



Myth as a Revelation of Spiritual Values for Today's Human Life Reflected on Sarah H. Bradford's *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People*

Ike Alit Triananingsih [✉], Henrikus Joko Yulianto

English Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang

Article Info

Article History:

Received 2 October 2019
Approved 26 November 2019
Published 29 November 2019

Keywords: African-American, Christian myth, Moses, Slavery, Structuralism

Abstract

America is a country with Christianity as the major religion. It is the fact that Moses in Christian myth has an important role to the religion of this country. The United States President Harry Truman wrote in 1950 that the fundamental basis of the laws of the United States was the Ten Commandments that were given to Moses. America is also known for the country of freedom. Besides, American freedom has a unique historical story which is about slavery. *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People* novel depicts the journey and struggle of Harriet in liberating African American slaves. This study aims to identify the incorporation of Moses in Christian myth to the story in the novel and its relation to the spiritual values of human's life in the present time. The method of this study is qualitative study analysis using structuralism method of Claude Levi Strauss and the Study of Myth by Joseph Campbell. Then, the method of data analysis is based on the story in *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People* novel and Moses in Christian myth. Bradford's novel tells about the main character named Harriet who became the leader of African American slaves to the Northern America and Canada for freedom. While in Christian myth, Moses was chosen by God to be the leader of Israelites to go from the land of Egypt bondage for freedom. The final finding of this study shows the conflict of the novel, the incorporation of Moses in Christian myth to the story in the novel and shows the Ten Commandments of Christianity influenced the spiritual values by Americans which is also still relevant today. For instance, most Americans are Christian as the values of the First Commandment; Americans commonly regard their society as the freest and best in the world as the value of the Eight Commandment; the right of American constitutional democracy to attempt to "pursue" happiness in their own way as long as they do not infringe upon the rights of others is a result of the Tenth Commandment; Although there are still some transgressions of one or more of the Commandments, there are somehow many other Americans who are still devoted to the Ten Commandments as moral principles in their daily life..

© 2019 Universitas Negeri Semarang

INTRODUCTION

America is a country with Christian as the major religion. The fact that Moses in Christian myth has an important role to the religion of this country. United States President Harry Truman wrote in 1950 that the fundamental basis of the laws of the United States was the Ten Commandments that were given to Moses. Moses in Christian mythology was born in a time when his people, the Israelites were the enslaved minority in Egypt (Atkinson, 2015:21). The Bible tells how the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt and eventually escaped under the leadership of Moses. Moses emancipated Israelites from slavery in Egypt with help of God. In many cases, Moses communicated with God when he was in trouble. He got Ten Commandments by God for Israelites to be the fundamental basis of the laws to live. The similar story was told in *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People* novel. America is known for the country of freedom. Besides, American freedom has unique historical story which is about slavery. The novel captured the journey and struggle of Harriet in liberating African American slaves.

Structuralism is an approach to literary analysis grounded in structural linguistics, the science of language (Bressler, 1999: 88). Claude Levi-Strauss concentrated on the paradigmatic approach that focus on the structures of discourse that seem to evade a conscious arrangement but are somehow put vertically within texts and sometimes can be represented as paired opposites or binary oppositions (Guerin, 2005:372). In this discussion, structuralism is used to find the main problem portrayed through the main characters in the novel by using intrinsic elements of the novel. Sets binary oppositions by Levi Strauss' theory is also used to find the symbol of African-American slaves' freedom drawn from conflict among the characters in the novel.

Myth is a fictitious story or half-truth, but it goes much deeper than that (Bolton, 2002:2). Myths often center the stories of direct interaction

between man and the gods and goddesses. The gods, goddesses, or other supernatural beings are often worshipped or revered by humankind (Bolton, 2002:2). The main characters in myths are usually gods or supernatural heroes (Campbell, 1991:101). The usual hero adventure begins with someone from whom something has been taken, or who feels there's something lacking in the normal experiences available or permitted to the members of his society. Moses is one of the Christian mythology. Moses in the Bible is leader of the Israelite departure from Egyptian bondage. Moses was a prophet and lawgiver whose legend is told in the first books of the Hebrew Bible; Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (Mercante, 2009:648). In this discussion, Claude Levi-Strauss' theory that focus on the representation of paired opposites (binary oppositions) is applied. Sets of binary oppositions between Moses and Pharaoh will be used to find the symbol of Israelite slaves' freedom in Christian myth.

