

THE REPRESENTATION OF A POLYNESIAN THROUGH QUEEQEQ CHARACTER IN HERMAN MELVILLE'S *MOBY DICK*

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Abstract. This research applies a literary anthropology approach that focuses the study on the uniqueness of Queeqeq character represented in *Moby Dick* (Melville, 1962). That uniqueness contains physical characteristics as a Polynesian, cultural behavior, belief, and dialect. Queeqeq character is described as a very sober man, consistent in his words and manners, and referring to Polynesian race, with large black eyes, natural dark skin, and unworldly tattoos. Queeqeq is represented as a character of a hard worker, agile, and tough as a seaman in the Pacific ocean. In religion, Queeqeq is described as a primitive ritual-religion person, who is serious in fasting; not to eat and talk in the Ramadan time, prays ritually through a wooden idol, following the ritual-religion custom of Polynesian. Generally, it can be concluded that Melville in *Moby Dick* (1962) succeeds in representing the specific characteristics of Polynesian culture through character and characterization of Queeqeq.

Keywords: *literary anthropology, representation, character, ritual-religion*

INTRODUCTION

Melville's *Moby Dick* is undoubtedly known as one of the great literary works in the nineteenth century as it was published in 1851. There have been so many articles and discussions from researchers as well as his admirers talking about that magnificent literary work. It was declared that Melville's *Moby Dick* has criteria of great literature; one of them is that the theme ranges great ideas of humanity. Melville's *Moby Dick* contains full moral lessons since many philosophical words are found in that novel. As expressed in chapter 1, "Yes, as everyone knows, meditation and water are wedded for ever." (Melville, 1962: 2) and "Who is not a slave?" (Melville, 1962: 5). Those expressions have a profound meaning which needs contemplation to answer problems of human life.

Even though Melville's *Moby Dick* is recognized as world literature, so far there are

still relatively few studies discussing it. Among those studies are "Existentialism in Melville's *Moby Dick*" (Andayani, 2018), "Multikulturalisme dalam Novel *Moby Dick* Karya Herman Melville" (Andayani & Purbowati, 2016), and "Comparative literary study on Mochtar Lubis' *Harimau Harimau* and Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*" (Andayani & Jupriono, 2018).

Andayani (2018) discusses Sartre's existentialism in Melville's *Moby Dick*, and finds that the main character of the story, Ahab, previously gets lost his leg because of a white whale, Moby Dick, then Ahab has a strong will and vengeance to kill the white whale. It shows that human gets meaningful existence when he fulfills on what he makes before.

While in the theme of multiculturalism, the discussion shows some principles of multicultural literature reflected from Melville's *Moby Dick*, namely: varied and unique characters, admission of equality of all

characters, authentic character's social background (Andayani & Purbowati, 2016). Varied and unique characters are reflected from the crews of the whaling ship who come from different nations. At the same time, they have no difference in right and responsibility as the portrait of equality admission. The authentic social background is especially depicted from the character of Queequeg as a Polynesian from South Pacific (Kahn, Kiste, Suggs, 2020), who is very sober contrasted with Ishmael as an American, but in the same time, they have unique friendship in the story.

In the context of literary research in Indonesia, the studies of unique character which represent specific characteristics of culture (custom, dialect, myth, belief) moreover of a specific society, are still very few (Rodgers, 1993; Andayani & Jupriono, 2018; 2019). These such studies try to approach the literary text from an anthropological perspective. The literary anthropology based on the archetypal approach, which emphasizes old cultural heritage (Bernard, 2017). Therefore, literary anthropology takes the point of view of ethnography in analyzing literary work (Rose, 1993; Ahimsa-Putra, 2003).

Literary anthropology can disclosure ancestor's old customs, the root of tradition and subculture which are believed or experienced by the writer, ethical moral lessons contained in literary works, and mythological symbols of a society that create the works (Budiman, 2003; Bernard, 2017). The uniqueness of Queequeg character in *Moby Dick* (Melville, 1962), for example, is very suitable to analyze from the perspective of literary anthropology.

