

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

History is a story that captures the events in the past. Today, people are helped by history books as source to know what happened long-ago, yet history books are usually boring and hard to understand. As an alternative way, many people consume history in interesting ways, such as historical novels, cartoons or movies. History is packed into these entertaining works to wipe off the stereotype that history is boring and useless. However, sometimes novels or movies adapt the historical events in creating a controversy when it changes the characters, the places, the plot and the places from the official history.

One example comes from James Ellroy's *The Black Dahlia*, a fiction novel that dramatizes The Black Dahlia murder in late 1940s. Black Dahlia was the popular name of Elizabeth Short, who was an ordinary American woman. She was never famous when she was alive yet her murder could attract attention and curiosity of people until this day. According to FBI record, around 60 years ago, she was found sliced clean in half at the waist by a mother walking her child on January 15, 1947, in Leimert Park, Los Angeles, California. Although there were extensive mutilation and cuts of the body, there was not any drop of blood at

that place, indicating that Short had been killed elsewhere (U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation).

The novel follows Dwight "Bucky" Bleichert, a LAPD officer who was known more for his prowess in the boxing ring than his ability to uphold the law. He met Lee Blanchard at Zoot Suit Riots while he was arresting Tomas Dos Santos, a Mexican-American criminal. After Zoot Suit Riots over, he became the partner of Lee Blanchard. As a well-known and respected officer, Lee Blanchard had a good reputation because he had arrested Bobby De Witt, a native San Bernardino criminal. While investigating another crime, Bucky and Lee were the first officers who responded when the body of Elizabeth Short was found. She had been mutilated and cut in half. Also, her mouth had been slashed open from ear to ear. Bucky and Lee were transferred to the case, and Lee became obsessed in finding the killer. While portraying The Black Dahlia murder case, James Ellroy presents Mexican-American as criminal. Mexican-Americans are portrayed as villains who affiliated with drug-trafficking and robbery, such as Tomas Dos Santos as a drug dealer, Luiz Cruz as a car stealer, and Felix Casco as a drug dealer and affiliated with robbery case. At the end of the story, Bucky revealed the real killer of Elizabeth Short, who previously pretended as a Mexican-American.

This novel becomes the bestselling novel in New York and the author has following awards such as The Best American Mystery Stories in 2002, The Best American Crime Writing in 2005, and The Best

American Noir of the Century in 2011. James Ellroy was born in Los Angeles, California, March 4, 1948. He is the son of Geneva Odelia (née Hilliker) Ellroy, a nurse, and Armand "Lee" Ellroy, an accountant (Ellroy, *My Mother and The Dahlia*). After his parents were divorced, Ellroy and his mother moved to El Monte, California. In June 22, 1958, when Ellroy was 10 years old, his mother was raped, strangled, and murdered by an unknown man. The body was thrown in Public Park in Los Angeles (L.A. Times). This incident changed Ellroy's life become worse. He got depressed, got drunk in underage, engaged in minor crimes shoplifting, involved in house-breaking, involved in burglary, and became homeless. His affection of criminal case leads him to write many crime fictions. Those novels give the light in his dark life, therefore he becomes success and rich. Mostly the novel tells about the adaptation of the actual American Noir, crime fiction that shows the world as an unhappy, violent place in which many unpleasant people live which is produced by American, which engaged with his dark past (Ellroy, *My Mother and The Dahlia*).

Interestingly, The Black Dahlia murder and his mother's murder are similar. Both Short and Ellroy were tragically killed and their bodies were thrown in the public park in Los Angeles. Similar to the issue which appears in the beginning of novel, there was Zoot Suit Riots scandal that happened in 1943, in which it happened in the same era with the Black Dahlia murder. The conflict between Mexicans and white military

personnel happened within several days, and the climax happened when thousands of white servicemen joined the attacks, entering bars and movie houses and assaulting any young Latino males they encountered. Although police accompanied the rioting servicemen, they were ordered not to arrest any of them. After several days, more than 150 people had been injured and police had arrested more than 500 Latinos on charges ranging from rioting, yet the service men just sent back to their bases without any punishment (Pagan 169).

As George Coroian stated, the involvement of U.S. in World War II contributed to the racial tendencies that triggered the riots. US needed the workers in the agricultural and service sectors of the United States to fill the jobs vacated by those who were serving in the military. An agreement was reached by Mexico that the temporary workers from Mexico were brought into the United States, yet Mexican workers were not particularly welcomed by white Americans. As the part of the war struggle, by March 1942, the United States had begun rationing various stuffs. Restrictions on wool had a direct effect on the manufacture of wool suits and other clothing. There were regulations in prohibiting the manufacturing of zoot suits but a network of illegal tailors was continuing to manufacture them. This case triggered the racial tensions. When Mexican American youths were wearing the zoot suits, they were seen as un-American because they deliberately ignored the rationing regulations.

