

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Related Theory: New Historicism

In spite of its big role, a new historical reading seems somewhat less popular than readings with other literary approaches. In fact, new historicism is actually a significant approach to literature that has influenced the way people view history. In his book entitled *Beginning Theory: an introduction to literary and cultural theory*, Peter Barry notes that the term *new historicism* itself, which sometimes is also called *Neo-historicism*, was initially used in 1982 by a famous new historical critic namely Stephen Greenblatt to describe a new way of historically based criticism (172).

It is basically important to look at how new historicism differs from the old or traditional historicism. According to the American critic, Louis Montrose, in new historicism literary and non-literary materials or texts can be given 'equal weight' (qtd. in Barry, 172). It means, both a literary text (such as a literary work) and a non-literary text (such as a historical account) can be analyzed together since it can support each other. In short, this view is reinforced by Ross C. Murfin in *The Scarlet Letter: a Case Study in Contemporary Criticism*, that 'literature is not a sphere apart or distinct from the history that is relevant to it' as asserted by new historicists like Greenblatt (333). In contrast, Barry explains, traditional historicism will separate literary texts from the non-literary ones: the former was

seen as 'the object of value,' whereas the latter as 'merely the setting' or something with 'lesser worth' (174).

Some perspectives of new historicism might be seen in several ways. Barry suggests, new historicism considers history can only be represented and recorded in written documents, in 'history-as text', whereas historical events are lost since they don't exist anymore. As he sums up: 'the word of the past replaces the world of the past' (175). In this case, he argues, new historicism follows Derrida's view that 'there is nothing outside the text, in the special sense that everything about the past is only available to us in textualised form', so that the purpose is not representing the past as it really was, rather, re-situating it (175).

Specifically in terms of viewing history, Tyson in *Critical Theory Today* assures that traditional historians may know some facts of events in history, but their understanding of what such facts mean, for new historicists, is actually a matter of interpretation, not fact. As a result, even though those historians believe that they report history by objectively referring to the facts, what kind of story to be told is influenced by the way they select and regard which one is important to report and which one is not. Thereby, new historicists maintain their belief that objective analysis is hardly possible to produce (279).

In relation to the new historical view that any definition is just a matter of interpretation, according to Foucault, what to be commonly regarded as "right", "normal", or "accurate" is just matter of definitions. Specifically, those definitions are 'social constructs by which ruling powers maintain their control' (qtd. in Tyson, 282). Based on Foucault's view, this is because the source of power is not

only from the top of political and economic structure, but power works anytime in all directions, to and from all social levels (qtd. in Tyson, 281). This power circulates through several ways; one of them is through the exchanges of discourses. Tyson explains that a discourse is 'a social language created by particular cultural conditions at a particular time and place, and it expresses a particular way of understanding human experience' (281). Discourses can be ideologies, texts, ideas, or spirits which can show one's way of thinking. These discourses are always overlapping and competing with one another (281).

For new historicists, it can be understood that in life people may have their own different interpretations about anything, including history, although none of those interpretations is more accurate. Hence, as Barry also suggests, new historicism implicitly supports liberal ideals of personal freedom. That is to say, it accepts and celebrates all forms of difference and even what it calls 'deviance' (175).

In terms of historical analysis, Tyson explains, new historicists believe that 'thick description' should be involved:

Thick description attempts, through close, detailed examination of a given cultural production—such as ... ritual ceremonies, and the like—to discover the meanings that particular cultural production had for people in whose community it occurred and to reveal the social conventions, ... and ways of seeing the world that gave that production those meanings. Thus, thick description is not a search for facts but a search for meanings ... (285).

Finally, based on new historicism perspectives, it can be said in a simple way that in seeing history one should not just ask, “What happened?” or “How is the chronicle?” as usually asked by traditional historians. Rather, it is suggested to find out “How has the event been interpreted?” or “What are the meanings of that event and what can be learned from that?”

B. Related Studies

As a work of an Australian playwright namely Alan Seymour, *The One Day of the Year* perhaps has been well-known only in its country, Australia. This work is nevertheless not a simple family drama. It has encouraged several critics to give their criticism in which they have not only retold its interesting and touching story, but also re-evaluated it in a somewhat new historical way.

Neil McDonald in reviewing “Australian Drama” in *Mc-Graw Hill Encyclopedia of World Drama: an international reference work* by Stanley Hochman, mentions that Alan Seymour’s *The One Day of the Year*, which was first performed professionally in 1961 at the Palace Theatre, Sidney, was a more responsive work to the tensions on the Australian community. He further argues, ‘Although the play does not fully resolve its conflicts, it does portray fundamental divisions within Australian society that would assume national importance ...’ (229).

In the introduction for *Three Australian Plays* published by Penguin Books (1965), H.G. Kippax asserts about this drama. He notes that it contains a universal theme, more than just a technical accomplishment. It is about a conflict

of views between young and old generations, which is dramatized through conflicting local attitudes to Anzac Day's celebration. Interestingly, as he mentions, after the solemn Dawn Service and morning march, there will always be 'bibulous reunions'. He also points out that, sharply, the play can touch an 'exposed and sensitive Australian nerve' (19).

Further, Kippax describes critically that *The One Day of the Year*, which is set in a poorer part of the city, can be seen as one of the Australian plays:

... with a disconcerting blend of disenchantment and compassion, whatever seems to be peculiarly Australian in [its] characters' illusions, prejudices, pretences, fallacies, and fallibilities – ... the obtuseness, insensitivity, and intolerance of 'Australianism' (18).

In a more specific historically based criticism, Nick Malligan reviews the play through his article entitled "The One Day of the Year" by questioning much about the history of Anzac Day, which also becomes the conflicting discussion in the story. He wonders whether back in Gallipoli perhaps the Australians were also the same as fighting a war that had nothing to do with them. Moreover, he proposes the questions concerned at the center of the play. This is pointed for the Australians themselves, whether Anzac Day is:

an excuse for [their] grandma to make [them] a tin of really awesome biscuits, a legitimate opportunity to remember what 324,000 Australians sacrificed for [them], or a celebration of a violent past (1).

In relation with the story of the play, Malligan also analyzes the contrasting interpretations among the characters'. For Alf Cook and Wacka Dawson, ANZAC Day is the most significant moment of the year on which they think and remember about the past experience in Gallipoli. On the other hand, the other two characters, Hughie Cook (Alf's son) and Jan Castle, insist on perceiving the day as a farcical celebration. In this case, they find that there are some parts of the celebration which are untold and unexplained. Therefore, they attempt to expose such unpublicized things through their camera. This conflict of views becomes a tension which 'soon develops into a ticking time-bomb' that is put at the central of the play. Finally, he asserts, 'the reappearance of Seymour's piece on Australian stages coincides with resurgence in the interest surrounding the Anzac legend' (1).

On the whole, the above criticisms share similar opinions which regard both literary work and its historical background as supporting each other. Another consideration based on those criticisms is that this play essentially provides the basis for re-evaluation of the perceptions towards Anzac legend and its accompanying celebrations and rituals. To this extent, this criticism can support the analysis on the work itself, particularly in accordance to the perspectives of new historicism.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS