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The Portrayal of Marine Life in Chudori's *the Sea Speaks His Name*

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Abstract

Many countries in the world have experienced a massive movement. In Indonesia, one of them was the 1998 Indonesian student movement which was able to push Soeharto (Indonesian president at that time) to resign from his president position which had lasted for 32 years. This movement is narrated in a novel entitled The Sea Speaks His Name which is a translation work of an Indonesian novel entitled Laut Berbicara and is written by Leila S. Chudori. Laut Biru as the main character of this work took part in the 1998 Indonesian student movement and was drawn into an ocean as a result of his action. Interestingly, the portrayal of marine life and its surrounding is repeated several times in this work. Deploying difference and repetition theory of Delueze and reader-response approach, the researcher applied a closed reading method and wrote the analysis results descriptively. This study found that the portrayal of marine life and its surrounding tended to show the acceptance of Laut's struggle to create a freedom in Indonesia. In this case, Chudori's novel provided a different point of view that as a maritime country, the beauty of marine life and its surrounding had some important roles to convey the 1998 student movement in relation to love, struggle and setting.

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Introduction

Many countries in the world experience different kinds of movement. In 2010, Arab Spring began as a movement toward the authority in Tunisia. The movement focused on the demand of democracy system which then spread to Egypt. Leonid Grinin and Andrey Korotayev (2022, p. 595) discussed the cause of this movement as follows "the diffusion of radical ideas and ideologies in society, as well as by rapid urbanization, a growing youth share in the population, and the combination of rapidly increasing education levels for part of population with very poor education for others". In 2011, a social movement called Occupy Wall Street took place in New York. The movement was caused

by the inequality of economic and social condition. In specific, Charles Barthold, Stephen Dunne, and David Harvie wrote that "the central objective of the occupiers was to protest the power of finance; their camp, in Lower Manhattan, amounted to a symbolic confrontation with global finance" (2018, p. 10).

Besides those social movements, student movement based on Altbach (1970) "has become a world-wide phenomenon and has succeeded in disrupting universities, stimulating political crises, and on several occasions precipitating revolutionary upheavals" (p. 156). In 1998, there was a student movement in different countries. Comparing Indonesian and Philippine movement, Lee wrote that "presidents Marcos and Suharto had near absolute control over their armed forces, even prior to the breakdown of their regimes. Marcos and Suharto maintained strong capacities to monitor and sanction the officer corps and had placed loyalists in key command positions prior to their downfall" (2009, p. 644). In Indonesia, the end of Soeharto's regime was caused by the 1998 student movement as Supriyanto stated that the movement "had a very significant role because this movement could carry out political reforms. The movement carried out by student in Jakarta to demand Soeharto to resign from the position of President" (2022, p. 66).

The 1998 student movement in Indonesia which was able to push Soeharto to resign from the president position is portrayed in Leila Chudori's novel entitled *The Sea Speaks His Name*. The original version of this translation work is *Laut Bercerita*. It tells a story of a group of students who try to have a democracy system in the government. Through the main character named Biru Laut, the concept of ending the dictatorship in Indonesia was sounding. Laut and some friends were kidnapped and tortured due to their movement. Two of them were still alive but others could not be found. Although this novel has political and humanism issues, the portrayal of marine life takes part or contributes to not only beautify but also strengthen the story. As a maritime nation which has more or less 17,504 islands, the portrayal of marine life and its surrounding needs to be discussed especially in the work of literature so that Indonesian people do not focus on the land studies only.

The popularity of *The Sea Speaks His Name* itself has resulted many studies. The studies which discussed power and its relation in the novel included Cahyo's dissertation (2021), Muzzayyanah's article (2018), Taufiqi's and Astuti's study (2021), and Anoprianti's writing (2018). Not only power and its relation, the violence in the novel was also analyzed in some studies (Muhibbuddin, 2021; Oktasari and Farizi, 2021; Putri, 2021; Rahmi, 2021). It was experienced by some characters and the studies which focused on the characters of the novels were written by Nadia, Syafrial and Sinaga, 2022; Rostanawa, 2019. Moreover, the depiction of new order in the novel was studied by Hariyanto (2020) by applying a reception analysis, Nopi (2020) by having hegemony theory, Sembada and Andalas (2019) with genetic structuralism analysis, and Widyaiswara, Setyaningrum, and Luthfiyati (2021) by having deconstruction analysis. Besides, the translation equivalence in this novel was analyzed by Fitriani and Pratama (2021); Melliana, Nurul and Yoga (2021).