Since the criteria of complex themes also become an indication of great literary work, in Melville's *Moby Dick*, a reader will also find many details about a Polynesian, the illustration of Polynesian physical characteristics, dialect, history, and culture. All of them are described sharply through the character of Queequeg. Furthermore, the reader will be absorbed and feel as if he is involved in the journey from New

Bedford, America as the western country to the east like New Zealand until Indonesia (Kahn, Kiste, Suggs, 2020). Through that huge journey, then he will be amazed at Melville's genius for the exploration of Polynesian people, and even encyclopedia of a whale as a mammal. In this case, the writer focusses on analyzing the character of Queequeg to expand the knowledge of unique Polynesian people.

METHOD

Concerning the data collection and analysis, the discussion will apply the descriptive qualitative method. According to Bernard (2017), qualitative research focuses on description and interpretation of the words data and this can lead to an evaluation of an organizational process. It also focuses on description and interpretation that might lead to the development of a new concept or theory or an evaluation of an organization process.

Referring to the formulas from Bernard (2017) about literary anthropology study, the data in this research will focus on the uniqueness of Queequeg character which is represented in *Moby Dick* (Melville, 1962). The uniqueness includes the physical characteristics as a Polynesian, cultural behavior, belief, dialect.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study of Polynesian people has been done and discussed by many researchers and scientists, as it is discovered the fact that Polynesian people spread to numerous small islands in South and North Pacific Ocean (Kahn, Kiste, Suggs, 2020). It is told in the beginning that Ishmael, an American, is the storyteller. He arrives in New Bedford. New Bedford is a coastal city near the North Atlantic Ocean, where men from many countries commonly come to a whale. Ishmael is one of them, and he has a high curiosity about sailing in a whaling ship, but at that time, the ship has already sailed to Nantucket, so he must stay until the following Monday.

Seeking a room to stay, Ishmael finally finds the Spouter-Inn. It is an old and not too clean small hotel. However, it is the most appropriate and affordable for a man like Ishmael. The landlord says there is only one empty room and Ishmael must share it with such a mysterious man. The landlord gives some description because Ishmael feels restless that he has never shared on one bed and the man has not yet come on late night.

"... the harpooner is a dark-complexioned chap." (Melville, 1962: 14) ... "generally he is an early bird—early to bed and early to rise—yes, he is the bird what catches the worm.—But to-night he went out a-peddling, you see, and I do not see what on airth keeps him so late, unless, may be cannot sell his head." (Melville, 1962: 18) ... "He pays reg'lar," was the rejoinder." (Melville, 1962: 20)

The quotations show some characteristics of the character, Queequeg, as Ishmael's sleeping partner in the Spouter-Inn. Queequeg is a harpooner with a dark complexion skin. He is a dull person, early to sleep and early to wake up. He is a hard worker, as the landlord says that he will not arrive unless his goods are sold. Moreover, he is also an obedient man since he is never late to fulfill his duty to pay.

When Queequeg has arrived and Ishmael can know him, Ishmael feels very afraid to see what a terrible man he is for the first sight.

"Such a face! It was of a dark, purplish, yellow color, here and there stuck over with large, blackish looking squares." (Melville, 1962: 22) ... "Through all his unearthly tattooings, I thought I saw the traces of a simple honest heart; and in his large, deep eyes, fiery black and bold, there seemed tokens of a spirit that would dare a thousand devils." (Melville, 1962: 52)

In the above quotations, Queequeg's facial skin has a combination of dark, purple, yellow color with black squares. His body is tattooed and his eyes are large, deep, black, brave with intense emotion. However, in that frightening performance, Ishmael can feel that Queequeg is an honest and sincere person.

To get a contradiction of the fact between Queequeg and himself, in his deep feeling, Ishmael is astonished by Queequeg's manner.

