

## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Going back to the essence of discussing a literary work, theory and approach play an important role in creating different perspectives through different points of view. According to Paul Procter, theory is (1) a statement or group of statements established by reasoned argument based on known fact or even; explanation for which certain proof is still needed but which appears to be reasonable or (2) the part of a science or art that deals with general principles and methods as opposed to practice; set of rules or principles for the study of a subject (1149). An approach, moreover, is a manner or method of doing something (41).

Literature is the product of human taste for the aesthetic and artistic eloquence. There have been many debates concerning the importance of relating an author with his or her work. Many literary theories contradict one another on this case. Some, like those who support the psychoanalytical movement, tend to view the importance of the creator to the work he or she conceives, whereas others might say the opposite.

Among these who believe in the latter, a set of reader-oriented theories have been established to accommodate their idealism in support of the crucial role of reader as the ultimate interpreter of meaning in literary works. It is, therefore, quite subjective positioning of the science of interpretation. According to Selden and Widowson, *Gestalt* psychology argues that the human mind does not perceive things in the world as unrelated bits and pieces but as *configurations* of elements, themes, or meaningful, organized wholes. Individual items look different in different contexts, and even within a single field of vision they will be interpreted according to

whether they are seen as 'figure' or 'ground'. These approaches and others have insisted that the perceiver is active and not passive in the act of perception (46).

The world of Stephen King's prose is filled with the manifestation and representation of the 'darker' side of our imagination. In the realm of what is often termed 'horror' fiction, King is commonly considered the king. This celebration of Stephen King as a virtuoso in supernatural tales provides a background for the analysis on his use of supernatural elements in his works. The writer will try to observe through the craft of phenomenology the implication of King's supernatural style when combined with the moral content of a literary work in the eye of a reader.

The work in question being *The Green Mile*, a story told through the use of a stream of consciousness of the main character/narrator Paul Edgecombe. Through Edgecombe's eye, we are guided through a flashback journey to a state penitentiary during the American 1930's Depression era where convicted men were awaiting their doom in the execution electric chair.

More of a character study than a bland morality tale, *The Green Mile* features the last days of John Coffey, a huge black man convicted of brutally killing two young girls. The writer assumes that there is a certain reason and meaning behind the depiction of John Coffey, who is black and staggering in physical features, as a humble and almost mysteriously Christ-like. Why is it John Coffey that King favors? What significance does it have in the morality context?

Here the hermeneutics approach will help understand the distinction between the meaning of the story and the significance that the writer receives by reading it. This is based on the fact that a literary work itself comes to be seen as a mysterious organic unity, in contrast to the fragmented individualism of the capitalist marketplace: it is 'spontaneous' rather than rationally calculated, creative rather

than mechanical (Eagleton 17). Therefore, meaning may stay the same from time to time, yet with all the changes and rapid modernization that take place simultaneously in every aspect of life, the significance of a literary work may undergo transformation in its effect from time to time.

#### A. Phenomenology

It is wise to begin the analysis by understanding the tools that will be applied to execute the process. In this case, it is imperative that we know what is meant by phenomenology and its principles and methodology in a comprehensive manner.

The writer plans on using the phenomenology stance as proposed by Edmund Husserl. His phenomenology plays upon the idea that we, as a reader, can be certain of how things appear to us immediately in our consciousness, whether the actual thing we are experiencing is a reality or not. Therefore this goes hand in hand with the writer's idea to base his analysis on interpretative method of research. This is the superficial thought that underlines the notion of Husserl's phenomenology.

Phenomenology started in the early twentieth century. As accounted by Terry Eagleton, after the end of World War I science seemed to have dwindled to a sterile positivism, a myopic obsession with the categorizing of facts; philosophy appeared torn between such positivism on the one hand, and an indefensible subjectivism on the other; forms of relativism and irrationalism were rampant, and art reflected this bewildering loss of bearings. During this period, the German philosopher Edmund Husserl sought to develop a new philosophical method which would lend absolute certainty to a disintegrating civilization (47).