In short, previous studies mainly discussed about power, violence, characters, new order, and translation equivalence which were different from this article that focuses more on the depiction of marine life and its surrounding through its repetition. However, there was a previous study (Gemilang, 2019) which also discussed ecocriticism in the novel in form of plot, setting and characterization. The similarities lay on the object of the study that is the novel and some data in relation to ecology. Significantly, this article is different from Gemilang's study, since it discusses more on marine life and its surrounding using different theory. Gemilang's study had general portrayal of ecology while this article focuses more on marine life and its functions.

It is expected that there will be an increasing amount of analysis about marine life to develop more awareness as a maritime country with a different object of the study. Previous studies discussed Indonesian

maritime country, its potential and security (Arif & Kurniawan, 2018; Hudaya & Putra, 2017; Kusuma, et al, 2021; Saha, 2016). The studies of Indonesian maritime in some literary works were also done. Ahmadi, et al (2019) underlined the concretization of human biophilia in two novels. Not only that, Kasenda, et al (2021) discussed the translation of swearing as an adaptation of maritime cultural elements. In the field of literacy, Heriyawati & Wita (2022) related maritime art appreciation. In addition to those studies, Nastiti (2021) studied maritime in the literary works during Kadiri-Majapahit Period. For folklore, a study done by Suhardi, et al (2022) connected maritime society with character education. Some examples of studies mentioned previously strengthen the importance of being a maritime country in literary works.

Considering that, there are two research questions elaborated in this article as follows: (1) how is the portrayal of marine life described and repeated in the work? and (2) what is the function of the portrayal of marine life in relation to the 1998 Indonesian student movement?

Methodology

As a century method in literary studies (Smith, 2016), a close reading method is applied in this study. Joker also noted that "the study of literature relies upon careful observation, the sustained, concentrated reading of the text" (p. 6). To analyze the story deeply especially how marine life portrayal works in the novel, I collected specific sentences which included marine life and its surrounding. After that, I classified them into some groups based on Gilles Deleuze's theory of repetition. I also analyzed some differences in each classification. The approach that I used in this article was reader-response since I focused more on the meaning that I could get after reading the work. The last step was that I described the results of my analysis.

As mentioned before, Gilles Deleuze's theory about difference and repetition (1986) was used in this study. His work is inspired by other sciences such as biology, evolution, geology. His theory is a critic toward a way of thinking that considers to be eternal or stable. He underlines the fact that everything changes and no matter how complex it is, it is still connected. In relation to difference, there must be a difference between two identical things as he writes: "No two grains of dust are absolutely identical, no two hands have the same distinctive points, no two typewriters have the same strike, no two revolves score their bullets in the same manner." (Patton, 1994, p. 26). In a nutshell, difference is everywhere.

Difference is different from repetition. A concept of a thing is repeated but every repetition will create something new. In this case, it creates difference. The differences result in newness, creativity and revolution.

Results and Discussion

The portrayal of marine life and its surrounding are written in seventeen parts of the novel. It starts with the moment where Laut is shot, kicked and then thrown into the sea. The character describes that he is floating then drowning slowly into the bottom of the sea.

> *"I heard an explosion and instantly felt something pierce my shoulder –Oh, the pain!—and then the back of my head. I felt the serrated sole of a jackboot ram into my back, causing my body to pitch forward in pursuit of the weights attached to my ankles. In the water, I glided towards the ocean's base"* (p. xii).

In this first time the phrase 'the ocean's base" is written, it describes the situation when Laut faces violence which is done by policemen. In short, this first quote above has the description of other human's action before Laut reaches the bottom of the sea. On the contrary, the idea of the second repetition "bottom of the sea" is totally different from the first one. The second quote below focuses more on the beauty of the birds on the top of the sea. As if they sing, they dive into the sea to see Laut, and say good bye.

> *"…. My death was more like it is when a poet puts the final dot on the last line of a poem, or like a light switched off.*
> *… Maybe it was only my imagination but I thought I heard the shrieking of birds, an*

Journal of Language and Literature
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> *entire flock of them as they burrowed into the surface of the sea as my body sank. The birds stuck their heads beneath the surface to stare at me, to say good-bye and ensure I arrived safely at the bottom of the ocean."* (p. xii)

From the first and second repetitions, there is a distinction between humans' actions and marine creatures' actions toward Laut. Humans tend to act cruelly while marine creatures act nicely. In addition, on the same page, the birds pray for Laut so that he is able to reach the bottom of the sea. Not only birds, some fish also surround Laut and kiss him after his head bumps a coral as written below.

