

Foreshadowing in remembering babylon



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The first chapter of Remembering Babylon contains the introduction young boy, Gemmy, and his first encounter with the white settlers of Australia. The exposition foreshadows characters' actions and potential conflicts, establishing later events in the novel and Gemmy's eventual rejection from society. As Gemmy finds, violence and conflict are conditions of life – or at least of his life – that prove nearly inescapable.

In the exposition of Remembering Babylon, future conflicts are foreshadowed through the characters' initial reactions to Gemmy's entrance to their society. Upon Gemmy's entrance to the society, Lachlan's first reaction is, "A black! That was the boys first thought. We're being raided by blacks. After so many false alarms it had come" (2). This initial reaction characterizes the conventional societal view of the aboriginal people in the eyes of the white settlers. By revealing that the settlers viewed attack as inevitable characterizes a negative, distrustful, and violent relationship early in the text. Establishing the context for for later conflict between the cultures and the eventual rejection of Gemmy from society, which Gemmy then leaves to return to the aboriginal people. The way the people regard Gemmy as not fully assimilated in their culture in the later town meeting as they "faced the black white man" (10) also foreshadows the conflict and rejection of differences in society. The town cannot look past the fact that the boy was raised by a different culture and thus regard him as something else altogether. This foreshadows Gemmy's later return to "black" society as he cannot return to white society, and is openly rejected. All of the conflict foreshadowed in the exposition, the hostility between the white and native people in Australia eventually leads to the conclusion of the story, in which

Gemmy is slaughtered along with some aboriginals in “ too slight an affair to be called a massacre” (189). The commonplace violence in the society, established in the exposition, foreshadows the inevitable violence and death of aboriginal characters, and by extension, Gemmy.

The exposition also establishes Gemmy’s character and role in society, with the introduction alluding to how he sees himself in society and how he will be treated. Gemmy’s first words are “ Do not shoot. I am a B-b-british object!” (3) as he runs up to the McIvor household. While this can be seen as simply a matter of Gemmy’s limited vocabulary having been separated from society for so long, it also establishes his eventual role within the white society. He is treated like an object to be traded around by the white people, with little care to his opinion and his own status as a human. He even sees himself as an object to be used as he continually attempts to please everyone in hope for some recognition of his worth and humanity. In the exposition, Gemmy is also described as having a look as if he is wondering “ how he had got there or where he was” (8). This establishes Gemmy’s confusion with the new society and his attempts to assimilate despite his confusion, a situation that can only result in failure as seen as the novel progresses.

Gemmy’s initial reaction to society in the exposition establishes him as a confused, eager to please boy, rejected and ostracized by white society. The exposition also establishes the papers as objects that have great meaning to Gemmy as he thinks they have taken his magic, setting up later events. The first thing the townspeople have him do is write an account of who he is, to assess his intelligence. However, through this, the deeply ingrained aboriginal views Gemmy has is revealed to the reader as immediately “ he

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began to plot...how to steal it back” (20) because he believes the words have magic. He admits he feels drained without them, also revealing that in this society he is not healthy and not living his best life. In the conclusion of Gemmy’s tale he is “ leaving the schoolhouse...the papers safely in his pocket” (180), having decided to rejoin the aboriginal tribe and leave the white settlers behind. The initial establishment of Gemmy’s discomfort in white society and his aboriginal views of words as power and magic reveal that Gemmy is ultimately not cut out for the conflict and society he has just joined, thus foreshadowing his eventual departure.

Foreshadowing in Remembering Babylon plays a key role in the conflicts that come to dominate the text. Through the foreshadowing of potential conflicts and events Malouf asserts and conflict between cultures and the unknown is near inevitable due to fear and isolation in society. Moreover, through these foreshadowed events, Malouf reveals that conflict in life will always be present.