Husserl, like his philosopher predecessor Rene Descartes, started out on his hunt for certainty by provisionally rejecting what he called the 'natural attitude' – the commonsensical person-in-the-street that objects existed independently of ourselves in the external world, and that our information about them was generally reliable.

Although we cannot be sure of the independent existence of things, Husserl argues, we can be certain of how they appear to us immediately in consciousness, whether the actual thing we are experiencing is an illusion or not. Objects can be regarded not as things in themselves but as things posited, or 'intended', by consciousness. All consciousness is consciousness of something: in thinking, I am aware that my thought is 'pointing towards' some object.

The act of thinking and the object of thought are internally related, mutually dependent. My consciousness is not just a passive registration of the world, but actively constitutes or 'intends' it. To establish certainty, then, we must first of all ignore, or 'put in brackets', anything which is beyond our immediate experience; we must reduce the external world to the contents of our consciousness alone. This, the so-called 'phenomenological reduction', is Husserl's first impression move. Everything not 'immanent' to consciousness must be rigorously excluded; all realities must be treated as pure 'phenomena', in terms of their appearances in our mind, and this is the only absolute data from which we can begin. The name Husserl gave to his philosophical method –phenomenology- stems from this insistence. Phenomenology is the science of pure phenomena (48).

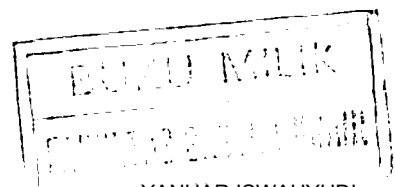
In addition, argued Husserl, we discover in the things which appear in consciousness ('phenomena' in Greek, meaning 'things appearing') their universal or essential qualities. Phenomenology claims to show us the underlying nature both

of human consciousness and of 'phenomena'. This was an attempt to revive the idea that the individual human mind is the center and origin of all meaning. In literary theory this approach did not encourage a purely subjective concern for the critic's mental structure but a type of criticism which attempts to enter into the world of a writer's works and to arrive at an understanding of the underlying nature or essence of the writings as they appear to the critic's consciousness (Selden & Widowson 51).

Phenomenology has influenced many forms of literary criticism and theory in a more indirect way. The 'Geneva School' of criticism, whose most important representative is generally regarded as Georges Poulet, focused on the literary work as the embodiment of the unique consciousness of the author. Authentic reading, therefore, involves the reader achieving the identification with the consciousness embodied in the work. Thus such elements of a literary work as form, style, mode, genre are seen as secondary to questions of consciousness. The Geneva School tends to concentrate not on single works but on the 'oeuvre' of an author (Newton 75).

Here we see that, according to The Geneva School, an author does have a certain recurring motif which he or she deliberately incorporate into the majority of his or her works. Just like Stephen King who feels the inclination to steer his works into the domain of the supernatural genre.

The text itself is reduced to a pure embodiment of the author's consciousness: all of its stylistic and semantic aspects are grasped as organic parts of a complex totality, of which the unifying essence is the author's mind. To know this mind, we must not refer to anything we actually know of the author –



biographical criticism is banned- but only to those aspects of his or her consciousness which manifest themselves in the work itself.

Moreover, we are concerned with the 'deep structures' of this mind, which can be found in recurrent themes and patterns of imagery; and in grasping these we are grasping the way the writer 'lived' his world, the phenomenological relations between himself as subject and the world as object. The 'world' of a literary work is not an objective reality, but what in German is called *Lebenswelt*, reality as actually organized and experienced by an individual subject.

Phenomenological criticism will typically focus upon the way an author experiences time or space, on the relation between self and others or his perception of material objects. The methodological concerns of Husserlian philosophy, in other words, very often become the 'content' of literature for phenomenological criticism (Eagleton 51).

