

New Historicism Analysis in A Christmas Carol Novella by Charles Dickens

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ABSTRACT : This study discusses the analysis of the novel by Charles Dickens entitled A Christmas Carol using the theory of New Historicism. The analysis was carried out using the literature review method. This study used the documentation method for the data collection techniques. This technique includes several steps such as reading the novel as a whole, marking the necessary quotations, and classifying the data. The discussion in this study will discuss the analysis of the novel by describing several aspects such as the author's world background, the historical-cultural environment of the text, and the inner world of the text. The results of the study show that from all that Dickens describes in A Christmas Carol, it is clear that this novel is a form of Dickens' harsh criticism of the government. The Victorian government ignored the rights of its citizens and the right to education for children. In addition, A Christmas Carol provides a new understanding that what is written in history is not necessarily accurate. It could be that the stakeholders made the historical record according to their wishes and interests. The Victorian era, known for its glory, had many dark sides, and Dickens managed to express them well and on target.

Keywords - A Christmas Carol, New Historicism, literary criticism, Charles Dickens, Novella

1. INTRODUCTION

Every nation always has its historical record. According to the Cambridge Advanced Learner's dictionary, history is the study of records and events in the past that are mutually recognized, especially around specific events, times, countries, or subjects. Based on historical background, many writers raised historical events into literary work. For this reason, history and literature have a relationship with each other. This statement follows the opinion of Wellek and Warren (1970) that literary works can be considered as a chronological arrangement of works and can be categorized as part of a historical process (Wellek & Warren, 1970).

This is also in line with the basic theory of New Historicism put forward by Stephen Greenblatt. This theory was first developed in 1980 in Germany and Europe. Sourced from the New World Encyclopedia page, New Historicism is an approach to literary criticism which believes that a literary work is a product of time, place, and circumstances during the historical process (NWE Contributors, 2015). In essence, the new Historicism always involves a critical analysis of the relationship between literature and history (Erisman, 2014). The new historicism theory also argues that literary works are always related to social, political, and economic praxis because these things are part of literature. For this reason, new historicism often biases literary and non-literary works (Ali & Otoluwa, 2021).

Charles John Huffam Dickens, most famously known as Charles Dickens, was an English writer and social critic. He managed to write several books with high sales and create some world-famous fictional characters so that he is known as one of the greatest writers during the Victorian era (Black, et al., 2007). One of his novels that remains very popular is a novel entitled *A Christmas Carol*. The novel tells the story of Ebenezer Scrooge. He is an old miser who is visited by the ghost of his former business partner Jacob Marley and the spirits of the past, present, and future. The visit made Scrooge change into a better person. This novel has even succeeded in inspiring many people to do good.

According to Michael Slater, a biographer of Charles Dickens, the novel *A Christmas Carol* is a form of Dickens' response to the government's attitude and the large number of ruling classes in the 1840s. Dickens rejects the fundamental belief that the poor are a problem and not a person to be helped. This unsettling belief was widespread in Victorian society (Celestine, 2021). On this polemic, Charles Dickens decided to write a satirical literary work. Instead of writing enjoyable literary works without bringing social elements, Dickens was passionate about making this novel. Some of the events and characters in this novel are even inspired directly by actual events and real people.

Christmas Carol was first published in London by Chapman & Hall in 1843 with John Leech as an illustrator. Charles Dickens finished this novel only in six weeks. In addition to telling the story of Ebenezer Scrooge in the story, *A Christmas Carol* presents a gloomy and gray picture of London in the Victorian era. There is almost no image of the sun in the built setting. Another highlighted picture is heavy snow that falls throughout the day, and the city is full of fog and factory smoke.

This study tries to analyze the novel entitled *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens using the theory of New Historicism. The data source in this research comes from Charles A. Dickens' novella entitled *A Christmas Carol*. This novella was chosen because of the author's success in packaging social conditions into a reading that has many sides, ranging from humor and sadness to fear that can flip the hearts of its readers, as well as being able to knock on the hearts of readers to do good.

2. METHOD

This study uses a library research method. Library research is research that collects data by collecting data from various works of literature. Library research is not limited to books but can also be in the form of documentation materials, magazines, journals, and newspapers. This library research emphasizes finding various theories, principles, opinions, ideas, and so on that can be used for the analysis of the object to be studied. (Zed, 2004). Data collection techniques in this study use the documentation method. The steps of data collection in this study are:

1. Reading the novel *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens.
2. Record data in the form of sentences or paragraphs following the study's objectives.
3. Classification of data by collecting data on literary works by purpose study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Authors' World Background

In his childhood, Charles Dickens lived in poverty with his family. He had to drop out of school at the age of 12 because his father, John Dickens, went to prison due to debts accumulated that were not paid (Pope-Hennessy, 1945). After three years of working to help the family's economy, Dickens continued his education. Before becoming a famous writer, young Dickens worked as a journal editor for about 20 years. He also wrote about 15 novels and hundreds of short stories. Dickens also wrote non-literary articles containing criticism and campaigns calling for educational rights, socio-economic conditions, and labor. The poverty he experienced as a child also made Dickens grow into a demanding person, tireless, and full of enthusiasm to highlight the reform of socio-economic conditions, especially labor. The harsh life of his youth later influenced all of his fiction and essays (Forster, 2005).

