

READING HISTORY IN HISTORICAL LITERATURE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE HISTORICAL NOVEL *KALBU QALHA*

(Membaca Sejarah dalam Karya Sastra: Analisis Novel Sejarah Kalbu Qalha)

Mohamed Nazreen Shahul Hamid
mohamednazreen25@gmail.com

School of Humanities,
Universiti Sains Malaysia.

Published on: 3 June 2019

To cite: Mohamed Nazreen Shahul Hamid. (2019). Reading history in historical literature: An analysis of the historical novel *Kalbu Qalha*. *Malay Literature* 32(1), 16-36.

Abstract

History has long been a source of inspiration for creative works in the effort of writers to produce quality literature. This is because there exist truths in history that can be conveyed to readers or audiences for the purpose of joint contemplation. In this article, historical events are examined through Amelia Hashim's latest novel, *Kalbu Qalha* [The Heart of Qalha], which is set against the history of Kedah, from its early beginnings through Siamese occupation and finally British interference. The analysis of the novel in this article employs the theoretical framework of Lukács to show that history can be read through literary works. This novel successfully exposes history and little-known historical figures to its readership, proving that historical literature is not mere fiction.

Keywords: *Kalbu Qalha*, historical novel, history, Amelia Hashim, Kedah

Abstrak

Sejarah sejak sekian lama telah menjadi satu daripada bahan sumber kreatif pengarang dalam usaha menghasilkan karya sastra yang

bermutu. Hal ini dikatakan demikian kerana dalam sejarah wujud kebenaran yang dapat disampaikan kepada pembaca atau khalayak untuk dijadikan renungan bersama. Dalam artikel ini peristiwa yang berlaku dalam sejarah diteliti menerusi novel mutakhir Kalbu Qalha karya Amelia Hashim yang berlatarkan sejarah Kedah dari awal pembukaannya, penjajahan Siam dan seterusnya campur tangan Inggeris. Analisis novel dalam artikel ini memanfaatkan kerangka teori yang diperkenalkan oleh Lukacs bagi menunjukkan bahawa sejarah dapat dibaca melalui karya sastera. Novel ini didapati berjaya mengangkat sejarah dan tokoh yang tidak diketahui umum kepada khalayaknya. Hal ini membuktikan bahawa karya sastera bukannya hasil rekaan semata-mata.

Kata kunci: Kalbu Qalha, Novel Sejarah, Sejarah, Amelia Hashim, Kedah

INTRODUCTION

In the context of literature, the writer's imagination generally plays an important part in the production of a creative work. This is true especially in the production of fiction since fiction is a literary genre that deals with stories told in narrative form based on the writer's imagination. The history of fiction can be observed in literary works such as myths, legends and folktales, which were transmitted orally by storytellers. Fiction in written form has its origin in the Muslim world of the 12th century CE, which saw the production of such works as *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* by Ibn Tufayl from Andalusia. The next development took place in the Western world in the late 17th and 18th centuries. England, for example, saw the emergence of such works as *Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe, 1719), which was modelled on *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, as well as *Moll Flanders* (Defoe, 1722), *Pamela* (Richardson, 1740) and *Joseph Andrews* (Fielding, 1742). Their emergence is considered to have initiated the trend for realistic novels (Mohamad Saleeh, 2005, p. 23). Matters concerning humanity and society began to find a place or attract the attention of writers to be dealt with from various angles, such as history, politics, psychology, economy and religion. This proves that literary works are not created in an empty vacuum, based solely on imagination. The writers' environment often influences their writing. A writer's creation, with its particular images, is a reflection of the influence

of his entire cultural background. One influence is history, which acts as an inspiration for writers.

Some writers draw on historical figures or events, resulting in the production of historical fiction, which includes historical novels. According to Hutcheon (1992, p. 113), the historical novel is a type of modern fiction modelled on historical writings or historiography. For Hutcheon, history is certainly an inspiration that can influence the writing of a historical novel. Apart from this, Bram (2016, p. 11) has said, “history is a good medicine ... visits to the past are good for us”. History is “a good medicine” because through it, people learn about past mistakes, such as learning from historical events that have brought about the ruin of entire civilizations. Past history is also important in determining patterns of thinking, lifestyles and cultural practices as people turn to history as a mirror for facing the future. Therefore, the blending of literature and history is a good move to disseminate both to the public, so that they may know their communal history.

All these can be traced in the local historical novel titled *Kalbu Qalha* [*The Heart of Qalha*] (2017), the latest novel by Amelia Hashim, published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. Amelia is a prolific writer who hails from Guar Chempedak, Gurun, Kedah. She has produced a variety of works, especially novels, short stories and plays. In her writing career thus far, she has won several awards and competitions, among them being: the Hadiah Sastera Perdana Negara [Premier Literary Award] 2013 (for the collection *Kumpulan Drama: Mimpi Laila*); the Anugerah Oskar Seri Angkasa [Seri Angkasa Oscar Award] 1989 for best script for the drama “Ini Bukan Duniaku” [“This is Not My World”]; and the Consolation Prize of the Hadiah Sastera Utusan Public Bank [Utusan–Public Bank Literature Award] 1990 (for “Penghujung Persimpangan” [“The End of the Crossroads”]). In recognition of her contributions, she was awarded the Bintang Kebaktian Masyarakat (BKM) medal by His Royal Highness, the Sultan of Kedah, in 2015. For the production of *Kalbu Qalha*, the writer took 10 years just for the collection of reference materials. It took her one year to arrange the materials in chronological order and to complete her writing. She tracked down historical sites and transliterated old manuscripts. She also visited old mausoleums as well as archaeological sites to find proof of certain events in Kedah’s history. With this as an introduction, this article will be a comprehensive analysis of Amelia’s novel, *Kalbu Qalha*, based on the theoretical framework concerning historical novels as introduced by Lukács in *The Historical Novel* (1962).