## **B. Hermeneutics**

In support of the phenomenology theoretical framework that the writer will employ, the nature of the study undergone herein requires the involvement of hermeneutics approach. The writer has also decided to employ the approach of Heidegger's hermeneutics. As the story of *The Green Mile* was written in recent past, it is set in a historical time period. And Heidegger's hermeneutics has an insistence of recreating the actual meaning of a text, allowing for a different interpretation of significance. Just what is meant by hermeneutics and why it is named like that will be discussed as follows.

The word hermeneutics has its literal meaning of the science of interpretation. Hermeneutics had its origins in the work of sixteenth-century German

theologians. Literary critics tend to regard the German Romantic, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) as the first major contributor to modern hermeneutic theory. The basic problem that hermeneutics confronts is that while the words of a text written in the past, such as the Bible, remain constant, the context that produced those words no longer exists. Schleiermacher argued that the purpose of hermeneutics was to reconstruct the original context so that the words of the text could be properly understood. Further development of hermeneutics found it on a more scientific basis for the purpose of studying the 'human sciences', that is, the humanities and the social sciences as opposed to the natural sciences (Newton 103).

Hermeneutics would thus focus on 'understanding' (*Verstehen*) rather than on 'explanation' (*Erklaren*), which operated in the natural sciences, since in natural science interpretation was directed at the non-human world. In the 'human sciences', in contrast, interpretation was directed at what had been produced by human beings, so that 'understanding' had to operate in order to bring humanly produced objects, such as texts written in the past, to life.

A major change in hermeneutic thinking took place in this century as a result of the impact of the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, whose work was a major influence on one of the most important figures in modern hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer developed Heidegger's contention that the historical and temporal situation of the interpreter can never be excluded from hermeneutics. Gadamer mentions that the past can be grasped only through relating it to the present (Kisiel 358).

Understanding the past, therefore, involves a 'fusion of horizons' between the text as the embodiment of past experiences and the interests and even prejudices.

of its interpreter in the present and not the reconstruction of the text's original context in its own terms with the interests and prejudices of its interpreter eliminated as far as possible.

There are obvious problems with trying to determine what is going on in somebody's head and then claiming that this is the meaning of a piece of writing. For one thing, a great many things are likely to be going on in an author's head at the time of writing. The American hermeneuticist E. D. Hirsch accepts this, but does not consider that these are to be confused with 'verbal meaning'; to sustain this theory, however, he is forced to make a fairly drastic reduction of all that the author might have meant to what he calls meaning 'types', manageable categories of meaning into which the text may be narrowed, simplified, and sifted by the critic (Eagleton 59).

Our interest in a text can thus only be in these broad typologies of meaning, from which all particularity has been carefully banished. The interpreter must try to reconstruct what Hirsch calls the 'intrinsic genre' of a text, by which he means, roughly, the general conventions and ways of seeing which would have governed the author's meanings at the time of writing. Hirsch states that we –the critics- not our texts, are the makers of meanings we understand, a text being only an occasion for meaning, in itself an ambiguous form devoid of the consciousness where meaning abides.

### C. The Narrator and the Narratee

The narrative described in *The Green Mile* is unique in that the narrator/main character himself tells all the accounts of the events contained within. It is not something rare, to begin with, yet with all the attention given to the dichotomy of



author and its work, it becomes something worthy of attention. The choice of this kind of modern variation on the first-person point of view is the device called stream of consciousness, by which not the spoken or written words of a character but his very thoughts become the medium of the story (Danziger & Johnson 26).

Stream of consciousness can be called the ultimate attempt by a writer to absorb plot into character. It represents a nearly total abdication of the writer's explicit point of view in favor of the character's, so that the mode of development is neither strictly logical nor strictly chronological but purely psychological. In it, the exposition of fact and the development of theme proceed as they would in a person's mind, according to the association of ideas (26).