One of the famous literary fictions by Charles Dickens, which implies a lot of socio-economic and labor commentary and criticism, is the novel "A Christmas Carol." The story's setting in this novel is inspired mainly by the accurate picture of the pathetic life in London in the Victorian era. Through this novel, Dickens managed to at least convey the socio-economic and labor conditions at that time well without criticizing them directly through pamphlets or non-literary articles.

3.2 The Historical-Cultural Environment of the Text

A Christmas Carol was written in 1843 during the Victorian era, where this era lasted between 1837-1901 AD. In the field of culture, the Victorian era was a transition from the rationalism of George's era to romanticism and mysticism, which had religious, social, and artistic links (Dixon, 2010). In international relations, the Victorian era is famous for an extended period of peace or commonly called the Pax Britannica, economic, social, industrial prosperity, and the glory of the British colonial empire in the international sphere (Tholfsen, 1961).

Behind all these triumphs, this era has a dark side that its national citizens only feel. At that time, London was transformed into a large capital city with the construction of factories and rapid population growth. From 1840- to 1860, London was inhabited by around 2-3 million people, which simultaneously turned into a city with various problems such as poverty, crime, unemployment, exploitation of child labor, and pollution (Putri, 2019). These phenomena are depicted directly in the novel A Christmas Carol. In this novel, there is almost no sun in the story's setting. The picture in the story shows a gloomy and gray London, with snow falling all day and a city full of fog and smoke. The picture appears in the following quote:

Quote 1

'It was cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy withal: and he could hear the people in the court outside, go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm them. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already — it had not been light all day — and candles were flaring in the windows of the neighboring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms. To see the dingy cloud come drooping down, obscuring everything, one might have thought that Nature lived hard by, and was brewing on a large scale.' (Page 5-6)

Poverty in this novel is described by many poor people who are hungry, cold, and unhappy even on Christmas Eve. This phenomenon is shown in the following quote:

Quote 2:

'...round which a party of ragged men and boys were gathered: warming their hands and winking their eyes before the blaze in rapture.' (Page 12)

At that time, Charles Dickens was not the only writer who made Christmas-themed literature. Some of the stories and essays about Christmas that caught Dickens' attention before writing A Christmas Carol, among others, were Washington Irving's works collected into one book entitled "The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent." The book also includes four essays on the Old English Christmas traditions that Irving experienced (Kelly, 2003). Both Dickens and Irving believe that a nostalgic British Christmas celebration can help restore the social harmony they feel is slowly missing from the modern world (Restad, 1996).

In the early days of the novel, A Christmas Carol was published, the public, especially literary critics, received this work very well. One of the weekly newspapers, The Illustrated London News, described that Dickens wrote this novel very impressively. This is evidenced by a sincere heart, pleasant humor, and a very gentle human spirit. All of that manages to make readers have a good sense of humor with themselves, with others, with the seasons they are in, and with the writers. One literary critic from the literary magazine The Athenaeum even stated that this novel was able to make its readers laugh and cry, to move their hearts to charity (Restad, 1996).

In 1844, this novel was widely adapted into stage plays in later times (Standiford, 2008). For the first time, in 1901, the novel was adapted into a silent black-and-white film entitled 'Scrooge, or Marley's Ghost' (Douglas-

Fairhurst, 2006). Years later, even after the death of Charles Dickens, this novel is still well received by the public by having gone through many reprints to date. In fact, in 2009, this novel was adapted into a 96-minute 3D film. The animated film *A Christmas Carol* was officially released on Disney Digital 3-D and IMAX 3-D on November 6, 2009, by Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures. The premiere premiered in London to coincide with the annual Oxford Street and Regent Street Christmas lights. Reporting from Box Office Mojo records, this film achieved success by having earned 325 million US dollars during its run (Koesno, 2021).