THE HISTORICAL NOVEL: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Generally, historical novels are creative works that use historical material or real historical events as their background. This definition comes close to that given by *Webster's dictionary* (1961, p. 1079), which states that “a historical novel is a novel having its setting in a period of history and usually introducing some historical personage and events”. Although this definition is brief, its meaning cannot be ignored because this definition outlines an important characteristic of the historical novel that concerns the aspect of the setting of historical novels, which is linked to history as well as historical figures and events.

What is clear from this is that historical novels are unlike other imaginative novels or works of fiction that are not produced with reference to history. The presence of the word “history” itself already determines that such novels include provable facts. The presence of the word “novel”, on the other hand, leaves room for imagination and creativity. In line with this view, Allen (1944, pp. 119-120) explains that the facts presented in a historical novel should run parallel to the historical facts that form the basis of its plot:

... his face must be congenial to the kind of past he has undertaken to depict ... His function is to produce a complete illusion in the reader's mind.

Leisy (1950, p. 8) asserts that “historical fiction is concerned with historical truth, whatever that is”. Apart from this, MacGarry and White (1963, p. 63) also offer a brief opinion in classifying a work as a historical novel: “Fiction is historical if it includes reference to customs, conditions, identifiable persons, or events in the past”. This means that a work of fiction is considered to be historical if it contains customs, well-known personages and past events. Apart from this, Hollman and Harmon (1976, p. 238) offer a more comprehensive classification, stating that a historical novel is

[a] novel that reconstructs a personage, a series of events, a movement, or the spirit of a past age and pays the debt of serious scholarship to the facts of the age being recreated.

It is clear from this that their opinion is that a historical novel brings back to life certain personages, series of events, actions or the spirit of the past, together with a detailed knowledge of that era.

Based on the different opinions stated above, it can be concluded that a historical novel is not merely one that includes a historical personage as a character in a purely fictitious narrative. Historical events should not merely function as the backdrop for the actions of fictitious characters. The two—characters and events—should complement each other. In short, a historical novel should contain various historical events that are brought to life by historical figures or events that can be proven to have happened within a setting of time and place that is historically accurate or coincides with actual events. Therefore, novels that only include historical personages but without a role or uninvolvement in the events should not be considered historical novels. The same applies to novels that present historical events but employ fictitious characters in place of actual historical personages. This is in line with the motive behind the writing of a historical novel that, on the whole, is meant to convey information about past events, raise a community's awareness, incite the spirit of defending certain rights and provide information regarding historical events that are unclear (Mohamad Saleh, 2005, p. 101).

In analysing the novel *Kalbu Qalha*, the theoretical framework employed was introduced by Lukács, a literary figure from Hungary. All his life, Lukács produced critical and academic works. His study concerning historical novels was published in 1962 under the title *The Historical Novel*. Basically, this study critically analyses the form, concept and development of the historical novel as literature. Lukács (1962, p. 19) states that the historical novel was an important genre at one point in time, whereby many novelists produced literary works along historical themes or bases:

The historical novel arose at the beginning of the nineteenth century at about the time of Napoleon's collapse. Of course, novels with historical themes are to be found in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries too, and, should one feel inclined, one can treat medieval adaptations of classical history or myth as "precursors" of the historical novel.

As mentioned above, the development of the historical novel in Europe began in the 17th century and developed rapidly in the 18th and 19th centuries. Each writer's novel has a different plot or subject matter. This is

because the work produced depends on environmental factors that influence the writer's ideas in his effort to create characters and a plot suited to the historical theme. Political instability, such as the fall of Napoleon, enables the writer to create historical novels in line with the setting of time and events of the period. As a result, historical novels became more interesting over time, with a variety of historical events treated according to the writers' identity, creativity and sensitivity.

Apart from this, according to Lukács, the writing of historical novels is closely connected to the role of the writer in building a historical novel. The writer is responsible for the historical sources or historical facts that he obtains. The concept of the historical novel must be understood by the writer in presenting characters and characterizations that reflect the personalities of the characters. In fact, the writer also needs to depict the historical events according to the actual historical facts. Lukács (1962, p. 19) emphasizes that:

“The so-called historical novels are historical” only as regards their purely external choice of theme and costume. Not only the psychology of the characters, but the manners depicted are entirely those of the writer's own day.

To strengthen his argument concerning the historical novel, Lukács (1962) listed three main characteristics that are the basis of a good historical novel: firstly, the setting of time and place; secondly, the historical events that are depicted accurately and meaningfully; and, thirdly, the characters and historical personages involved in the historical events. These characteristics can be examined and understood through Figure 1.

