilda is a kitchen maid for the Hayes family when she meets Jimmie. She is around seventeen, with lank, yellow hair and a narrow face. Jimmie does not find her particularly pretty or smart. She and Jimmie have a sexual relationship, and she becomes pregnant. She travels to the Newby's to live with Jimmie after they are married. When she has the baby, it is clear to Jimmie that the child is not his but the cook's from the shearing group.

Gilda leaves with Jimmie and the others when they flee the Newby's. They soon leave her and the baby behind. When she is released from custody, she and the baby are taken in by a group of nuns.

Rev. Mr. Neville

Rev. Neville is the minister in Brentwood when Jimmie is growing up. He and his wife try to encourage Jimmie to "better himself" by finding a white girl off a farm to marry and to save money to buy land. In 1894, he is offered the Methodist church in Muswellbrook and he accepts, asking Jimmie to come along with him and his wife.

After Jimmie's killing spree, Rev. Neville feels a sense of responsibility for trying to give Jimmie ambitions. He visits Jimmie twice in jail after he is caught.



Dulcie Blacksmith

Dulcie is Jimmie and Mort's mother. She is full-blooded. Jackie thinks that she is flippant. When Jimmie returns to see her before he kills the Newby women, he finds that she has remarried.

Dowie Stead

Dowie is Miss Graf's fiancé. When Jimmie kills her, Dowie and some of his friends set off in pursuit of Jimmie and Mort. They almost catch them several times, but the two brothers manage to evade them.

Dowie is relieved that he does not have to marry Miss Graf after she is killed. He finds this feeling troubling and this is part of the reason why he continues the chase. He thinks that this is the appropriate action for a grieving fiancé. After Jimmie is captured, he joins the army.

Miss Graf

Miss Graf is a schoolteacher who lives with the Newby's. She is engaged to Dowie Stead. She tries to convince Gilda to come work for them rather than stay with Jimmie. She is arrogant and condescending to both Gilda and Jimmie.

When Jimmie is refused any food from the Newby's, he realizes that it is not Mr. Newby who he wants to kill, but Miss Graf. He and Tabidgi go back to the house where Jimmie chops Miss Graf in her stomach, killing her.

Mr. Hyberry

Mr. Hyberry is the public hangman for the State of New South Wales. He also operates a butchery. He is told that he may be up for an M.B.E. honor if Jimmie and Mort are caught. Later, he considers resignation from his position but continues on. He hangs Tabidgi and is preparing to hang Jimmie the following day.

Mr. Healy

Jimmie has his first fencing contract with Mr. Healy. Healy is Irish, and Jimmie thinks that he has the air of a basilisk. He tells Jimmie that some of the posts are too far out and as such, he doesn't pay Jimmie the amount that they'd agreed on for Jimmie's work. Jimmie and Mort return eventually to kill Mr. and Mrs. Healy and their child.



Mr. Newby

Jimmie works for Mr. Newby doing some fencing. It is here that Gilda, Tabidgi, Mort, and Peter join him. Mr. Newby doesn't want to turn his homestead into a blacks' camp and so he tries to get Jimmie to force his relatives out by not getting their supplies for them or paying Jimmie. He is arrogant, racist, and a hard man. When he refuses to give Jimmie food, Jimmie and Tabidgi kill his wife and daughters.

Mr. McCreadie

McCreadie is a schoolteacher who Jimmie and Mort take hostage. He is a smart man, but also sick. He tries to drive a wedge between Jimmie and Mort. He takes them to a sacred place. He eventually convinces Jimmie to leave Mort behind. Mort takes him to a farmer's house so that he can get medical help.

Peter

Peter is a young boy from the Mungindi tribe. He comes with Mort and Tabidgi when they bring Jimmie his initiation tooth. Jimmie eventually leaves Peter and Tabidgi by a road after the killings, teaching Peter to say that Tabidgi is innocent.



Objects/Places

Brentwood

Brentwood is the blacks' camp where Tabidgi and Dulcie live and where Mort and Jimmie grew up. Jimmie returns there for several days before the killings but cannot find rest there and leaves.

Muswellbrook

This is the town that Rev. Neville moves to after Brentwood. He takes Jimmie with him.

Verona

Verona is another blacks' camp that Jimmie visits while he is working for the Healys and others. He helps bury a white man there and later returns as the police tracker to find the grave and the person who killed the man.

Merriwa

Merriwa is near Verona and is where Jimmie is stationed as the police tracker.

Balmain

Balmain is a suburb of Sydney. In this town, Mr. Hyberry lives and operates his butchery.

Pilbarra

Jimmie and Mort stop in this blacks' camp while on the run. They are almost caught by their pursuers but manage to evade them after killing a member of Dowie's party.

Manning

Mort is killed near Manning, and Jimmie is injured from the gunshot wound while swimming across the Manning River.

Kaluah

Jimmie winds up in this town, finding a convent to hide in after he is shot. He is captured in the convent.

Kaluah Ursuline Convent

Jimmie is captured in the convent's guest room, where he had been hiding out for several days.