> *"And just like that, I found myself surrounded by hundreds of fantail fish and then a soldierfish which smashed my head against a crop of brain coral. And then, all the other fish kissing me, as if out of pity for the sorry state of my corpse."* (p. xii)

It is clear that the repetition of the words 'bottom of the ocean' in this work has at least a difference. The first one does not focus on marine life although the words 'bottom of the ocean' are written. It is different from the second and third quotes which focus on the marine life especially its animals. When readers read more closely, the second and the third quotes are not the same although it is about marine life. The second is more about the life on the surface of the sea, while the third has kinds of fish as animals in the sea. In relation to the atmosphere of Laut's death, the first quote tends to have a gloomy period when Laut needs to be suffered. On the contrary, the second and the third quotes show more empathy towards Laut's death. It seems that marine creatures such as birds and fish can be more 'humanist' than humans. Metaphorically, when it is related to the student movement, the first repetition which includes people who tortured and shot Laut Biru represents the power of dictator government who tried to shut students' voice up, while the marine life performs the support from the society for the student movement.

The repetition of 'bottom of the sea' also appears on page seven and page 307. Similar to previous two quotes (the second and the third), the fourth quote also includes marine animals as written below.

> *"The current encircles and embraces me as if I am a part of the sea. Maybe that's the reason my parents named me Biru Laut – Blue Sea."* (p. xiii)
> *...*
> *With my body caught among coral and seaweed, I realize I am dead, but that my soul might fly off to the unknown. A kaleidoscope of fish kiss my cheeks; a seahorse floats before my eyes; and then I hear a loud knocking."* (p. xiii)

In these lines, there is additional elements such as sea stream which hugs Laut, little fish that see him, various colorful fish kiss his cheek and a sea-horse swims in front of him. Their actions represent their empathy, pity, love to accompany Laut who struggles for a democracy system of government. Through the portrayal of marine life, the support in form of empathy, pity and love toward students' movement from the society is conveyed. The sea creatures written in the novel are not the big one such as whale or shark. The fact that the author uses small sea creatures represent the ordinary people who have no power but still support students' struggle.

The repetition "bottom of the sea" is also used to describe Laut's friend who also struggles with him.

> *Suddenly he was by my side. The Poet. Leaning on a large rock. I didn't even get to ask if he was also tortured first, then killed, and kicked to the bottom of the sea?* (p. 61)

In the quote, a big coral as a part of marine life is stated and 'bottom of the sea' is used to question whether 'the poet' is also killed and drown. This repetition strengthens the story that Laut is not alone to fight for a better system of government. There is other 'fighters' who become the victims.

In the last part of the novel, 'bottom of the sea' is written in a different way. Silence dominates as the surface of the sea is still like sleeping, the cloud stops moving, the birds stop flying, every creature stops doing an

activity as if to respect the day when all family members of the missing activists spread flower as memoriam. 'Bottom of the sea' is written as a place of the source of Laut's voice.

> *The surface of the sea was still calm, as if asleep. The clouds stopped moving. The birds stopped flying and decided to perch on the top of a tree branch. All living things seem to stop their activities to listen to something that is inaudible to ordinary ears. Sound from the bottom of the sea.* (p. 307)

The repetition of "bottom of the sea" in the quote above refers to the sound from the bottom of the sea that reveals a story of Laut's effort and death. This repetition refers to the act of silence that can have two meanings. Based on surface meaning, it relates to the situation of mourning. More deeply, it also refers to the silent situation to be created as a way to eliminate students' movement. The fact that the presence of the student corpses is still unknown until now creates a silent situation.

As a big picture, there are two kinds of portrayal of deep sea in those repetitions. The first quote refers to human's action to Laut which is considered as a bad one. It is different from the quote on page 61. Although this quote also includes a human, it does not state any human bad action. On the contrary, the rest quotes have marine creatures. To sum up, human's action which is against the struggle of Laut is contradicted with the acceptance and nice actions which the sea creatures and stream show. Nature supports Laut while authority shut him down.

There is also a kind of sea animal which takes an important part in the novel, namely stingrays. The word 'stingrays' is repeated several times as follows.

> *"Life under the sea is getting quieter. Or more precisely: life after death is life without sound and without feeling.*
> *Some stingrays are still flying beautifully while other fish seem to step aside to provide a stage for them. Every wave of the stingray gave off a light that seemed to be the lamp of our life under the silent and dark sea.*
> *"Have the people lost us?"*
> *The Poet nodded. "This sea wave will send our voices to the surface…."*
> *Witnessing this beautiful soundless life at the bottom of the sea, I doubt that those on the surface of the earth will be able to hear our voices."* (p. 188)

Several stingrays are like flying in the ocean beautifully meanwhile other fish step aside so that they can show their beauty. Every wave that the stingrays create produces light for Laut and 'the poet' as a symbol of life. This refers to the life of Laut's spirit so that others can know his struggle and continue it. In addition, the stingrays also appear in Laut's imagination before he is thrown into the sea.

