

I will not serve: God and the State refused

I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can, and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I permit myself to use - silence, exile, cunning.

(James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*)

- I will not serve, answered Stephen.
 - That remark was made before, Cranley said calmly.
 - It is made behind now, said Stephen hotly.
 (James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*)

Lucifer's Motto - *I shall not serve*

Political overtones (USA etc.) everything

Man assailed - by outside world

The opposite thing God & Satan

The results of L.M.

See the religious and puritanical side only

(Killeen, *the green notebook*, p. 61)

The crucifixion of *Lucifer's motto* [fig. 51] is a nailing not to a cross, but to an America hidden in patches of paint, by which outside world, by which everything, the crucified victim is assailed and all but engulfed. The 'Political overtones (USA etc.)' pointed to in Killeen's note for the painting are immanent in the conjunction of Lucifer's motto - I will not serve - with a crucifixion and a map of the U. S.A..

'U.S.A.' had one connotation above all to Killeen's generation in the 1960s and early 70s: the Vietnam war, in which a New Zealand National government, claiming that it was New Zealand's obligation as a member of the A.N.Z.U.S pact (Australia, New Zealand, the United States of America) had made us an ally of the Americans. Our part in the war was despised by young intellectuals and the bohemian left in New Zealand — those, in the words of a verse in the green notebook, 'long in the hair / though short in the tooth'¹ — that same sub-culture from which many of Killeen's Barry Lett Gallery audience came. New Zealand's part in the war was also for them the occasion of some personal fear, for it seemed that — at any moment — the New Zealand

¹ Killeen, *the green notebook*, p. 51.

government might follow Australia (then, too, politically more sycophantic to America than we), and a national military call-up would be declared.

With the painting *Lucifer's motto*, then, there is a refusal to serve at once God and the State.

I will not serve

I will not fight

(Killeen, *the green notebook*, p. 50)

The anti-war theme is continued in *Anzac spectacle*. [fig. 52] The title refers us to one of the major public rites of New Zealand culture: Anzac Day, 25 April, annual day and public show of remembrance of the war dead, especially of the two world wars, and of the Korean war, the Malayan war, and the Vietnam war: a day of bugles, poppies, parades. Anzac Day, claimed by its sponsors as an apolitical commemoration of the glorious dead, had also, so it seemed in the 60s, an unstated political function: that of making what Killeen called, in a note headed 'Anzac Day', 'the calm necessity of war' seem our 'inevitable destiny' in the present.² Hence, in the 1960s, Anzac ceremonies and monuments were the object of anti war demonstrations.

Anzac spectacle shows four frontal, darksuited male figures in the military 'at ease' position, partially overlapping and partially overlapped by thickly impastoed patches of paint: red, yellow, blue, and black with green dots — Killeen's foliage sign. The red is the red of blood. It is painted, unlike the other colours, as if to drip and to trickle down the board, and, unlike the other colours, it spills sideways to stain the adjoining patches, nastily smearing, for instance, over the yellow. ('As if — these are counterfeit trickles.) Given its bloodiness, and its conjunction with a military parade, the red allows such connotations of blood as bloodlust: blood shed: bloodstained: bloodthirsty: bloodbath.

The 'spectacle' of the title is not only descriptive of the painting's subject (a public show), or of the painting itself (an object of sight, and especially of public attention), it is signified *in* the painting, by means of a pair of spectacles camouflaged in the paint: a pun at once visual and verbal, in which the patriotic parade is submitted to humour, and made a bloodshot and deplorable spectacle, a defective sight.

² Killeen, *the green notebook*, p. 61.

The war monument hatched in the patchery is a stepped structure in the style of the 40s, with ziggurat aspirations, like the one outside the Auckland War Memorial Museum, such an edifice as conventionally has inscribed on it: THE GLORIOUS DEAD, that same text Killeen had scribbled in a note towards this painting, headed 'Anzac Day'.³

Thus, in *Anzac spectacle*, double meaning (or triple or more) is released not only by pictorial structure (in which there are immediately given forms, and forms partially concealed), but also by title, in which (in synonymity with pictorial structure), both a first meaning and a disguised second is offered, and in which, by a ludicrous pun, the boundaries of meaning are collapsed, that the various meanings might mingle. Thus, by the derisiveness of its pun, by the bloodiness of its paint, by the cunningness of its concealment, the Anzac service is refused.