Based on the theoretical framework above, the problem proposed are to see the main conflict reflected through the characters and find the "symbol of self-freedom" from the characters in the novel and Moses in Christian myth. This study aims to discuss the Christian myth as a revelation of spiritual values for today's human life. So, it uses Levi-Strauss' theory and also uses the study of myth by Joseph Campbell.

METHODS

This study is designed as qualitative descriptive research applying structuralism theory by Claude Levi Strauss and the Study of Myth by Joseph Campbell. The material object of this study is Sarah H. Bradford's novel entitled *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People*. Its formal object is the study of Bradford's novel concerning on binary opposition in novel, meaning, and relations in the novel which depicted the structuralism showing the symbol that reflected and described in the novel through the characters.

Then, it was related to Ten Commandments in Christianity to find the values exist in the present time. The data analysis is taken by some procedures: (1) describing data in binary opposition (2) data is interpreted and related to Ten Commandments in Christianity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This part elaborates the binary opposition and study of myth by Joseph Campbell. *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People* is a novel told about slavery in Maryland. Harriet was an African American slave. She was the granddaughter of African slave imported from Africa. As the slave law in Maryland, every child that was born from a slave, he/she would be a slave.

The Conflict of the Main Character

Novel usually contains a hundred or thousand pages that make a story or plot. One of the principal ways to analyze a novel is by examining intrinsic devices of which it is built. At the very least, these consist of plot, characters, setting, theme, and point of view (Nurgiyantoro, 1998:23). The central message, concern, or purpose can be found in the theme. Theme is a main idea that underlies the meaning of the whole story in a novel. An author usually expresses a theme as a generalization, or general statement, about people or life (Nurgiyantoro, 1998:70). The theme of *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People* novel is "self-freedom is everybody's right." It was the main conflict of the story and the primary goal in slaves' lives. Slavery in *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People* novel presented situations where slaves were mistreated and sold away from their spouses, parents, and children. After the master died, the slaves were alienated to another plantation but still in one state. It is the starting point for Harriet to liberate herself when she heard a whisper to flee to freedom with an invisible guide.

Incorporation of Christian Myth in Depicting the Main Character's striving for Freedom

A myth was an event which had happened once, but which also happened all the time. It talks about another plane that exists alongside our own world and in some sense supports it (Armstrong, 2005:4). *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People* novel tells about the way Harriet liberate African-American slaves for freedom with God's help. It has similarities with the way of Moses in Christian mythology in liberating Israelites from Egypt bondage that would be discussed below.

Moses in *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People* Novel as Symbol of Freedom

The slaves were only property and had no right as human beings. They had to do everything the master/mistress commanded them to do. Meanwhile, the master/mistress were people who had power to control every slave's activity. After the whole experiences as a slave, the words "liberation and freedom" then came to Harriet's minds.

"Why should such things be? Is there no deliverance for my people?" said Harriet (Bradford, 1886:16).

She would never have had power if she was still a slave, so she decided to go to the North for freedom. Harriet got idea and braveness to escape from slavery in Maryland. She went to the North alone facing many obstacles. She wanted to be free. Since Harriet brought many African American slaves for freedom, she was called Moses.

Behold here, in the stupid little negro girl, the future deliverer of hundreds of her people; the spy and scout of the Union armies; the devoted hospital nurse; the protector of hunted fugitives; the eloquent speaker in public meetings; the cunning eluder of pursuing man-hunters; the heaven guided pioneer through dangers seen and unseen; in short, as she has well been called, "The Moses of her People." (Bradford, 1886:14).