"if it pleased me he would dress first and then leave me to dress afterward, leaving the whole apartment to myself." (Melville, 1962: 29) ... "At that time in the morning, any Christian would have washed his face, but Queequeg, to my amazement, contented himself with restricting his ablutions to his chest, arms, and hands." (Melville, 1962: 30)

The quotations describe Queequeg's manner that he is a very civilized person. He always does anything by considering whether other people get pleased or not with his action, whether other people near him will feel bothered or not with his attendance. Then he will appreciate other's privacy as highly as possible. Comparing to modern people as Melville refers to Christian, Queequeg is a very traditional, even pagan person, always feels contented even though in poor condition. Furthermore, he does not want other people to get trouble because of him.

With his intellectual mind, Melville is a very sharp observer. He does not only describe Queequeg's physical and spiritual characteristics but also Queequeg's dialect.

"Who-e debel you?"—he, at last, said—"You no speak-e, dam-me, I kill-e." And so saying the lighted tomahawk began flourishing about me in the dark." (Melville, 1962: 25)

The quotation above shows the dialogue when Queequeg finally tries to make communication with Ishmael for the first time. There is a suspicious atmosphere that Queequeg also feels anxious. But from the linguistic performance, there is a unique characteristic that there is often the addition of vowel 'e': *who-e, speak-e, dam-me, kill-e*

Getting closer with Queequeg, the better understand Ishmael to Queequeg's personality. Until one day Queequeg intends to tell seriously about his native island. It reflects that Queequeg considers both of them to be a best friend. Ishmael is very excited and hears eagerly to Queequeg's history.

"Queequeg was a native of Kokovoko, an island far away to the West and South. "(Melville, 1962: 58) ... "His father was a High Chief, a King; his uncle a High Priest, and on the maternal side, he boasted aunts who were the wives of unconquerable warriors." (Melville, 1962: 58)

Kokovoko is a very unique native name. Even though it is a creation of great imagination from Melville as the author, but as a matter of fact, the name is very similar to the real one. In South Pacific islands, many kingdoms have that such name. Queequeg's family comes from noble people. His father is a King, his uncle is a High Priest, his aunts are unconquerable warriors' wives. Melville's story is such immortal one; in this modern time, there are still small kingdoms spreading surround North and South Pacific islands.

The geography of Polynesia can be a hint to answer why it becomes so unique. Inhabited by a small number of people, Polynesia contains hundreds, even maybe thousands of islands forming a Polynesian triangle with the mount is Hawaii island and two base angles are New Zealand and Easter Island. Elaborately the names of the islands can be mentioned as Samoa, Cook, French Polynesia, Nieu, Tokelau, Tuvalu, Tonga, Wallis, Futuna, and Hawaii. The culture of these

numerous islands is the result of a combination of Micronesia and Melanesia (Kahn, Kiste, Suggs, 2020).

Surrounded by sea and ocean makes Polynesian islands get no trace (or maybe having only a little) of modern life. Their dialects are naturally conserved and still alive, like the dialects of Maori, Samoa, Tonga, Hawaii. For their religion, Animism is still firmly held in their daily life, even though Christian has existed there (Kahn, Kiste, Suggs, 2020). Melville informs much data about Polynesian's religion through Queequeg's manner and actions.

"For now the savage goes up to the empty fireplace, and removing the papered fireboard, sets up this little hunchbacked image, like a tenpin, between the andirons. The chimney jambs and all the bricks inside were very sooty so that I thought this fireplace made a very appropriate little shrine or chapel for his Congo idol." (Melville, 1962: 24)

It is such a ritual ceremony that shows Queequeg's beliefs. With a wooden idol, as Melville calls a Congo idol, being a Polynesian, Queequeg does his praying. He sets a place for his worship and chooses the fireplace to become the shrine. Removing things surround the fireplace, to make it clean enough, he puts his idol in the middle respectfully. Then he does the pray in solemnity. In the quotation, Melville makes a comparison between the shrine made by Queequeg and the chapel. It explains that a Polynesian does not need a special one to make a worship place, but clean and quiet.

The title of chapter 17 of Melville's *Moby Dick* is the Ramadan. It tells about the Fasting done by Queequeg in one day. At that time, Ishmael misses Queequeg, feeling anxious Ishmael looks for him anywhere and finally find him in their room in a very silent condition.