> *"Red Eyes ordered my mouth to be gagged again. … I hear the waves crashing, smell the salty scent of the sea in the wind that ruffles the hair. Then in the darkness, I imagined thousands of little yellow and blue fish swarming waiting for me; dozens of stingrays jumped above the surface of the sea to greet me like a long-lost brother."* (p. 229)

In this quote, there are thousands of tiny blue and yellow fish which gather to wait for Laut's body, including tens of stingrays which welcome him as a brother who has gone away for a long time. While the first quote tends to show the symbol of life, the second quote has the beauty side of a moment before death. The description of marine life changes death into an event which is not always considered as a bad one. Laut also says that fish and stingrays are his best friends.

> *"As for sadness, I mean because we will no longer be able to be together. At least for a long time. But I'm sure you will always hear my voice, my resistance. Here, I am accompanied by a troop of small fish, big fish, and winged stingrays who are true friends. I believed what Alex said that the minnows would rise to the surface at the sound of the golden voices of the sailors coaxing the storm to subside."* … (p. 365)

As a symbol of life and beauty side of death, the stingrays then change its role in the next repetition. As best friends the stingrays

Journal of Language and Literature
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then in the next parts of the story, especially in Laut's letter for his young sister – Asmara, become the messenger for other people. It has all Laut's messages about the story after they are kidnapped, the struggle including the death of activists as follows.

> *"So, I left a message for these fish, small and large, yellow and blue. Also, to the flying stingrays who will jump to fly because one day they will tell you my story… What happened since my kidnapping I will tell and leave it through the wings of the stingrays that will come to you. You will understand because we have left a mark on each other since childhood" (p. 365-366).*
> *"Asmara, I'm sending all these messages through the wings of stingrays" …* (p. 370)

Those quotes above show that Laut sends messages to Amara through the movement of the stingrays. In line with it, Asmara – Laut's sister can understand the messages through the codes like morse that the stingrays have. Stingrays become the messenger to first Amara his sister and second to other people through the story of 'the sea speak his name'. The stingray plays an important role in student movement as a messenger who delivers the codes and story. The stingray can be the author who tells the story of student movement from the beginning, middle until the end where there are victims that can be found that also causes severe lost and suffering of other family members. Through the stingray, readers are taken back to the memory of students' sacrifice and a note that the voice cannot be silenced.

Beside stingray, the phrase: the sea speaks his name is repeated twice as follows.

> *"The crowds of wreaths and crates and burning candles slowly drifted away from us standing on the sidelines as if saying goodbye to a group of beloved children. From a distance I saw two stingrays flying and jumping many times. For some reason the flapping of its wings makes a sound with a regular rhythm. Like morse. Or I'm just dreaming. T.H.E.S.E.A.S.P.E.A.K.S.H.I.S.N.A.M.E."* (p. 372)
>
> *"The two stingrays flew back, jumping to escort a bunch of garlands and candles that never died even though they were disturbed by the wind. Their flapping wings sounded louder even though the two fish were still flying some distance from us. Once again, the flapping sounded full of rhythm: T.H.E.S.E.A.S.P.E.A.K.S.H.I.S.N.A.M.E."* (p. 372-373)

From the quotes, the stingrays are the one who connects Laut and Asmara. The last repetition is no longer from Laut's perspective, but it is from Asmara. Each repetition of stingrays takes different role. Although Laut and his friends are physically death, the stingrays also take their part as a messenger which brings Laut and his friends' story and struggle alive.

In addition to repetitions which relate to death and life, marine life and its surrounding also portray love and local wisdom during student movement. One of Laut's friends is from East Flores.

> *"There was only the sound of the waves, Alex's words that seemed to be whispering to the ancestors.*
> *"How does the sound of singing praises to the ancestor of the fish?" I asked.*
> *"Wuno haka nai heti rera gere …*
> *Wuno dore lali nai lali rere"*
> *"For a few seconds, Mother's kitchen transformed into a white sand beach with sea waves. The sound of the waves accompanied Alex's verses, which means Wuno goes towards the rising sun …/Wuno goes towards the setting sun. I felt unable to move because my body, eyes and ears were glued there. Inside a voice that introduced an unfamiliar world to me. The world about the Seven Stars and Antares which according to Alex is a compass for sailors to see East and West."* (p. 217-272)

People in Flores have special songs to thank the sea fish. In their language, the song is "Wuno haka nai heti rera gere … Wuno dore lali nai lali rere" which means Wuno goes to the direction where the sun rises, Wuno goes to the direction where the sun sets. The compass which is used by Flores people is stars which shape some forms specifically so that people

know East or West. In the novel, Adonara and Lembata islands are stated with its local wisdom.