Anzac
faces men with hats [steel helmets]
guns
religion
nationalities
racialism
northern Hemisp
calmness
inside
outside
(Killeen, the green notebook, p. 68)

In a number of the paintings for the May 25 exhibition, the alliance of the church with the state in war is connoted by various minglings of camouflage, cross, cross as gravestone, and rifle and helmet. This was not an uncommon topos for that youth culture from which Killeen's audience was partly drawn, as in the Bob Dylan song of the time, 'With God on Our Side': 'You don't count the dead when you've got God on your side'. It was a time when Auckland's Catholic priests who joined in anti Vietnam war demonstrations were suspended from preaching duties by their Archbishop Liston; a time when (as if in counterproof of religion's role in war) the only way to avoid military service, should by bad luck

³ Killeen, the green notebook, p. 50.

your ballot come up, was to demonstrate allegiance to some pacifist sect (preferably fundamentalist Christian); Christian clergy sat fat on the panels which determined the conscientiousness of objection. The complicity of the Church and State had come clear for the New Zealand young.

In Killeen's *Soldier with Man Passing*, a male figure marches in profile to the right of the panel, overlapped partly by patches of paint. [fig. 57] As we have seen, some of the patches assume the shape of a soldier's profile in steel helmet, surrounding the striding man, while to the left, the patches are worked into a cross, whose outlines interlock with the military profile. So, the complicity of church with the state and with war is connoted by signs (soldier/cross) and by structure (the signs interlocking).



fig 58 *Bang bang*, April 1970

That same connotation is camouflaged in *Anzac with Southern Cross*, where four hidden stars make at once an emblem of nation and inscription of Christ's sign in the New Zealand sky. [fig. 54] And it is, in a sense, camouflaged again in *Anzac Dreamtime*, where the signs of the cross, steel helmeted soldiers, and tiger and lamb are so scattered that their conjunctions are very largely left up to us. [fig. 53] The complicity is more flagrant, however, in *Bang Bang*, where a dark cross appears between steel helmeted soldiers and the inscription 'NZ', and a light cross appears on the uppermost helmet. [fig. 58] Here, once again, nationality, religion and war are conjoined.

Another theme which runs through a number of the paintings of the May 25 exhibition is 'religion as pollution'. A note of the time reads in part:

pollution

Outside world impinging on people

Religion as pollution of mind (man's head)

(Killeen, the green notebook, p. 68)

The painting *Pollution*, February 1970, proffers four figures, overlapped by all-over patches; a dog; two crosses; a map of New Zealand; an eye; and trees. [fig. 59] The crosses, signs of Christianity, partake of the world's pollution — a pollution signified at once by the title, and by horizontal streaks of dirty grey, smeared all over and through the colours.



fig. 59 *Pollution*, February 1970.

Also, several series of drawings made at about the same time, but not exhibited, concern themselves specifically with 'religion as pollution of mind (mans head)', as in the note towards *Pollution*. To remark just one instance. In *Five in the Head* (dated 2-3-70), there is the figure 5 in a male head, sign of the five senses, and a cross, sign of their infection by Christian morality. The top of

the head is punningly formed by breasts, the chin by a crotch — signs of the forbidden, signs of the desired, signs of the Christian repressed.⁴

In his note towards the painting *Lucifer's Motto* (1970) Killeen reminds himself: 'See the religious puritanical side only' — meaning, devote a work or works specifically to it. Several series of drawings around the time of the May 25 show, made towards a related but never to be completed painting, and a related series of paintings on paper, concern themselves with the Christian hatred of sex, and of women as sexual beings and as occasions of sin for the male. These works share the motif of a female nude with a cross in the crotch, or, one might say, a nude with the crotch crossed out, in accord with the Christian 'dictates of carnal decorum'.⁵

One might be reminded here of Nietzsche, for whom too Christianity castrates, saying, 'The Church fights passion with excision in every sense: its practice, its "cure" is *castratism*... The saint in whom god delights is the ideal eunuch'⁶ Killeen was, it seems, aware of the castrations performed in the name of the cross, as we may learn from another page in the green notebook:

5 senses

10 commandments

5 will get you 10 (mack the knife)

(Killeen, the green notebook, p. 68)

In a phallogocentric culture it is, of course, woman especially who is censured by the cross — the male will not be so hacked in his power and pride; but women so cancelled, made so inaccessible to the male, then also inflicts what she suffers: castrated, she castrates. So, in the several series of drawings where there are female nudes with crosses over their genitals, there are also, floating

⁴ One might consider also *Five Minus Ten*, (12-11-70), where the five senses, signified by an eye, a nose, an ear, lips, and a kite and its string, are subtracted from by the ten commandments; *Five Will Get You Ten Unfortunately* (12-11-70), where the five senses, in the same five signs, are (mis) governed by the same ten laws. *Inside and Outside* (undated) has a head whose nose and whose eyes are formed by the cross, and outside are the signs of trees and clouds -- a nature unpolluted by Christian dogma. While in *Five in the Head and One Out* (1970), the head has a 5, a +, and an x inside it, and a skull outside, sign of the Christian obsession with Death, a Christian pollution of nature. Again, in *The Nature of Religion* (undated), three faces are joined, as if in the surgery of some hideous and perverse operation, by a single cross implanted through all three heads. A Christian pollution, inside the mind and out. (All these drawings in the artist's possession.)