Concerning the setting of time and place in the context of a historical novel's production, Lukács (1962, p. 19) states that “its characters as belonging to any concrete time and the portrayal of historical time also affects the portrayal of historical place”. In other words, characters created by the writer are subject to a certain framework or timeline. Historical events presented are also influenced by setting these in a historical place. This means that it is the setting of time and place that differentiates a historical novel from other genres. This is because the depiction of various time and place settings linked to history create the feeling of being in the time and geographical location described by the writer.

The second characteristic of a historical novel, as presented by Lukács (1962, p. 43), is that the historical event is depicted accurately and

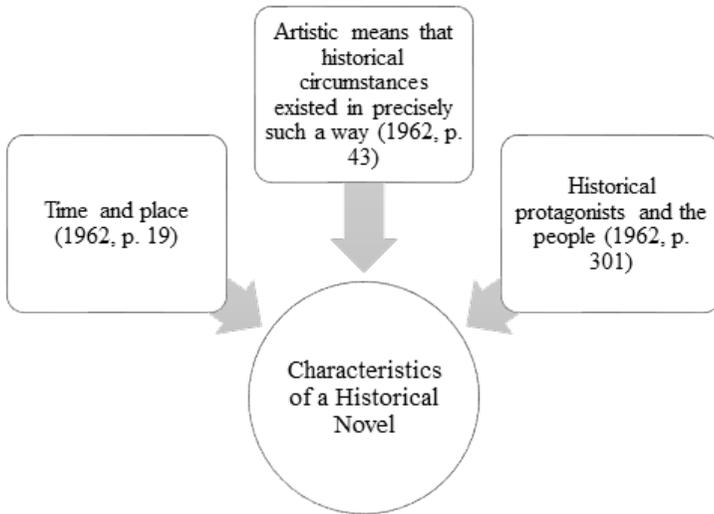


Figure 1 The three characteristics of the historical novel, according to Lukács (1962).

meaningfully: “[T]he historical novel therefore has to demonstrate by artistic means that historical circumstances existed in precisely such and such a way”. Lukács wished to state that historical events display a link with the main theme or idea that the writer wishes to insert in his historical novel. This means that a historical novel must foreground a historical theme through the depiction of events related to it. Apart from this, historical events must be depicted in very artistic ways because history contains valuable lessons that must be preserved.

Next, the historical event selected by the writer as the main idea of his work must be presented accurately. This is meant to preserve the factual accuracy of the historical novel although the writer has composed the work using his creativity. For Lukács (1962, p. 43), the accuracy of facts and historical events must be observed by every writer:

“[A]uthenticity of local colour” is in actual fact this artistic demonstration of historical reality. It is portrayal of the broad living basis of historical events in their intricacy and complexity in their manifold interaction with acting individuals.

Lukács explains that fictionalized historical events are a dash of local colour depicted through historical reality. A historical event that is treated accurately and transparently by the writer of a historical novel is able to depict the uniqueness of a civilization. Each civilization develops in complicated ways and involves the relationship between an individual and his wider surroundings. Therefore, Lukács asserts that the historical events in a narrative must have their own historical value because fictionalized history can represent the local colour that is not present in other societies.

The third characteristic is characters, or historical figures, as well as the people involved in the historical event. The character foregrounded by the writer must be a protagonist who also plays a role as a historical figure. Lukács (1962, p. 301) states that due to “the relations between historical protagonists and the people, it is inevitable that biography should appear as the specific form of the modern historical novel”. Clearly, he believes that characters based on historical personages are a special necessity in the biographical novel or in the modern historical novel. Individual historical figures function to move along historical events based on the setting of a particular time and space. Therefore, historical characters or personages are an important part of the historical novel, as asserted by Lukács (1962, p. 300):

The popularity of the biographical form in the present-day historical novel is due rather to the fact its most important exponents wish to confront the present with great model composition [that] must take on an entirely new structure.

Through the three main characteristics of the historical novel put forward by Lukács, it can be concluded that the production of a historical novel emphasizes the setting of time and place, historical events that are treated creatively and accurately as well as the inclusion of historical figures that are the main actors moving along the plot devised by the writer.

ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL *KALBU QALHA*

Based on the discussion of the theoretical framework above, the analysis of the novel *Kalbu Qalha* is divided into three discussions, that is, setting of time and place, historical events creatively expressed and, finally, historical personages.

Setting

In producing a novel of high cultural value, the first basis is the setting of time and place that is chronologically level with the context under discussion. The setting of time and place, when clearly described by the writer, will successfully depict the ambience and environment suited to the culture and the ways of life of a community at a particular place and time. In fact, it should encompass the historical depiction of the geographical location, which is the exact and specific spatial details. These spaces must be filled or populated by people who have their own customs and ways of life within a certain timeframe. Both these aspects of time and space are interrelated, as mentioned by Lukács earlier (1962, p. 19).