> *"Whenever I would receive one of his letters – of which there were only six in the nearly two years they were on the run – I would read them on a small pier overlooking the sea. According to Mama Rosa, the pier was built by priests of the SVD congregation decades ago. It is this wharf that connects motor boats and sailboats carrying agricultural products that cross between Adonara Island, Lembata Island and East Flores. On full moon nights, the Perazon family and all the women in the village gather to sing and enjoy grilled seafood."* (p. 291-292)

In the full moon nights, Perazon's family and other women (especially mothers) gather, sing and eat grilled seafood together. Through this repetition, students' movement cannot be seen as a movement occurred in Java Island done by Javanese people only. People or students who are from other island also take part in the student movement. There is also a sense of togetherness, a unity of the movement that I can get from this repetition.

The view of the beach and the sea is portrayed beautifully in Alex's area such as the blue ocean and grouses. This part is also the beginning of Asmara's love for Alex who is from Flores.

> *"When our motorboat almost reached Onrust Island, a group of grouse greeted us by swaying the sea surface. Alex smiled a little looking at the birds. The first smile in weeks."* (p. 295)

> *"The sea that surrounds it is much bluer and it feels as if we can touch the sky because it feels like we are covering our heads," said Alex.* (p. 296)

The portrayal of beautiful beach and sea is described to set not only Alex's and Asmara's love, but also a love which belongs to Laut and his beloved girl. Laut and his girlfriend are set on a beautiful white sand beach before the student movement takes place.

> *"We arrived at White Sands when the sun broke from behind the clouds. ... White Sand is not just a name. In front of us, the stretch of white sand is like an endless silk carpet. ... I took off my shoes and carried them running to feel the sand that immediately kissed the soles of my feet. I can see that at the end there, slowly the sun begins to move and a strip of light makes ripples like a sea of diamonds."* (p. 121)

Love becomes the part of the student movement. The marine life and its surrounding have an important role to support the spirit of loving and continuing their movement. In the story, it is written that after the first student movement, Laut loses his hope and bravery due to the torture but after he is with his girlfriend, he finds the power again to continue the movement. The marine life and its surrounding take an important role as a medium or a place where love grows.

The repetition of beach then is used to describe Laut's personality like an ocean. On one hand, it can be so still. On the other hand, storm occurs too.

> *"After lunch, Coki excused me to lie down because he could not sleep the last few nights, while Alex immediately went around the island with his camera. I walked alone along the beach. Because I just thought and mocked the mountain climbers who liked John Denver's songs, finally my ears heard the phrase "Like a Sleepy Blue Ocean" repeatedly. So imagine everything that Pak Hasan revealed with a tough heart.*
> *I have reached the insane stage to imagine the sea of the sea on the bottom of the sea trying to interact with me with the father, mother, and Anjani. But look at the surface of the sea that is so calm, so "sleepy", as said John Dever, as if showing the character of the sea. Calm but someday it can turn into a rebellious storm."* (p. 305-306)

To sum up, marine life and its surrounding take a big role in this novel. First, it plays as the story's setting where Laut is drown into the sea. Secondly, its roles are performed as loyal supporters which fully accompany Laut even the time during and after his death. In line with

that, it also takes a part as messengers which tell the truth about Laut's struggle and death. Lastly, marine life and its surrounding become the witnesses of students' movement in relation to their love and culture. To me, the marine life including the creatures and its surrounding perform the support from the society toward the struggle of students. The fact that the author has small marine creatures tends to show that ordinary people who do not have any positions in the government show more love and empathy. Moreover, the author has Flores as one of the settings which can also considered as a unity of movement since it is supported by not only Javanese people but also others from different area of Indonesia.

Conclusion

Little did Indonesian literary works have marine life as a part of the work let alone the discussion on this matter. It is different from Chudori's novel. In the novel, marine life and its surrounding are repeated several times to convey the tendency for supporting Indonesian student movement. The setting of the novel which is the sea including marine life is being contrasted with the people who try to silence students' voice. Being a part of the sea, the presence of small sea creatures which show love, support, empathy reflects common people who belong to student movement in form of witnessing their struggle and sacrifice. In other words, marine life and its surrounding are used as a medium for creating the power of subordinate under the regime. In the literary field, this study contributes to the connection between the topic of ecology through the portrayal of marine life with politic since it is about student movement that confronts the government at that time.

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