Themes

Race

The themes of race, discrimination, and prejudice permeate *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. The novel, at its core, explores racial discrimination and the frustration of individuals held within that oppressive system. Jimmie Blacksmith, half black and half white, is caught between two worlds. Although he grew up within an aboriginal family in a blacks' camp, he dreams of attaining the things that the white world values: property, money, and status. He is encouraged by the Nevilles to save money for land and to marry a white girl in order to raise his status.

Yet, although Jimmie works hard, he faces many challenges and obstacles to his dreams because of his skin color. His employers overwhelmingly cheat him out of the money that he has earned working for them. Not once in the novel is there a white employer who treats Jimmie fairly or kindly. Instead, they distrust him and use every opportunity to look for ways to criticize and demean him. When Jimmie goes to work for the police as a tracker, he feels that he has been officially labeled as a black man despite his hope that this might increase his status. Likewise, marrying Gilda does not offer him the respect and status that he thought it would. Instead, it reduces Gilda to his level in the social hierarchy.

Jimmie's killing of the white women of the Newby household and then Mrs. Healy tap into white fears about the black man. By killing white women, Jimmie has crossed a racial boundary akin to rape. He emasculates the white men of the families and society by striking at their women who they are supposed to protect. There is little outcry about the men's deaths, but the women's deaths create concern, fear, and outrage.

Gender

Just as *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* illustrates racial tensions and discrimination so too does it show the gendered dimensions of society at this time. The novel at several junctures points to differing roles that men and women held within society at this time. For Jimmie, manhood, race, and status were tied up in property ownership and marriage to a white woman. We also see that it was the men who chased after Jimmie. For Dowie, he needed to fulfill his role as the bereaved fiancé even though he didn't feel an over abundance of grief for Miss Graf. The men also have a responsibility to protect their women, creating even more trouble, as this doesn't happen.

The novel also indicates that women occupy a special status in society. Jimmie sees Mrs. Healy as an example of an ideal landowner's wife. "It was not simply a matter of her being full and ripe: he could not have been so potently stirred by aspects so directly sexual. But combine these with her impassive air, her peculiar way of sitting still in the dray and breathing out into the morning a vapour of worship and submission to her



husband..." (p. 21). This status is evident by the concern and horror over Jimmie killing women.

Although Jimmie and Mort also kill two men, there is little uproar over this, and the men do not seem particularly appalled by this. Rather, it is the deaths of the women that cause fear, horror, and shame. Jimmie refrains from telling Mort for a long period of time that he killed the Newby women and not the men, as Mort assumes, because he fears that Mort will look at him differently. Both men also express the desire not to be remembered as "woman-killers." This act appears to be considered much more heinous and wrong than killing a man. Women, in general, seemed to be viewed as innocent and helpless, in need of the protection of their men.

Crime and Punishment

The novel *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* is a glimpse into ideas of crime and punishment. Throughout, we find different crimes: Jimmie's killings, the murder of the man in Verona, Farrell's abuse and hanging of the black man, and the employers' cheating Jimmie out of the money he earned. This variance allows us to see how crime is thought of subjectively in this novel. The whites don't particularly see their actions as crimes or as wrong. They offer justifications for cheating Jimmie and for treating him poorly. Almost always, this is connected to his race. As in other times and situations, things done to blacks by whites are not seen as crimes or even wrong in some cases. Yet, actions taken against whites by blacks are, regardless of how small or insignificant. In this case, Jimmie's actions would probably widely be considered a crime. He killed a number of people, many of whom were women.

Yet, Jimmie's actions are also revenge for the way that he was treated. As no one in the wider society is punishing his employers for their discrimination and cheating, he takes matters into his own hands, doling out his own punishments to them. In his eyes, at least some of his victims deserved their deaths because of their prejudice and actions against him. We also see the larger society's reaction to this. They seek to punish Jimmie and his relatives through death as well. Tabidgi, Mort, and Jimmie are all killed for their participation in these crimes. A bill is passed allowing any citizen to kill Mort or Jimmie. In the end, Tabidgi and Jimmie are hanged for their actions.

Style

Points of View

Thomas Keneally uses a third-person perspective in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. This omniscient and reliable voice allows the reader to track the thoughts and actions of several characters within the same chapter and ultimately, the novel. Keneally primarily follows Jimmie Blacksmith in the novel, as it is his actions that provide the action and direction of the novel.

Keneally also adds in the thoughts and actions of several of the other characters including Tabidgi, Mort, Mr. Hyberry, and Dowie Stead. This adds to the novel by allowing the reader to see the motivations and thoughts of those chasing Jimmie or awaiting his capture. The reader is also privy to the remorse felt by Tabidgi and Mort, who are drawn into Jimmie's killings at various points in the novel. Not having experienced what Jimmie has, their motivation is more primal and loyalty driven to Jimmie.