Through this novel, Amelia actually invites her readers to look back towards the ancient history of the Malay kingdom of Kedah. Compared to other local historical novels, this novel is set over a long span of time, beginning in the 2nd century and ending in the 19th century. The writer makes an effort to bring, as much as possible, the historical magnificence of Kedah—called “Qalha” in this novel—to the forefront. The novel begins with the founding of Qalha by Tan Dermadewa and Tun Perkasa approximately in the 2nd century, as composed in the following excerpt:

Sejarah negeri Qalha bermula dengan dua bersaudara, iaitu Tan Dermadewa dan Tun Perkasa, dua pembesar Melayu. Mereka penduduk asal negeri Qalha ini. Mereka telah merencana tampuk pemerintahan dengan rapu; bukan untuk sehari dua tetapi untuk selama-lamanya, sehingga bumi ini hancur. Mereka mahu negeri Qalha selama-lamanya diperintah oleh raja berdaulat dan orang Melayu sebagai tuan.

[The history of Qalha begins with two brothers, Tan Dermadewa and Tun Perkasa, two Malay nobles. They are the original inhabitants of Qalha. They plan the leadership in carefully; not for a day or two but forever, until the days this world is destroyed. They want Qalha to be ruled forever by sovereign kings and the Malays as its lords.]

(Amelia, 2017, p. 2)

After Qalha is successfully established, the fruits of its earth bring the kingdom to a higher position through the arrival of foreign traders. The two clever brothers successfully gain the loyalty of the people. Qalha is ruled

efficiently and solidly. Furthermore, the writer develops the plot of Qalha having its first king, as follows:

“Oleh sebab Raja Gambroon ini ada pengalaman memerintah negeri, baik kita pelawa dia menjadi raja kita!” usul Tan Dermadewa kepada Tun Perkasa. Lalu mereka sepakat memilih Raja Gambroon ini sebagai raja mereka. Pengalaman yang ada pada Raja Gambroon itu diperlukan bagi membina kekuatan bagi membangunkan Qalha.

[“Because Raja Gambroon has some experience reigning over a country, it will be good if we invite him to become our king!” said Tan Dermadewa to Tun Perkasa. So they agreed to choose Raja Gambroon to be their king. The experience that Raja Gambroon had was necessary to build the strength in order for Qalha to develop.]

(Amelia, 2017, p. 10)

Raja Gambroon is said to have come from Gambroon in Persia, and his name is given as Maharaja Derbar Raja. His own kingdom was attacked by the Kurds and, therefore, he and his followers escaped in a large ship and anchored in Qalha. Following this, he is crowned as the first king of Qalha. After his demise, the reign passes to his sons. Several decades later, Qalha becomes an Islamic kingdom, as told in the following excerpt:

“Ya! Baginda terbuka pintu hatinya untuk menerima cahaya Islam pada tahun 1136 Masihi bersamaan dengan 531 Hijrah. Inilah yang ditunggu-tunggu oleh rakyat yang terlebih dahulu menerima Islam. Apabila raja sudah Islam, maka seluruh rakyat itu menerima Islam sebagai pegangan hidupnya. Alhamdulillah...”

[“Yes! His Majesty opened his heart to the light of Islam in the year 1136 CE, the year 531 according to the Hijri calendar. This was what the people who had accepted Islam earlier had been waiting for. When the king became a Muslim, all the people accepted Islam as their way of life. Alhamdulillah...”]

(Amelia, 2017, p. 77)

An Islamic scholar from Yemen, Tuan Syeikh Abdullah bin Tuan Syeikh Ahmad bin Tuan Syeikh Jaafar Quamari, also referred to as Abdullah

al-Yamani, is credited with converting Maharaja Derbar Raja II to Islam and changing his name to Sultan Mudzafar Shah I. Sultan Mudzafar Shah I became the first sultan of Qalha to accept Islam in 1136CE. After this, Qalha is described as continuously developing.

Based on the above discussion and examples, it is clear that the setting of time in *Kalbu Qalha* follows a chronological order. This novel does not digress although the plot moves forward through the narration of Tunku Rahmah to Tunku Anum and Tunku Pengiran, and is then continued through the narration of Tunku Anum. In the earlier chapters, the writer focuses at length on the exposition of how Qalha was founded and received a king. It then continues with how the light of Islam began to shine in Qalha. It then moves on to several attacks (by the Cholas, Portuguese and Aceh) and important events that happen, apart from the kingdom's socio-economy and politics. Finally, the writer leads the reader to explore more deeply the Siamese annexation of Qalha in the 19th century, which is accomplished with the help of the British.

In order to date the events depicted, the writer uses many different references to strengthen the setting of this novel. Among these are: *Al-Tarikh Salasilah Negeri Kedah* [The History of the Origin of Kedah]; *Tawarikh Tanah Melayu* [The History of the Malay Peninsula], *Arkeologi Nusantara* [Archaeology of the Malay Archipelago]; *Kota Seputih* [Fort Seputih]; and the like. No facts were altered by the writer. This novel, as much as possible, uses the references found by the writer. Apart from this, chronology is observed in the use of its setting, which reveals that the writer is influenced by the writing style of the *hikayat*. The writing style of the *hikayat* has long contributed to the traditional concept of history, called historical literature (*sastera sejarah*) by the people of the Malay Archipelago (Siti Hawa, 1998, p. xiv). According to Harun (2000, p. 297), a work that is considered as historical literature should possess at least one if not all of the following characteristics:

