
CHAPTER V

Conclusions

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Racial discrimination and violence are two daunting issues in many parts of the world today. Australia is no exception. In the colonizing process of Australia, in the last 200 years, Australian literature has attempted to grapple with two significant themes: one, the settlement of the whites or the Europeans in an alien land and their efforts to adjust themselves in the harsh and some times inhospitable landscape; two, their efforts to come to terms with native aborigines of Australia. The fact that the population of the aborigines has gone on decreasing over the years shows that racism or racial discrimination is very much a fact of life as Helen Daniel quotes from Peter Kerr's "Open Your Mouth, Midnight, I Can't See You" :

*"There appears amongst most Australians a systematic unwillingness to admit that aborigines are people who have had a community and separate culture quite different and quite independent from white culture ... Discrimination by the majority is better typified by a willingness to ignore the existence of aborigines ... white amnesia has consistently handicapped the development of culture and community in Australia."*¹

The two novels *Jimmy Governor* by Frank Clune, and *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* by Thomas Keneally, attempt a serious study of the problem of the racial relationships in the contemporary Australia. It

seems from the study of these two novels that the novelists endowed with a sense of larger human values and sensitivity have attempted to analyse and to penetrate the very genesis of racism. As Chris Tiffin points out:

*"White Australia's dealings with the Aboriginal population have been less than creditable, but it has often been the writers who have championed racial tolerance and equality"*² (emphasis mine).

Howsoever feeble the voice of the writers may be, it can be said that it is the writers' voice of conscience that has helped to generate a sense of sympathy, tolerance and humanity among the people.

Of the two novels, Clune's *Jimmy Governor* is the first literary attempt to deal with the historic event of the massacre of the Mawbeys in the year 1900, in a fictional manner in a limited sense. Clune, however, relies more on documents rather than on the 'mythical' aspect of the events. He narrates the incidents giving concrete examples, dates, names of places, persons, etc. He even gives a list of persons injured and murdered by Governor brothers, mentioning their ages in the brackets after their names in a journalistic style. Also, Clune uses a map at the beginning of the novel showing the track of the fugitive blacks. Thus, Clune uses journalistic style giving a picturesque account of the massacre and making it more dramatic and sensational.

On the contrary, Keneally's novel *The Chant of Jimme Blacksmith* is a novel which deals with the same event in a more imaginative and artistic manner. It is true that Keneally makes use of Clune's novel as a source material along with other contemporary sources, to write his novel. Thomas Keneally 'mythicizes' a horror story from the past, giving it the added significance of human values. Thus, we find the tribal traditions are more strongly depicted in *The Chant of Jimme Blacksmith* than in Clune's novel. For instance, they believe that a tribal man marrying a white girl is against their tradition, and it would cause danger. Thus, the inevitability of the subsequent catastrophe is anticipated in this tribal belief. Jimmie's marriage to the white girl Gilda Howie makes the matters worse so far as Jimmie's relationship with the whites is concerned.

Characterization in Keneally's novel *The Chant of Jimme Blacksmith* is more penetrating than in Clune's novel. His depiction of the landscape is quite evocative. The narrative is engrossing and racy which gives it a sense of fatalism in the minds of the reader. The tragedy is more touching than horrifying. How Keneally deals with the theme more imaginatively than Clune can be seen from the fact that Keneally does not bother about the exact number of murders; in fact, he reduces the number of actual murders.

A comparative study of these two novels serves an important function. And that is to diagnose the two writers' attitudes towards

the problem of racism. Frank Clune, for instance, visits a museum where the wax figures of the historic murderers and the murdered have been kept. After seeing these wax figures, Clune says:

*"I had nightmares for months after viewing this horrible sight, and I avoided aborigines for years, until I found that they are decent, loyal and true friends."*³ (emphasis mine).

This shows rather patronizing and condescending attitude towards racial relationship. This kind of liberalism is no radical liberalism. Keneally, however, gives a deeper understanding of the central character Jimmie Blacksmith, a character turned against itself. The mixture of black and white blood in him makes his situation extremely problematic. He represents what can be described as a problematic hero.

The two novels, Clune's *Jimmy Governor* and Keneally's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, may also be described as historical novels. The characters and the events are drawn from Australian history during the period of Federation 1900. Avrom Fleishman defines a historical novel as follows:)

*"A novel which is permanently suited to telling how individual lives were shaped at specific moments of history and how this shaping reveals the character of these historical periods."*⁴

Accordingly, in the two novels under study, both the writers have attempted to give the development of the central characters Jimmy/Jimmie and his half-brother and also the regions and individuals which drove them to commit the acts of violence which shook the Australians at a particular juncture in their history. In a wider sense, these two novels are landmarks in the history of racial relationship in Australian Society.

The present Dissertation also aims at the interdisciplinary study between the novel, *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* and the film by the same title, based upon the novel. The film is based upon Thomas Keneally's novel is supposed to be a major event, which deals with the problem of racism in a different medium altogether. Fred Schepisi, its writer-director, has closely followed the novel in his film. The roles of Jimmie and his half-brother Mort have been played by Tommy Lewis and Freddy Reynolds, both blacks. A significant deviation from the novel introduced by the director of the film is that the script of the film makes sure "that the audience stays on Jimmie's side"⁵. This seems to be unavoidable because the film is a visual media, whereas a novel is literary. The horror scenes, for example, are quiet shocking and traumatic on the visual screen, what with the colour effects, the sound effects and the close-ups. In the novel, such effects are mute and tentative. And so it seems that the script writer and director were obliged to put the murderers in a favourable light. Who otherwise would proved to be outrageous.

In conclusion, we can say that a comparative study of the two novels on the same theme serves the purpose of literary criticism to arrive at a judgement about the form of the novels. Thus, Frank Clune's novel *Jimmy Governor* can be described as a 'documentary novel', whereas Thomas Keneally's novel succeeds in mythisizing a historic event. Secondly, the two novels have the elements of the genre of historical novel. And, finally an interdisciplinary aspect with regard to a comparative study of Thomas Keneally's novel *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* and the film based upon it throws light on the different purposes which the two mediums, the film and the novel serve. The film being a visual and also a commercial medium can have a traumatic effect, whereas a novel being a literary medium has a humanistic appeal.

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REFERENCES

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