

**Sixth Famine Memorial Anniversary
28 August 006**

Guest of Honour, Consul-General Anne Webster

**Memorial Oration by
Tom Keneally AO
Patron & well-known author
(also some of his constructive comments during the developmental phase of the
memorial)**



Tom Keneally addressing the assembled audience; Consul-General Anne Webster laid the wreath at the conclusion of the formalities.

In his oration Australia's prize winning author, Thomas Keneally was his usual witty effervescent self. But he likened the misery of the Irish orphan girls who came through Hyde Park Barracks to the desperate plight of the Sudanese refugees in Darfur today. 'I think the traumas that the orphan girls lived through are being lived through now in the Sudan'. He went on to say 'we honour the history of these girls, the matriarchs of so many of your families', describing their lives as 'a triumph', he said they had proved how wrong people were when they said someone wasn't fit to be an Australian.

In a fax on 1 May 1998, Tom Keneally had thanked Chairman Tom Power for keeping him informed about the proposed sound sculpture. He said he like it 'because of its sense of vanished language, extinguished culture, the fragmentation of lives, the horror of the scenes the orphan girls would have beheld—bodies in ditches, hair growing on the faces of skeletal children, mothers begging with dead babies in their arms.

I think in this new season of peace, Australians of Irish descent are entitled to and capable of confronting all that.

But I think on a quick reading, that there has to be an element of Australian redemption to the music, Gaelic grief giving way to Australian wistfulness, but also jauntiness. For these are the names of survivors! They are the fragment left from the cataclysm but their descendants proliferate in Australia. They are the mothers of Australia. I may be doing the treatment a

disservice, but these elements seem missing from the pages. What they went through fed explicitly and subterraneously into what we became.

These are victims redeemed by Australian space. That should also be in the basic perhaps. They're my chief thoughts.

Best wishes

Thomas Keneally