⁵ The phrase is Leo Steinberg's, in 'The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion', *October* no. 25, Summer, 1983.

⁶ Nietzsche, cited Jaques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, transl. Barbara Harlow, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1979, p. 93.

about the nudes, male faces made glum by this denial, and with crosses shadowing their features. In some of these drawings, a knife-like shape is aimed at the male's or the female's genitals. Similarly, in a notebook drawing, a frontal female nude clutches, in a gesture of bemused decorousness, a cross over her crotch, and the sketch is labelled: morality so far. [fig. 60]

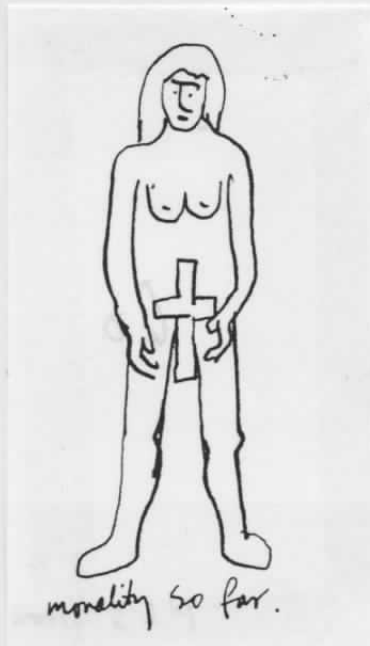


fig. 60 The green notebook,
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No doubt an intellectual rebellion may be provoked by an initial rebellion of the flesh, or some sense of constraint. Yet Killeen's critique of Christianity stems, I think, from something larger than a mere resentment of personal restriction, and from something more than an irritation at Christian extirpations of sex. Killeen's concern was not only to 'See the religious puritanical side only'. He was concerned too, with what he called the 'Political overtones (USA etc.)', with the Church's connection with war and power. And with still larger, and more pervasive matters.

There is the matter of Christian dualism, for instance, in which, for nearly twenty centuries, the whole world has been divided into opposing principles. Many of Killeen notes refer to it.

The state of man does not lie in opposites.

(Killeen, the green notebook, p. 53)

The opposite thing God and Satan

(Killeen, the green notebook, p. 61)

*Consider the large free feeling of the Americans.
Does this come from them not pushing
a theory of the world on you? Like McCahon does?
They say something about the reality
of the world
(Killeen, the green notebook, p. 51)*

The theory that McCahon pushed at his students was dualism: his was a Christian world, a world of perpetually warring opposites, all but Manichean, a universe of tragic and eternal division, of belief and unbelief, of good and evil, male and female, light and dark, heaven and hell, life and death. It was the fact that McCahon *had* a powerful theory, unlike those others about him, and a theory so powerfully put into paint, which made his views so persuasive: it was this very power which had, somehow, to be got around.

The rejection of duality, the refusal, Stephen Daedalus like, to pay false homage to that Christian vision of the world behind which are massed twenty centuries of authority and veneration, was not to be easy of achievement.

And so the notes on duality go on.

Under the heading 'Possible subjects for exhibition May 25, 1970', duality is numerously touched upon. We have seen that in the note for *Lucifer's Motto*, Killeen remarks 'The opposite thing God and Satan'. For *World*, he notes, similarly: 'The world as we see it... Opposites (way of seeing contained only in our world)'.⁷ Opposites are not, in other words, a universal reality, nor do they exist independently of our perception: they are products of culture not nature. On the following page are these lines towards the never to be completed *Tree of Fire*: 'Within the head — goings on between outside of head and inside. Good for mind matter, etc Satan — God — God — Satan opposites inside one's skin'.

A way had to be found to awake from that Christian nightmare, to refuse its jostling spectres; a language had to be forged which might come, as if into the clear light of day, to embody that awakening. This language was to be achieved, in the end, with the cut-outs. But they were as yet unforeseen. First there had to be

⁷ Killeen, the green notebook, p. 62.

some further consideration of opposites; some years of painterly play with (among other things) various devices by which dualities might be denied.

In the paintings for the May 25 exhibition, there is the 'all over' pattern of patches, 'white all over yellow all over red all over green all over', as the green notebook has it,⁸ in which no part of the painting can seem more important than another, and no part can become of sufficient import to be dualistically opposed one to another; an all overness, a 'large free feeling', in Killeen's words, learned from such Americans as Stella, Pollock, Johns and Judd — learned from the very America he might seem to be painting 'against'.⁹

⁸ Killeen, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁹ A map of the United States of America, painted in patches of colour, must irresistibly remind us of Jasper Johns, in its subject as in its manner.