Setting

The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith takes place in Australia at the turn of the 20th century. Australia at the time is on the verge of federation, and racial tensions and prejudice are high. The events occur throughout Australia as Jimmie leads his pursuers on a chase that ranges from the mountains to the coast. Jimmie spends time in Brentwood, Verona, Merriwa, and Kulauh. Many of the locations through which Jimmie and Mort travel remain unnamed.

The book moves in a more or less linear fashion. The first chapter is the exception. It begins with Tabidgi setting out to bring Jimmie is initiation tooth. From there, the book moves from Jimmie's initiation to the point that Tabidgi arrives with the tooth and then onward to their deaths.

Language and Meaning

Thomas Keneally uses simple language in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. Due to the plot and subject matter, there are several violent scenes included, and Keneally also uses strong language at times. Knowledge of Australian history or of this particular piece of history is not needed to understand or follow the novel.

Keneally does use an aboriginal dialect or accent for characters such as Jimmie, Mort, and Tabidgi, among others. An Australian accent or dialect is also depicted in many of the white characters as well. This helps to capture both the setting and time period of the novel.

Structure

The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith consists of fifteen chapters, which follow a linear pattern for the most part. The book also contains a list of other books published by the author and a brief author's biography.

Keneally uses a small part of Australian history and crafts a fictional work from that historical fragment. The book does not indicate which sections or pieces of the work come from historical sources and which from the author's mind.



Quotes

"In June 1900 Jimmie Blacksmith's maternal uncle Tabidgi-Jackie Smolders to the white world-was disturbed to get news that Jimmie had married a white girl in the Methodist church at Wallah." Chapter 1, p. 1

"In fact, Jimmie was surprised to find that he loved his half-brother Morton, who was innocent and loyal, who came to see Jimmie because he hated the thought of kinsmen lost amidst strangers." Chapter 4, p. 27

"He had been a policeman for half and hour yet now wanted to commit murder. He was more officially a black now than Tabidgi or Mort: a registered, accredited, uniformed black man; more deeply, more damagingly black than ever." Chapter 5, p. 35

"Jimmie himself was in a vindictive state of mind. The Verona people were to be punished for their vulnerability. There was a lust in him to punish the race through the man who had done the knifing." Chapter 5, p. 38

"The Hayeses' maid said she respected him. Helped to it, of course, because she carried his child. She was very young and her legs were freckled." Chapter 6, p. 50

"He had always presumed that to marry a white raised a person in the community. Now it came to him that if one reject married another, the facts of their individual rejections might be added or even multiplied." Chapter 6, p. 53

"Every Friday, Gilda took her constantly rehearsed, arduously copper-plated grocery list to the Newbys.' On Saturdays she went to make the collection." Chapter 6, p. 60

"It was not his child. He could tell, though not with reasons, that he could not have begotten a child of that face." Chapter 6, p. 63

"Now he worked automatically, without aim. Work was a sedative for a man with a magic uncle bent on liquor, a lying wife, a bastard child; all within his walls." Chapter 7, p. 68

"Now Jimmie himself knew that Newby was not what he wanted. He was in a fever for some definite release. Killing Newby, however, was not it. When he put his rifle against Newby's gut, he knew that he wished to kill that honey-smooth Miss Graf." Chapter 8, p. 78

"Though one of the daughters ran towards her mother and perhaps the firearm, Jimmie Blacksmith did nothing to prevent her, and then chopped Miss Graf leisurely between hip and ribs." Chapter 8, p. 79

"Though he felt buoyant enough, Jimmie Blacksmith knew that he had become an incurable. He knew in an instant that he must see into his acts the fervid illusions they were based on. He chose therefore to know and not go mad." Chapter 8, p. 81



"Already Jimmie found it hard to believe in the slaughter of the Newbys. It had become remote, like an alien truth, like the story of how the Red Sea was crossed." Chapter 9, p. 87

"This bill will increase penalties against those harbouring the fugitives, provide a reward of \$5,000 for their capture, and cancel all the Blacksmiths' rights under common law and the law of the State. They can be shot on sight, or-if captured as the result of surrender-be put to death, it seems, without question, by any citizen using any means of execution." Chapter 12, p. 128

"Jimmie had left him native. Mort did not see that-he would not be Mort and native if he could. All he could sense was the love and Jimmie's death." Chapter 14, p. 157

"In May Mr. Hyberry went to Dubbo and hanged old Jackie. It was a quick and easy hanging." Chapter 15, p. 178



Topics for Discussion

Why do you think Jimmie committed the killings? What led him to those actions?

Based on Keneally's descriptions, compare and contrast the lives of blacks and whites at this time in Australia .

Why did it seem to matter so much that Jimmie killed women and not men?

Why do you think Jimmie returned to the Healy house to kill them? What significance did they have for Jimmie?

Discuss Jimmie and Mort's fugitive travels. What did they learn about society and themselves along the way?

Why do you think McCreadie was able to influence Jimmie? How did he help the two brothers?

Jimmie thinks that he is "blacker" working for the police. Why do you think this is? What makes him blacker at this time than when he wasn't working for the police?