- (1) Provide an account of the origin of the kings
- (2) Recount the genealogy of the royal family
- (3) Provide an account of the establishment of the kingdom
- (3) Narrate how Islam first came to that kingdom
- (4) Narrate the condition of the kingdom at its final stage

Kalbu Qalha possesses all of the above characteristics, though the mythological element that can be found in the *hikayat* is absent in this novel. This is because Amelia, the writer, focuses on factual accuracy in her novel. Historical facts must be respected as belonging to the people about whom the story is told. This is explained by Langlois and Seignobos (1966, p. 36):

Historical facts are localised; each belongs to a given time and a given country. If we suppress the time and place to which they belong, they lose their historical character; they now contribute only to the knowledge of universal humanity, as is the case with facts to folk-lore whose origin is unknown ...

As asserted by Lukács, the settings of time and place are interrelated. These two aspects of setting are important in order to bring the atmosphere to life and to provide an accurate depiction about the history that is to be presented in a novel. Without the right place as its setting, characters cannot be brought to life and the historical events talked about will seem strange. In *Kalbu Qalha*, an actual place is used as the setting for the novel. This is clearly seen in the following excerpt, when the writer describes the city or site of ancient Qalha (Amelia, 2017, p. 11):

Mereka perkuatkan sistem pertahanan di empat-empat pintu kuala negeri Qalha, terutama di pintu masuk Sungai Emas dan Sungai Batu melalui kuala Sungai Qilah. Pengkalan Bujang bertukar menjadi kawasan petempatan warga asing pelbagai bangsa. Mereka datang dan bermukim di situ kerana urusan perdagangan. Bukan sehari dua mereka singgah. Kadang-kadang dua tiga tahun mereka menetap di negeri Qalha ini.

[The defences at the four portals of Qalha were reinforced, especially at Sungai Emas and Sungai Batu, which could be reached from the estuary of Sungai Qilah. Pengkalan Bujang became the settlement of various people from foreign lands who came and settled there for trade. They did not merely stay for a day or two. At times, they remained in Qalha for two or three years.]

Historical scholars are familiar with the site of Pengkalan Bujang, which is located in Bedong, Kedah. It is known for the discovery of its *candi* (tomb temple), which is believed to date back to the 10th till the 14th centuries (Zuliskandar, Nik Hassan Shuhaimi & Mazlan, 2012, p. 131). In

fact, Pengkalan Bujang is said to have been the most important entrepôt in the north of the Malay Peninsula at the time. The area around Sungai Batu is a complex of the Bujang Valley civilization that covers a large area exceeding three square kilometres. Its location next to where Sungai Batu and its tributaries flow is unique in itself. The system of its tributaries creates a landscape of islands. The location of Sungai Batu is strategic for all kinds of trade activities as well as defence. The Sungai Batu area is located around 10 kilometres from Sungai Petani and 80 kilometres from Alor Setar. Its location lies among oil palm estates along the Merbok–Semeling road. Therefore, it is clear that the location used as the setting of *Kalbu Qalha* is historically accurate. The writer has been extremely careful in conducting her research and writing. The use of a location that actually existed as the setting for her novel facilitates the reader to imagine it and allows him to visit the area in order to get a “feel” of the surroundings depicted in the novel.

Historical Events Described Accurately and Meaningfully

Generally, the writing of a historical novel requires a writer to select certain important historical events as the main idea of the work, which are then transformed in an interesting way. Shahnnon (1989, p. 53) has said that the events in a story cannot stand on their own and are sequential because they have causes and effects. This is in agreement with Lukács’ definition (1962, p. 43), which is that a historical novel should depict historical events in accurate and meaningful ways. In other words, the events presented by a writer through his narrative enable dry history to be appreciated through masterful storytelling, according to a carefully arranged chronology.

The second characteristic of the historical novel, as put forth by Lukács, is also displayed in *Kalbu Qalha*, which is that the writer presents several important events as recorded in the history of Kedah. Among these are the cessation of Penang to the British and Siamese attacks. In connection with the handing over of Penang, the writer from the very beginning paints Francis Light as a person who was never honest in his dealings with Qalha (Kedah). Amelia (2017, p. 351) retells this event in the following manner:

“Apakah adinda boleh pujuk Tuanku Sultan supaya menyerahkan Pulau Pinang kepada kanda?...Bagi Francis Light, ini memberi dia kecerahan dalam bidang perniagaan. Bukan mudah untuk berjaya. Dia terpaksa bersaing dengan Belanda dan dengan pedagang persendirian sebangsanya.

[“Do you think you could persuade His Majesty the Sultan to hand over Penang to me, dear?” ... For Francis Light, this brightened his business outlook. Success never came easily. He had to compete against the Dutch and against merchants who were his own countrymen.]