The Zoot Suit Riots are commonly associated with the Sleepy Lagoon murder, which happened in August 1942. The Sleepy Lagoon was the name of the larger reservoir outside the city of Los Angeles. On the night of August 1, 1942, zoot-suiters were involved in a fight at a party near the Sleepy Lagoon. The next morning one of the partygoers, José Díaz, was died. There was a public protest against the zoot-suiters which pushed by the local newspapers. During the period from 1942 to 1943, the media news continued to portray the zoot-suiters as dangerous gang members who were capable of murdering. Because of the news reports, people began to believe that the Mexican American youths, particularly the zoot-suiters, tended to commit to the crime. (Coroian)

According to the National Household Survey Canada, United States is the second largest Mexican community in the world after Mexico and Canada is as the third. Los Angeles has the highest population of Mexican in United States. This population explosions triggered by the illegal immigrant who causes American anger. Furthermore, since 1980s, those illegal immigrants have also become the transporters for cocaine in the United States (FBI). Drug organizations in Mexico are predominately involved in cultivating marijuana and opium. However, Mexican drug organizations keep a high position in the cocaine market that was formerly dominated by Colombian drug cartels, therefore it opened the chance for Mexican groups to dominate the drug trafficking market. In the late of 1980s, Mexican traffickers were middlemen for the Colombian cartels.

Traffickers would receive the shipments of cocaine in northern Mexico, smuggle the drugs across the border, and leave stashes in specified locations where Colombian distributors would retrieve the cocaine and transport it to U.S. This case leads a bad stereotype of Mexican descent in U.S. (Finckenauer 11)

To resist the Mexican who is stereotyped as criminal, American utters resentment and propagates bad stereotypes. Due to the increasing number of immigrants, American also increasingly ignites in anger. In 1940s, the first Mexican racism riots known as Zoot Suit Riots happened. After this riot, Mexican and American conflicts were unstoppable. Bloody Christmas happened in 1950s, when a group of young Mexican-Americans were beaten by police officers brutally (Escobar 171). 20 years later, in 1976 three Mexican-Americans were kidnapped, stripped, and hogtied; one had his feet burned (Miller 151). Because of the racial issues between Mexican-American and American often come out to public, the writer needs to uncover any issues of racism against a particular race which implicitly constructed in the novel. Sometimes, we do not realize about something in the text which identifies a particular race as good or bad. By this study, the writer hopes to realize the reader's awareness of racism.

Besides, there is a study by Jessica Wren Butler in 2010 of *The Black Dahlia* novel using Gender approach. This study compares *The Black Dahlia* with another novel entitled *Black Money* by Ross MacDonald. This study analyzes how the women in these novels are

constructed as passive consumption objects by the male gaze and constructed by male discourse. The difference between the study above and the writer's research is the theory itself. Butler uses Gender and the writer's research applies New Historicism. Moreover, the writer wants to reveal Mexican-American sentiment issue within this novel, yet Butler finds the femininity through crime fiction novel.

Thus, the murders of Jean Ellroy and *The Black Dahlia* are similar, therefore the writer assumes that the author used *The Black Dahlia* murder as the representation of his mother. Not only telling about the murder, the novel of James Ellroy also depicts the sentiment against Mexican-Americans. These cases lead the writer to analyze the novel deeper and to propose several statements of the problem to get the motives of the author.

1.2. Statements of the Problem

Based on the introduction above, the writer develops the statements of the problem as follow:

1. How is the representation of James Ellroy's mother murder in *The Black Dahlia* novel?
2. How does the author's subjectivity reflect the racial sentiment against Mexican-American?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

By following the statements of the problem above, the objectives of the study can be decided as:

1. To analyze the representation of James Ellroy's mother murder in *The Black Dahlia* novel.
2. To reveal the author's subjectivity that reflects the racial sentiment against Mexican-American.

1.4. Scope and Limitation

For a more comprehensive analysis, a scope and limitation will be applied in this study. The writer concerns on analyzing a novel entitled *The Black Dahlia* by James Ellroy, which focuses on historical incidents within the novel such as The Black Dahlia murder and Zoot Suit Riots. The writer also tries to reveal the representation of the author's mother murder which reflected in *The Black Dahlia* character. Besides, this study focuses on Mexican-American sentiment that the author built in the novel.

In order to analyze this novel deeper, the writer uses New Historicism theory. Moreover, the writer assumes that this theory is appropriate to be used as the primary tool in analyzing this novel. In applying New Historicism's, the writer needs to compare the similarities and dissimilarities between the official history, the unofficial history and the story in the novel to obtain the "new history" that the authors want to built in their work. Thus, this study is supported by official history of The

Black Dahlia murder which just focuses on the similarities and disimilarities of The Black Dahlia murder depicted in the novel. The writer also discovers the official history of the author's mother murder and focuses on the similarities and disimilarities of The Black Dahlia character, with the purposes to reveal the representation of the author's mother murder. Biography of the author is also needed as a supporting material to analyze this study.

