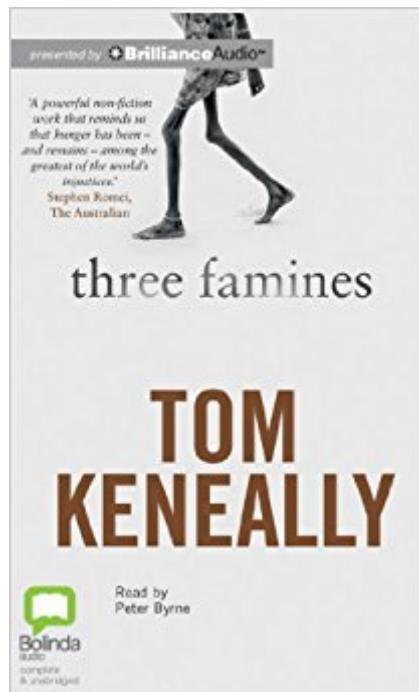


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# Three Famines



## Synopsis

This is the story of three terrible famines. The first is an Gorta MÃ¡fÃr, the great hunger of Ireland, which began in 1846. The second is the deadly famine that struck Bengal in 1943. The third is the Ethiopian famine, which first sprung up in lethal form in the 1970s under Emperor Haile Selassie and then reappeared under the brutal dictator Mengistu in the 1980s. Keneally visited Eritrea in 1984 to see the effects of this grave event. Tom Keneally shares these three shocking histories with his customary penetrating wisdom, and he presents a controversial theory in his utterly compelling narrative: in all three famines, ideology, mindsets of governments, racial preconceptions and administrative incompetence were, ultimately, more lethal than the initiating blights, the loss of potatoes or rice or the grain named teff. "I am sure Tom Keneally is incapable of writing a dull book" *—Andrew Riener, Sydney Morning Herald*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"As reports of east Africa's famine continue to focus on drought and crop failure - natural rather than political causes - *Three Famines* provides a sharp and timely admonition... Keneally's writing is understated, sometimes to a fault. He witnessed the famine in Ethiopia, yet refuses to tell us what it looked or felt like. The tone is distant, but the occasional glimpses of individual suffering are all the more moving for it." *Financial Times* "Thomas Keneally...writes vividly about the depths to which human beings descend during famines... The book is both reportage of starvation and analysis of how famine is made. The 'politics' in his subtitle points to the fact that drought, blight and pestilence may be unavoidable but famine is a manmade phenomenon. This may be an elementary point, but

it needs to be made time and again." Guardian "The human story of famine is told very well and passionately by Keneally, as one might expect from the author of Schindler's Ark." Irish Examiner" --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Tom Keneally won the Booker Prize in 1982 with Schindler's Ark, later made into the Academy Award-winning film Schindler's List by Steven Spielberg. He has written ten works of non-fiction, including his recent memoir Searching for Schindler. His novels The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith, Gossip From the Forest, and Confederates were all shortlisted for the Booker Prize, while Bring Larks and Heroes and Three Cheers for the Parclete won the Miles Franklin Award. He lives in Australia.

Very interesting read about three famines. What really interested me was that all were preventable, especially the Irish famine which brought my ancestors to America. Had the British had more human compassion for Irish I'd be living in the UK.

I found this work to be both scholarly and readable. It lays blame for famines directly where it needs to be, centralized governments. It also shows the physical, cultural, and personal effects of starvation on different groups. Very informative and fascinating book.

I thought this book was a bit chaotic and tried to make analogies that were broad enough to be more than obvious. By using famine's that were all over the place historically it was hard to analyze what extraneous pressures came to bear on the institutions and people responsible for the catastrophes. The initial descriptions of the effects of hunger were extremely enlightening but the rest of the book was a jumble of ideas and histories and did not form any cohesive argument.

For those interested in the related issues of hunger, starvation, and the human consequences of venal politics, Three Famines is a book worth reading. Keneally discusses three Famines (the Irish potato blight, the Bengal famine of 1943-4 and the recurring Ethiopian famines) in the context of ideology, policy, and the amazing lack of empathy decision-makers have for the poor. He finds a common thread in these crises, including the physical and psychological effects on the people who suffer but also in the ways in which famine is responded to by governments and aid organizations. While Keneally does not go as in depth on the Bengal famine as Madhusree Mukerjee (in her book Churchill's Secret War) or on the Irish famine as in many other works, his knowledge of

and description of the Ethiopian famines is top-notch. The book is a very easy read (though the content is hard to get through for the empathetic). I would have liked to divine more "outrage" but very likely Keneally feels it but wants the reader to find it her/himself. I recommend this book without hesitation.

Thomas Keneally, in his recent book *Three Famines*, takes a rather clinical approach to mass starvation. The reader expecting any sentimentality toward the victims of such eras will not find it here. Readers will, however, come away with a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to famines. Keneally makes his points through revisiting the potato famine in Ireland, the Bengal starvation in 1942, and the Ethiopian experience with intermittent famines later in the century. He makes the case that each of the three resulted from the ideology and mindsets of governmental leaders, racial perception, and administrative bungling or malfeasance. Segments of the book are not for the faint of heart, but a reading of this volume will open and inform the minds of all who take the time for it.

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