Francis Light’s fervent wish came true when Penang was handed to the British in 1786. This event is hard to accept and gave rise to two poems expressing the sorrow of the local populace, which are still remembered today. Amelia (2017, pp. 378-379) depicts this as follows:

Mereka gunakan Francis Light untuk mengumpan nendaku. Namun, nendaku tahu niat buruk mereka. Rundingan itu tertangguh-tangguh, terseret sehingga nendaku mangkat. Namun, lapan tahun selepas ayahanda kepada Tunku Pengiran memerintah Qalha, rundingan itu menjadi kenyataan. Pulau Pinang diserahkan kepada Francis Light untuk ditukar wajah menjadi pelabuhan pada tahun 1786. Peristiwa itu menjadikan cerdik pandai Qalha mencipta pantun yang berbunyi:

*Pulau Pinang bandar baharu,
Kapitan Light menjadi raja;
Jika dikenang zaman dahulu,
Jatuh terderai si air mata.*

*Gerdum gerdam kapal di Tanjung,
Nampak dari Pulau Jerjak;
Hendak terbang bukannya burung,
Hendak menangis bukannya budak.*

[They used Francis Light to bait my grandfather. However, grandfather could see what they were up to. The negotiations were delayed over and over again, until my grandfather passed away. Then, eight years after the father of Tunku Pengiran began ruling Qalha, the negotiations became reality. Penang was handed over to Francis Light in 1786 to be turned into a port. This event inspired the intellectuals of Qalha at the time to compose the following poems:

*Pulau Pinang is a port new-founded,
Captain Light is its new king;
When times of old are now remembered,
Tears freely to flow begin.*

Cannons sound from the ships near the city,
Easily seen from Jerjak isle;
We are not birds that can fly to safety,
We are not children who can cry.]

Clearly, the writer depicts the cessation of Penang to the British in an accurate way, including the parties involved and the year of its handing over. She also cleverly adds meaning to the event by depicting its aftermath. The people of Qalha do not accept the taking of the island and feel a great sorrow about this event.

Next, the writer uses her imagination to develop the historical facts concerning an attack by the Siamese. History records that the Siamese attacked Kedah on 12 November 1821. However, the real atmosphere at the time of the attack cannot be conveyed by a purely historical text. The writer, as evident in the following excerpt (2017, p. 503), uses her imagination in the best possible way to depict the Siamese attack:

Tentera Siam terus mengamuk. Menembak perahu-perahu dengan meriam. Habis ditenggelamkan perahu-perahu yang tertambat di Kuala Bahang. Rumah-rumah penduduk dibakar. Loji-loji simpanan barang dagangan dirompak kemudian dimusnahkan. Mereka mengikat rakyat yang ditawan untuk dibawa balik ke Ligur. Yang melawan habis dibunuh.

[The Siamese soldiers went on a rampage, shooting at fishermen's boats with their cannons. All the boats moored at Kuala Bahang were sunk. The people's homes were burnt to the ground. The warehouses with their wares were looted and destroyed. They tied up ordinary people that they had taken prisoner, and brought them to Ligur. The ones who resisted were killed on the spot.]

It would be difficult to encounter such a depiction of the scene at the time of the attack in a historical text but this is possible in a novel, in which the material can be treated imaginatively in order to cause an emotional response within the reader. The writer has to exercise her imagination to provide a literary slant to the history being presented. Naturally, the basic feature of literature is that it is fiction. It is through fiction that the writer can tell the tale clearly, as if it were real. In fact, this is one of the functions of literature, according to Huizinga (1973, p. 45): "The function of literature is not merely to write pretty poems and tales, but to make the

world intelligible". The truth behind such intelligibility has not yet been proven from the viewpoint of reality or history but it is sufficient for it to stand on its own in the world of fiction, being an example of verisimilitude, which means "like real". Reality in fiction is accepted for a short while, or within the sphere of a single text, and need not extend to reality outside the text. All of this is put into practice when the writer depicts the attack on Qalha by Siam in an accurate way. However, with this being a historical novel, facts are made less dry and stiff through her storytelling. The Siamese attack is given a symbolic meaning as the writer (2017, p. 493) reminds of what could have been lost had the Siamese been able to annex Qalha:

Dia tidak mahu tewas. Malu rasanya kepada nenek moyangnya sekiranya Qalha terlepas. Sekiranya dia gagal mempertahankan tradisi pemerintahan kesultanan Melayu yang berpaksikan agama Islam, tamatlah riwayat kesultanan Melayu Qalha.

[He did not want to be defeated. It would be a shame to the memory of his ancestors if Qalha were lost. If he failed to defend the traditional rulership of the Malay sultans which rested on Islam, it would be the end of the Malay Sultanate of Qalha.]

Although Kedah is now free from colonizers, this message must be borne in mind, especially by the young generation. If care is not taken, ancient history may repeat itself. Religion and the honour of one's people, which had been defended successfully in the past, could be lost in the blink of an eye. Here, the historical novel plays an important part in inspiring a love for one's fatherland, religion and people. While it may seem cliché, this is undeniable.

Historical Figures

Characters in works of fiction are the actors or people who move the plot along. They are closely linked to the plot and events that develop the narrative. The importance of characters is emphasized by Aristotle (1960, p. 68): "Character means the personalities of the story". These characters or personalities must be developed carefully. At the very basic level, characters in a historical novel are historical figures that really existed and are brought to life in a creative way by the writer in his work. Even so, the characters or historical figures depicted in a historical novel need not be great personages

or statesmen but may be other people about whom there are historical records, an example being those who are mentioned in historical literature, historiography or even local research works.