As the opening case of this novel, Zoot Suit Riots becomes the important part to support the statements of the problem. The writer will compare the similarities and disimilarities between the official history of Zoot Suit Riots and Zoot Suit Riots depicted in the story of *The Black Dahlia*. Besides, out of the case of The Black Dahlia murder, Mexican-Americans are often portrayed as criminals. Therefore, the writer concerns in Mexican-Americans sentiment built in this novel. By using New Historicism theory, the writer hopes that it can examine the Mexican-American sentiment depicted in this novel and relate it to the author's mother murder.

1.5. Significance of the Study

Some literary works often represent a particular history inside its text. Through the text, people may obtain the information at particular time and place reflected in the literary work. Historical-theme novel can help the people to know many things happened in the past. This study

which analyzes James Ellroy's *The Black Dahlia* based on the new historical perspective behind official history. In this study, the writer discusses about the representation of the author's mother murder represented as The Black Dahlia in this novel. Beside, Mexican-Americans are repeatedly portrayed as criminals through this novel. By analyzing Mexican-Americans image which the author built in this novel, this study is expected to raise reader's awareness of racism towards particular race. The writer expects to find the author's motive to show the different viewpoint of the history.

The result of the analysis is expected that the reader can get the motives of the author which give different perspective in presenting the history of his mother murder. In addition, this study contributes to adding a research particularly at the English Department of Universitas Airlangga. This research is expected to be a future reference for students who would like to apply theory of New Historicism or to concern with racial issues, particularly in literary works.

1.6. Theoretical Background

To analyze this novel, the writer applies New Historicism to gain a deep analysis. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, New Historicism appeared as a contradiction to New Criticism which rejects the author and historical background of the literary works. New historicism believes that author's background, historical background, and time period of the novel

have big effects to the literary works. The social and political condition during the period when the author writes the novel will influence how the author perceives the events in the past.

Tyson stated that history is always unstable and dynamic, there is no universal spirit of an age because history made by different human produce different story too. Therefore, all historical analysis is subjective, historians must reveal the ways they have been positioned, by their own cultural experience, to interpret history (285).

According to Michael Foucault as quoted in Bressler's *Literary Criticism*, history is the complex interrelationship of a variety discourses, the various ways such as artistic, social, political, and so on that people think and talk about their world (220). It means that in order to interpret historical events we must look from another view such as social-political aspects and other aspects by using our own bias to analyze historical issues.

To analyze the issue, this study uses New Historicism by Stephen Greenblatt. The writer chooses two particular of Greenblatt's New Historicism sub-theory, namely Representation to find the representation of the author's mother murder and Subjectivity to reveal the subjectivity of author through Mexican-American sentiment which will be explained deeper in Chapter 2.

1.7. Method of the Study

In order to conduct the analysis of *The Black Dahlia* novel by using New Historicism; the writer applies qualitative research method. This includes data source, data collection and data analysis. Data sources such is from the primary data which are the novel entitled *The Black Dahlia* written by James Ellroy in 1987 and the official history of The Black Dahlia murder, Zoot Suit Riots scandal, Jean Ellroy (James Ellroy's mother) murder, Anti Mexican-American sentiment, and biography of the author. The writer will choose quotations from the text as evidence and as data of analysis. Furthermore, the writer also uses secondary sources such as books, journals, articles, and internet articles that are related to the subject of this study. Then, in collecting the data, the writer will use close reading method.

To analyze the issue, the writer will approach several steps. Firstly is finding the historical events that occur in the text, which are the Black Dahlia murder, Zoot Suit Riots, Jean Ellroy's murder and Anti Mexican-American sentiment. The writer will also find out the relevance of the historical events to the text. Then, the writer will search author's biography that relevant to text which included his personal family background and also political background from various sources such as books, interview, and journals. New Historicism theory by Stephen Greenblatt is applied as the primary tool to analyze the issue. The writer will find the similarities and disimilarities between the official history of Black Dahlia murder and

the official history of Jean Ellroy murder, then find the similarities and disimilarities of the story in novel and Zoot Suit Riots, and also try to examine Mexican-American sentiment that reflect within the novel. Lastly, the writer will uncover the author's subjectivity related to Mexican-American sentiment.

1.8. Definition of Key Terms

- Black Dahlia murder* : The popular unsolved murder in 1947 which killed Elizabeth Short in nude mutilated body.
- Bloody Christmas* : An incident of a group of young Mexican-Americans were beaten brutally by LAPD.
- Mexican-American* : Americans of full or partial Mexican descent.
- The Sleepy Lagoon murder* : The murder of a young Mexican-American in the largest reservoir outside the city of Los Angeles which called The Sleepy Lagoon.
- Zoot Suit* : A flamboyant long coat with baggy pegged pants, a pork pie hat, a long key chain, and shoes with thick soles which refer Mexican-American youth culture.