"... good heavens! There sat Queequeg, altogether cool and self-collected, right in the middle of the room, squatting on

his hams, and holding Yojo on the top of his head. He looked one way nor the other way neither, but sat like a carved image with scarce a sign of active life." (Melville, 1962: 91)

The quotation shows Queequeg as a Polynesian who does his fasting in the Ramadan day. He squats on his hams by holding Yojo (the wooden idol) on his top of the head. He does it with no eating and even moving in hours.

The more he knows Queequeg, the more Ishmael get amazed and respect to that Polynesian man. For Ishmael, as an American, what Queequeg does and acts are very unique that he has never met before in his life.

"He seemed to take to me quite as naturally and unbiddenly as I to him; and when our smoke was over, he pressed his forehead against mine, clasped me round the waist, and said that henceforth we were married; meaning, in his country's phrase, that we were bosom friends, he would gladly die for me, if need should be." (Melville, 1962: 54)

On the second day, when Queequeg and Ishmael share one bed, there is intimate feeling as Queequeg communicates boundlessly. Queequeg chats, tells about humor and native land when they smoke together. From the quotation, Melville explains a symbol of friendship, a Polynesian shows it by pressing his forehead against one's, and hold tightly around one's waist. For Polynesian too, the meaning is philosophical; bosom friend means family, they willing to die if their bosom friend has huge trouble someday (Kahn, Kiste, Suggs, 2020).

The symbol which has very high humanity is not only formed in Queequeg's words, but it is also revealed when the crews of the ship are in a hazardous situation. The situation happens when all the crews and the

captain have been on board and the whaling ship is ready to leave.

"In the midst of this consternation, Queequeg dropped deftly to his knees, and crawling under the path of the boom, whipped hold of a rope, secured one end to the bulwarks, and then flinging the other like a lasso, caught it round the boom as it swept over his head, and at the next jerk, the spar was that way trapped, and all was safe." (Melville, 1962: 64)

The quotation shows a panic situation when the strain of the mainsail makes the boom fly from side to side, sweeping the entire parts of the deck thoroughly. One of the crews has been swept overboard. No one can handle the situation; every movement seems to make the situation in worse condition. Queequeg, as a Polynesian, has a strategy to handle it. A Polynesian man is a skilled person to face any trouble on the sea (Kahn, Kiste, Suggs, 2020). Furthermore, he is consistent with his conviction that humans must help each other spontaneously. That is the revelation of harmony in life.

In general, it can be concluded that Melville in *Moby Dick* (1962) has succeeded in represented Polynesian specific culture through the character and characterization of Queequeg. By an approach of literary anthropology (Bernard, 2017), the representation of Polynesian unique-specific culture (collective character, dialect style, custom, tradition, belief) (Kahn, Kiste, Suggs, 2020) seen through Queequeg in the novel of world literature created by Melville, who has adventured to the South Pacific among Polynesian society.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it can be concluded some following conclusions. First, Queequeg character in *Moby Dick* is described as

a very sober man, consistent in his words and manners, and Polynesian with large black eyes, natural dark skin, unworldly tattoos. Second, Queequeg is represented as a character of a hard worker, agile, and tough as a seaman in the Pacific Ocean. Third, in *Moby Dick*, Queequeg religiosity is described as a serious man in fasting-eat and fasting-talk, praying ritually through a wooden idol, following the ritual-religion custom of Polynesian.

Finally, it must be admitted that this literary anthropology study, which is done by the writer, still contains many shortages. First, the depth of this study has not dug the deep root of Polynesian culture (Kahn, Kiste, Suggs, 2020), it is seen in the discussion of Queequeg's ritual magic custom and the description of Polynesian dialect which still reaches on the characteristic of affixation and reduplication. Hence, if there is another writer who is interested in developing this study, he should cover those shortages. Second, all aspects of Polynesian culture have not been entirely found by the writer; for example, the system of opposition-myth (cf. Ahimsa-Putra, 2003). It is suggested to the next researcher to analyze to that discussion.

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