Where the historical novel is concerned, historical figures do exist, though their role depends on the position of the novel itself. This can be observed in Amelia's novel, *Kalbu Qalha*. The writer has an unusual way of selecting historical figures as her characters. Tunku Anum becomes the main character in the entire novel. In fact, Tunku Anum also acts as the main narrator in the novel. Even in the early pages of the novel, the writer draws the reader's attention to this (2017, p. 1):

Namaku Tunku Anum bin Tunku Abdul Rahman. Aku dilahirkan pada tahun 1790 di Kota Limbong. Bondaku bernama Tunku Rahmah binti Tunku Muhammad Jiwa, puteri sulung Sultan Qalha ke-19. Ayahandaku seorang pembesar wilayah Chenak, di Singgora. Dia cucu kepada Tunku Ibrahim, iaitu Raja Muda Kota Limbong (Pekan Langgar) dengan gelaran Raja di Limbong. Ketika usiaku antara tiga hingga empat tahun, setiap malam sewaktu menidurkan aku, bonda bercerita tentang leluhur nenek moyang kami. Aku terlelap dibuai mimpi akan keagungan negeriku, negeri Qalha.

[My name is Tunku Anum bin Tunku Abdul Rahman. I was born in 1790 in the town of Kota Limbong. My mother's name was Tunku Rahmah binti Tunku Muhammad Jiwa, the eldest daughter of the 19th Sultan of Qalha. My father was an aristocrat from the district of Chanak in Songkhla. He was the grandson of Tunku Ibrahim, the Crown Prince of Kota Limbong (Langgar Town), and holds the title "Raja of Limbong". When I was three or four years old, my mother would tell me stories of my ancestors at bedtime. I would fall asleep buoyed by dreams of my glorious kingdom, Qalha.]

Kalbu Qalha is narrated from the perspective of Tunku Anum, who hears these tales from her mother, Tunku Rahmah. When Tunku Rahmah's narration ends, Tunku Anum becomes the sole storyteller.

Although there are several historical figures featured in this novel, it is clear that the writer wishes to draw attention to Tunku Anum, a character who has almost been lost in the folds of history. In reality, Tunku Anum played a big part in accelerating the process of releasing Kedah from the 20-year-long Siamese rule in 1839. This success was due to Tunku Anum's ability to endear herself to the Siamese ruler of Ligur at the time. Based

on historical records, Tunku Anum not only freed Kedah but was also instrumental in bringing home the 22nd Sultan of Kedah, Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Halim Shah II (called “Tunku Pengiran” in the novel) who had been exiled to Malacca by the Siamese, to bring order to Kedah after it was freed from the yoke of Siamese rule.

Apart from this, Tunku Anum also received the title “Tunku Paduka Raja Jambangan” after being appointed as the lead representative for the delivery of the golden tree to the King of Siam in Bangkok in 1809, during the reign of Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin. All of this is well recounted by the writer. The narrative succeeds in bringing to life a little-known historical figure. An example for this is the episode where Tunku Anum tells about being tasked with delivering the golden tree (2017, pp. 427-428):

... untuk menghargai aku sebagai teman sepermainan, aku telah dilantik menjadi utusan menghantar bunga emas dan bunga perak ke Ligor. Aku diberi gelaran Tunku Paduka Raja Jambangan. Itu tidak menjadi masalah kepadaku. Sebelum ini, ayahandaku telah mengambil seorang guru mengajarku bahasa Siam. Aku mampu bertutur dan faham bahasa itu. Aku tahu Pengiran mempercayai aku.

[... as a way of honouring me as an equal, I was appointed to send the gold and silver tree to Ligor. I was awarded the title “Tunku Paduka Raja Jambangan”. All this was not a problem for me. My late father had once appointed a teacher to teach me the Siamese language. I speak and understand it. I knew the Pengiran trusted me.]

From the above excerpt, it is clear that the writer uses her creativity in the effort to highlight the historical figure, Tunku Anum. Tunku Anum’s ability to speak the Siamese language is presented as an important asset to Qalha (Kedah). Tunku Anum is successfully portrayed as a major historical figure in the novel. His role in history, which had hitherto not been well known, can be seen in this novel. The writer used the opportunity to do so when writing this novel. She could have selected any other, better-known character but instead preferred an unsung hero to be the central character in *Kalbu Qalha*.

Apart from this, there are other characters or historical figures who have been made more human in *Kalbu Qalha*. Such characters are injected with all kinds of emotions. They are brought to life in an imaginative way, according to the writer’s interpretation, which allow for an insight into

the thoughts of historical personages. This is different from the work of historians who can only describe observable or reported human actions. For example, the writer describes the emotions felt by Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin (Tunku Pengiran) when he is exiled to Melaka (2017, p. 533):

Ingatlah sepupuku! Beritahu orang-orang kita! Aku kecewa dengan pendirian Inggeris yang mengiktiraf hak Siam ke atas Qalha. James Burney yang merangka perjanjian itu telah menggariskan, aku tidak boleh menetap di Pulau Pinang. Malah, tidak juga boleh tinggal di Perai, Perak, Selangor atau Burma. Aku tidak percaya kepada Fullerton lagi. Inggeris yang menjadi Gabenor di Pulau Pinang. Pulau Pinang itu negeri kita. Inggeris hanya menyewa. Sungguh Inggeris ini bangsa yang tidak bermaruah.