Ruth Glancy, a professor of English literature, stated that the most significant impact of *A Christmas Carol* is the influence felt by each reader (Glancy, 1985). As early as 1874, *The Gentleman's Magazine* attributed the increase in charitable donations in England to this novel (Harrison, 2008). In 1874, after reading Dickens's Christmas story, Robert Louis Stevenson, a Scottish poet, vowed to give generously to those in need (Deacy, 2016). Likewise, in 1867, a businessman from the United States was deeply moved after attending this storytelling performance. After the event, he permanently closed the factory on Christmas and sent a turkey to his employees (Douglas-Fairhurst, 2006). This is just like what Scrooge did to Bob Cratchit, which is indicated in the quote:

Quote 3

'I'll send it to Bon Cratchit's.' whispered Scrooge, rubbing his hands, and splitting with a laugh. 'He shan't know who sends it. It's twice the size of Tiny Tim. Joe Miller never made such a joke as sending it to Bob's will be.' (Page 104)

3.3 The Internal World of the Text

Many discourses are described in the novel *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. The first discourse that appears is about the condition of the city, which is gloomy, foggy, and without sun. As previously mentioned, this discourse describes the original conditions of how people in the Victorian era lived their daily lives, especially during winter. Other quotes that demonstrate this condition are:

Quote 4

"Foggier yet, and colder! Piercing, searching, biting cold. If the good Saint Dunstan had but nipped the Evil Spirit's nose with a touch of such weather as that, instead of using his familiar weapons, then indeed he would have roared to lusty purpose. The owner of one scant young nose, gnawed and mumbled by the hungry cold as bones are gnawed by dogs, stooped down at Scrooge's keyhole to regale him with a Christmas carol: but at the first sound of

'God bless you, merry gentleman! May nothing you dismay!'

Scrooge seized the ruler with such energy of action that the singer fled in terror, leaving the keyhole to the fog and even more congenial frost." (Page 12-13)

Another discourse is the description of the poor socio-economic situation, where even small children are forced to work all day a week for a small wage. The exploitation of children is illustrated through the image of a boy who has to sew on Christmas Day. The boy was even punished with five shillings for being caught drunk. The boy's behavior should be punished, but that does not mean a fine because his income alone is minimal. This illustration is stated in the following quote:

Quote 5

"...and even the little tailor, whom he had fined five shillings on the previous Monday for being drunk and bloodthirsty in the streets, stirred up to-morrow's pudding in his garret..." (Page 12)

In addition, there were also discourses on labor. This is precisely illustrated directly by a Scrooge employee named Bob Cratchit. Dickens explained that Cratchit worked all day for a small fee without a day off. Even though it is Christmas, Scrooge would not give him a day off. Scrooge said that it was another way to pick a man's pocket. Here, Cratchit is the image of most of the London workers at that time. They are overworked but do not get a decent wage. The following quote will demonstrate the discourse:

Quote 6

'You'll want all day to-morrow, I suppose?' said Scrooge.

'If quite convenient, sir.'

'It's not convenient,' said Scrooge, 'and it's not fair. If I was to stop half-a-crown for it, you'd think yourself ill-used, I'll be bound?'

The clerk smiled faintly.

'And yet,' said Scrooge, 'you don't think me ill-used, when I pay a day's wages for no work.'

The clerk observed that it was only once a year.

'A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December!' said Scrooge, buttoning his great-coat to the chin. (Page 13)

All of these discourses Dickens describes as an absolute condition of the living conditions of people in London in the Victorian era. Some of the characters in this novel are more or less adopted from the original figure, like the character Tiny Tim, the son of Bob Cratchit, who was inspired by his nephew, Harry Burnett, who has a disability. Burnett was five years old when Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol*. The other characters are Ignorance and Want, who hide behind the cloak of the Present Christmas Ghost. Dickens was inspired by the children he saw on a trip to a school in the East End (Ackroyd, 1990).

A Christmas Carol blatantly shows that historical records do not always go hand in hand with what happened. It is evident from the social conditions raised by Dickens, which is in stark contrast to historical records, which state that the Victorian era was precisely the peak of Great Britain's glory. Not much history discusses the sufferings of British nationals, even the various polemic problems they face.

From all that Dickens describes in *A Christmas Carol*, it is evident that this novel is a form of Dickens' strong criticism of the government. The government in the Victorian era ignores the rights of its citizens and the right to children's education. Until now, this novel is often considered the pioneer of the Christmas celebration, which is full of religious and humanitarian elements.

4. CONCLUSION

The novel by Charles Dickens entitled *A Christmas Carol* is a form of protest and criticism from Dickens to the government in the Victorian era. Dickens assessed that the government at that time was very negligent and neglected the welfare of its citizens. In addition to criticizing the government, *A Christmas Carol* also became a weapon for Dickens to raise awareness of the dangers of neglecting poor children in London. Dickens' concern is that if poor children in London continue to be neglected, what is most worrying is that they will grow up to be dangerous individuals, even inheriting a culture of violence and crime. From this background, the story in the novel *A Christmas Carol* depicts the gloomy city of London in the middle of the Victorian era, which was filled with poverty, unemployment, crime, and pollution.

In addition, *A Christmas Carol* provides a new understanding that what is written in history is not necessarily accurate. It could be that the stakeholders made these historical records according to their wishes and interests. The Victorian era, famous for its glory, turned out to have many dark sides, and Dickens managed to express it well and right on target.

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