The author directly stated that Harriet was the Moses of her People. Her journey in liberating slaves from Maryland to Northern America has some similarities to the journey of Moses in Christian myth who brought Israelite slaves from

Egypt bondage to freedom. Moses was a character who symbolizes Israelite slaves' freedom. He was seen as the leader of the Liberation. It enabled Israelite slaves to have a sense of freedom. One major similarity between Harriet and Moses was that both were the leader for slave to freedom. As a brave character Harriet symbolized African American slaves' freedom.

Within months of the 1865 Union victory in the Civil War, the 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution ended slavery throughout the remaining slave states, including Delaware. Attention now focused on providing education and job opportunities for black people (Marks, 1998:38).

As the result, white people finally aware to colored people's right. Harriet's long journey in liberating African American slaves finally paid off. The U.S. Constitution ended slavery in 1865 as stated in the quotation above. After that, the constitution focused on education and job opportunities.

Moses in Christian Mythology as Symbol of Freedom

God had certain scenario for Moses since he was born. He lived at the time his people in Egypt were in bondage. He directly talked to God when the first time he got the command to make her people free from slavery. God gave him Aaron as friend to led Israelites since he was not fluent to speak. Aaron convinced Israelites that Moses was the chosen person by God to bring them to the land of freedom. Finally, he was helped by God in his journey liberating Israelite slaves from Egypt bondage.

Moses raised his staff and the waters of the Red Sea parted, allowing the Israelites to cross on dry land. (Atkinson, 2017:30).

God gave the way to the Israelites when they did not have another way except to cross the Red Sea. Pharaoh ordered his warriors and the Israelites to cross the Red Sea to pursue Moses. Unfortunately, when the Egyptians followed suit, the walls of water engulfed them and they drowned. It was the way God always helped Moses in his journey. Moses brought Israelites to

pass Red Sea safely. On the other hands, God drowned Pharaoh and his warriors when they tried to catch Moses and Israelites. Pharaoh was cursed because he stole Israelites' freedom and made them as slaves in Egypt. Moses in Christian myth was a character who symbolizes Israelite slaves' freedom. He was seen as the leader of the Liberation. It enabled Israelite slaves to have a sense of freedom.

Incorporation of Christian Myth in the Novel

Both Moses and Harriet as hero/heroine whose adventure began when freedom was taken away from them and their people. They were the chosen people from God to be the leader for their people to regain their freedom.

The usual hero adventure begins with someone from whom something has been taken, or who feels there's something lacking in the normal experiences available or permitted to the members of his society. This person then departs on a series of adventures beyond the ordinary, either to recover what has been lost or to discover some life-giving elixir. It's usually a cycle, a going and a returning (Campbell, 1991:101).

Harriet piloted the slaves to North, traveling by night, hiding by day, scaling the mountains, fording the rivers, threading the forests, lying concealed as the pursuers passed them. She carried the babies, drugged with paregoric, in a basket on her arm. She went nineteen times and brought away over three hundred people from land of bondage to the land of freedom.

The spiritual deed of Harriet was shown by her belief that God will always help her in any trouble that she faced. On one of her journey to North, Harriet was shown the map of New York State, and the track of the railroad, for more than three hundred miles to Niagara, where he would cross the river and be free. Unfortunately, the way seemed long and full of dangers. Harriet encouraged her people in her cheery way. They must not give up now.

"Go forward." (Bradford, 1886:47).

"De Lord had been with them in six troubles,

and he would not desert them in de seventh." (Bradford, 1886:60).

There was nothing to do but to go on. As Moses spoke to the children of Israel, when compassed before and behind by dangers, she spoke to her people, that they should go forward. Her religious character brought up by parents possessed of strong faith in God, she had never known the time when she did not trust Him, and cling to Him, with an all-abiding confidence. She seemed ever to feel the Divine Presence near and talked to God "as a man talketh with his friend." Hers was not the religion of a morning and evening prayer at stated times, but when she felt a need, she simply told God of it and trusted Him to set the matter right (Bradford, 1886:23). It was clearly shown that Harriet's belief in God related to the story of Moses in Christian mythology that Moses gave Israelites the law that would brand them as people who knew God.