[Remember, cousin! Tell our people! I am disappointed in the British who acknowledged that Siam has a right over Qalha. James Burney, who drafted this agreement, had expressly stated I could not live in Penang. I could also not settle in Perai, Perak, Selangor or Burma. I lost my trust in Fullerton, the British governor of Penang. Penang was our territory. The British merely rented it from us. Truly the British are not an honourable people.]

Based on the above excerpt, it is clear that the writer is able to avoid the dryness of historical fact and artefact by writing about historical figures in a more life-like and human way. A historical novel should highlight the lives and inner lives of its characters. This includes the way the characters act, think, feel, aspire, experience inner turmoil and what they say (Lukács, 1962, p. 302). In fact, in a historical novel, characters “must seem human and interesting, but they must be creatures of their own time, believing many things we no longer believe, feeling emotions we no longer share” (Lukács, 1962, p. 302). The writer should not only bring forth historical figures as living human beings with emotions but also ensure that in body and soul, they are in line with the time period that is the backdrop to their lives. Othman Puteh (1983, p. 175) asserts that writers of historical novels should not be tied to historical objectivity because at its most basic, history does not allow the writing of something that is not known at all. All of this is successfully achieved by Amelia when employing historical figures as characters in her novel.

CONCLUSION

On the whole, based on the above discussion, Amelia's novel, *Kalbu Qalha*, clearly possesses the characteristics of a historical novel, as outlined by Lukács. The first characteristic of the historical novel, that of the setting of time and place, is displayed clearly and in detail by the writer, whereby it follows the succession of reigning kings. The second characteristic of a historical novel, concerning historical events being expressed accurately and meaningfully, is also applied by the writer. Among the historical events included are the taking of Penang by the British and Siamese attack on Qalha (Kedah). In fact, all historical events are well depicted in the novel and animate the plot. The final characteristic of the historical novel, concerning historical figures that lived in a particular society, is best exemplified in the main character who also functions as the narrator of the novel, Tunku Anum. The writer uses this novel to highlight the contributions of this character, whose historical significance has been lost in the folds of time. In short, *Kalbu Qalha* clearly possesses all three of the characteristics of the historical as outlined by Lukács, presented in a unique writing style.

Apart from this, the novel succeeds in presenting the historical magnificence of the ancient kingdom of Kedah, as well as its decline. Different from the writers of the *hikayat* in the olden days, the writer of this novel is able to insert emotion into her work so that it is not dry, as ordinary history texts generally are. Although fictitious elements are added, these additions do not impede the recounting of actual historical facts concerning the history of Kedah. This is because this is not a deconstructive historical novel, unlike many historical novels produced today. The novel presents many factual details about the kingdom of Kedah, from its early beginnings to the Siamese annexation of Kedah. This is necessary because these facts are increasingly forgotten. Therefore, the research Amelia conducted is a commendable effort as it has enabled her to successfully bring to life the history of Kedah and its origins. The production of this novel by Amelia also shows that history always provides material that is relevant to creative works, in spite of the current trend whereby people are inclined to "look to the future for inspiration". In connection with this, it is important to note that the historical past has played an extremely important part in forming the present society. In fact, this novel proves that history can be read in the language of literature.

REFERENCES

- Amelia Hashim. (2017). *Kalbu Qalha*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Bram, Christopher. (2016). *The art of history: Unlocking the past in fiction and nonfiction*. Minnesota: Graywolf Press.
- Harun Mat Piah. (2000). *Kesusasteraan Melayu tradisional*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Hollman, C. Hugh & Harmon, William. (1986). *A handbook to literature*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Hutcheon, Linda. (1992). *A poetics of postmodernism history, theory and fiction*. London: Routledge.
- Langlois Ch. V. & Seignobos, Ch. (1966). *Introduction to the study of history*. New York: Barnes & Noble Inc.
- Leisy, Ernest E. (1950). *The American historical novel*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Lukács, Georg. (1962). *The historical novel*. London: Merlin Press.
- Marston, Doris Ricker. (1976). *A guide to writing history*. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest.
- McGarry, Daniel D. & Sarah Harriman White. (1963). *Historical fiction guide: Anotated chronology, geographical and topical list of five thousand selected historical novels*. New York: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Mohamad Saleeh Rahamad. (2005). *Pencerakaan dalam novel sejarah*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaya.
- Othman Puteh. 1983. *Cerpen Melayu selepas Perang Dunia Kedua: Satu Analisa Tentang Pemikiran dan Struktur*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Siti Hawa Haji Salleh. (1998). *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*. Kuala Lumpur: Yayasan Karyawan dan Penerbit Universiti Malaya.
- Webster Third New International Dictionary*. (1961). Massachusetts: G. and C. Merriam Company.
- Zuliskandar Ramli, Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Nik Abdul Rahman & Mazlan Ahmad. (2012). Status candi Pengkalan Bujang (Tapak 23), Kedah Malaysia berdasarkan data arkeologi dan saintifik. *Jurnal Arkeologi Malaysia*, 25, 131-147.

Received: 15 November 2018.

Accepted: 11 March 2019