The narratologist Gerald Prince poses the question: why, when we study novels, do we take such pains to discriminate between the various kind of narrator (omniscient, unreliable, implied author, etc.), but never ask questions about different kinds of person to whom the narrator addresses the discourse. Prince calls this person the 'narratee'. We must not confuse the narratee with the reader. The narrator may specify a narratee in terms of sex ('Dear Madam...'), class ('gentlemen'), situation (the reader in his armchair), race (white), or age (mature).

Evidently actual readers may or may not coincide with the person addressed by the narrator. An actual reader may be a black, male, young factory-worker reading in bed. The narratee is also distinguished from the 'virtual reader' (the sort of reader whom the author has in mind 'when developing the narrative) and the 'ideal reader' (the perfectly insightful reader who understands the writer's every move).

How do we learn to identify naratees? When the novelist Anthony Trollope writes 'Our archdeacon was worldly –who among us is not so?', we understand that

the narratees here are people who, like the narrator, recognize the fallibility of all human beings, even the most pious. There are many 'signals', direct and indirect, which contribute to our knowledge of the narratee. The assumptions of the narratee may be attacked, supported, queried, or solicited by the narrator who will thereby strongly imply the narratee's character. When the narrator apologises for certain inadequacies in the discourse ('I cannot convey this experience in words'), this indirectly tells us something of the narratee's susceptibilities and values. Even in a novel which appears to make no direct reference to a narratee we pick up tiny signals even in the simplest of literary figures (Selden & Widowson 50).

Sometimes the narratee is an important character. For example, in *A Thousand and One Nights* the very survival of the narrator, Scheherazade, depends on the continued attention of the narratee, the caliph; if he loses interest in her stories, she must die. The effect of Prince's elaborated theory is to highlight a dimension of narration which had been understood intuitively by readers but which had remained shadowy and undefined. He contributes to reader-oriented theory by drawing attention to ways in which narratives produce their own 'readers' or 'listeners', who may or may not coincide with actual readers (49-50).

#### D. Horizons of Expectations

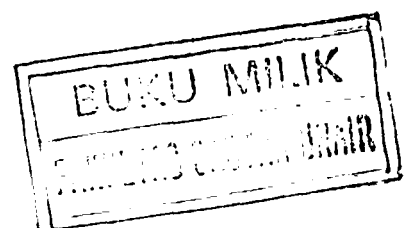
The term 'horizon of expectations', first introduced by an important German exponent of 'reception' theory Hans Robert Jauss, is used to describe the criteria readers use to judge literary texts in any given period. These criteria will help the reader decide how to judge a poem as, for example, an epic or a tragedy or a pastoral; it will also, in a more general way, cover what is to be regarded as poetic

or literary as opposed to unpoetic or non-literary uses of languages. Ordinary writing and reading will work within such a horizon.

The original horizon of expectations only tells us how the work was valued and interpreted when it appeared, but does not establish its meaning finally. In Jauss's view it would be equally wrong to say that a work is universal, that its meaning is fixed forever and open to all readers in any period. 'A literary work is not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in each period. It is not a monument which reveals its timeless essence in a monologue.' This means, of course, that we will never be able to survey the successive horizons which flow from the time of a work down to the present day, and then, with an Olympian detachment, to sum up the work's final value or meaning. To do so would be to ignore our own historical situation (Selden & Widowson 53).

Our attempts to understand a work will depend on the questions which our own cultural environment allows us to raise. At the same time, we seek to discover the questions which the work itself was trying to answer in its own dialogue with history.

Our present perspective always involves a relationship to the past, but at the same time the past can only be grasped through the limited perspective of the present. But a hermeneutical notion of 'understanding' does not separate knower and object in the familiar fashion of empirical science; rather it views understanding as a 'fusion' of past and present: we cannot make our journey into the past without taking the present with us (54).



## **CHAPTER III**

### **ANALYSIS**