Christian Myth as a Revelation of Spiritual Values for Today's Human Life

Myths serve several purposes. One of the foremost purposes is about religion. One of the essential elements of a myth is a religious significance. In these cultures, the myth explained religious beliefs as well as justifying religious rituals (Bolton, 2002:2). The reflection of Moses in Christian myth signifying the spiritual values for human's life in the present time will be presented below.

Spiritual Values of the Ten Commandments for Today's Human Life

The Ten Commandments are the commands God gave to the people of Israel through Moses after leading them out of Egypt bondage. Moses was the chosen one and received the Ten Commandments from God; the first four commandments are based on religion; the fifth commandment concerns family responsibility; the sixth and eighth address the crimes of murder and theft; the seventh, ninth, and tenth focus on moral living: do not commit adultery, do not lie,

and do not covet the belongings of others (Atkinson, 2017:35).

The Tenth Commandments of Christianity are reflected in the spiritual values of American's society in the present time. It influenced the way American's society behave to God and people. In the United States, the Ten Commandments became the foundation of both personal and civil morality. One of the amendment in Bill of Right is about to speak freely for both colored and white people in America. For example, a colored American author Toni Morrison expressed her free of speaking though her works. Nowadays, based on Nevins' article, stated that about 71 percent of American society are Christian and worship God. It is influenced by the First Commandment. Americans who commonly regard their society as the freest and best in the world as the value of the Eight Commandment. The understanding of freedom was shaped by the Founding Fathers' belief that all people are equal and that the role of the government is to protect each person's basic "inalienable" rights. The U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights assures individual rights, including provisions for freedom of speech, press and religion. The next value is about the right of citizens in the American constitutional democracy to attempt to attain "pursue" happiness in their own way as long as they do not infringe upon the rights of others. It shows that one of the values of the Tenth Commandments. As a result, most of the spiritual values of the way American's society life were influenced by Ten Commandments delivered by God in Christianity and still exists in the present time.

CONCLUSION

Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People novel told about Harriet who was born as slave in America and was chosen by God to be the leader of the other slaves in the journey to North for freedom. Her journey to the North for freedom has similarities with Moses' journey in liberating

Israelites slave from Egypt bondage to freedom. The main theme of both story of Moses in Christian myth and *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People* novel is “self-freedom is everybody’s right.” In Christian myth, Ten Commandments were given to Moses for Israelite as their basic law. The legacy of it is lasting. For instance, most Americans are Christian as the values of the First Commandment; Americans commonly regard their society as the freest and best in the world as the value of the Eight Commandment; the right of American constitutional democracy to attempt to “pursue” happiness in their own way as long as they do not infringe upon the rights of others is a result of the Tenth Commandment; Although there are still some transgressions of one or more of the Commandments, there are somehow many other Americans who are still devoted to the Ten Commandments as moral principles in their daily life.

Nurgiyantoro, Burhan. (1998). *Teori Pengkajian Fiksi*. Yogyakarta: Gajah Mada University Press.

REFERENCES

- Armstrong, Karen. (2005). *A Short History of Myth*. Great Britain: Canongate Books Ltd.
- Atkinson, Dominique. (2015). *The Men Who Changed the Course of History*. California: Kindle Edition.
- Bolton, Lesley. (2002). *Everything: Classical Mythology Book*. Avon, Massachusetts: Adams Media Corporation.
- Bradford, Sarah H. (1886). *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People*. New York: GEO. R. LOCKWOOD & SON
- Bressler, C. E. (1998). *Literary criticism: An introduction to theory and practice*. Upper Saddle River, N.J: Prentice Hall.
- Campbell, Joseph. et al. (1991). *The Power of Myth*. United States of America: Anchor Books.
- Guerin, W. L. et al. (2005). *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Marks, Carole C. (1998). *A History of African Americans of Delaware and Maryland's Eastern Shore*. Wilmington: A Delaware Heritage Press Book.
- Mercatante, Anthony S. (2009). *The Facts on File Encyclopedia of World Mythology and Legend*. United States of America: Facts On File, Inc.