

Character Building in Lang Leav Poetry “Sea of Strangers”

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ABSTRACT

This research aims at analyzing the character building of selected poetries in Lang Leav’s “Sea of Strangers”. In this research, a qualitative approach is used as the research design, and the data was analyzed using content analysis. “Sea of Strangers” is a continuation of Lang Leav book series Love & Misadventures, Lullabies, and The Universe of Us. There were eight poetries analyzed and several character buildings found in those poetries. The character buildings that appear are the character of patient, hard-working, religious, strong, creative, independent, confident, being realistic, respectful, honest, caring, and loving. From the eight poetries analyzed, almost all of those poetries explained the women's strength when they feel the pain of heartbreaking, waiting, romance, and insight into everyday life. Besides the beauty of the words used by the writer, these poetries also contain a lot of inspiring messages.

Keywords: Character Building; Lang Leav; Sea of Strangers; Poetry

INTRODUCTION

If in the past, poetry was often seen as a boring text for many people, maybe not for now. The interest in writing and reading poetry has become a very fun trend, especially for those who love reading and literature. This is evidenced by the number of literary books that have become best sellers in many bookstores and several collections of poetry written by famous authors have become the most widely read works on online book platforms. According to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) 2017 Survey of Civic Engagement in the Arts (SPPA), the percentage of American adults who read poetry has almost doubled in the last five years, from 6.7 percent in 2012 to nearly 12 percent in 2017. In other words, 28

million people read a poem last year. Also, Alysha Mohamed (2020) in *The Journal of Queen's University* stated that the interest in reading poetry in recent years is not only owned by prospective writers and literature students but also has a special interest among young people. Even in social media such as Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest, and others, there are lots of accounts that publish poetry either in Indonesian or in English.

One of the modern poetry writers who is getting enough attention among young people is Lang Leav. Leav was born in a Thailand refugee camp. Her family fled Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge regime. She was the second youngest of three brothers. Her family moved to Australia in 1981. Her mother was a seamstress, and her father practiced acupuncture. Leav grew up in Cabramatta, Sydney, in a refugee village. Leav's passion for literature began at a young age. She wrote poems and gave them to her friends in school. In her official blog, Langleav.com, she received a Churchill Fellowship Award for her undergraduate thesis in college, "Cosplaying Lolita". Her first anthology, *Love & Misadventure* (2013), was a smash hit, and her subsequent poetry collections have all gone on to become worldwide bestsellers. In 2016, Lang shifted her focus to fiction, and her debut novel, *Sad Girls*, debuted at #1 on the *Straits Times* and other international bestseller lists. Even her book, *Lullabies*, won Goodreads Best Poetry.

Many people think that poetry is only for those who are sad and broken up. Though, poetry does not always discuss feelings only. Poetry can be many things. Poetry can be philosophical, emotional, or nostalgic. In a descriptive style, it can paint pictures, and in a story mode, it can tell stories. Poems may be ironic, sarcastic, political, or just informative (Wolosky, 2001). Aan Mansyur, one of the most famous poetry writers in Indonesia, once stated in an interview that poetry is more about thinking. Many people believe that writing poetry is all about emotions, with no involving thought. Even though what happens is the opposite, when writing poetry, someone will reflect and think more because poetry itself is often written with a unique choice of words so that deep meanings, ideas, and feelings can beautifully reach the reader. From the language style used by the writer himself, the characters contained in the poetry can be identified.

In Merriam Webster, a character is defined as one of the attributes or features that shape and distinguish an individual. According to Suyanto (2009), Character is how a person thinks and behaves to live and cooperate with the environment around him. Whether it is with his family, friends, nation, and country. Suyanto also added that someone who has a good character is the one who can make decisions and he is ready to take the responsibility for the decisions he makes. In line with this, the Indonesian Ministry of National Education decided 18 values originated from Pancasila, religions, culture, and the objectives of national education.

Several studies that have made poetry as its object have been widely carried out. Some of them also use Lang Leav's poetry as the object of their researches, such as research conducted by Azmita (Faithful translation), Lestari (Semantics Deviation),

and Wibowo (Deconstructive meaning). These previous studies have been conducted in many different ways in analyzing Leav's poetries and they tended to focus on analyzing the aspects except the character building in Lang Leav's poetry. Therefore, further investigation related to the character-building in Leav's poetry is needed to complete the significance of the research in this field. This study focuses on analyzing the character building in Lang Leav's "Sea of strangers". Sea of strangers is Lang Leav's book which was published in 2018. It contains poetry and prose which speak about the beauty and tragedy of love. This book is a continuation of Lang Leav's previous international bestselling book series, Love & misadventures, Lullabies, and The Universe of Us.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Character Building

In the Cambridge dictionary, there are two meanings of the word "character". *first*, character is a noun defined as the unique combination of qualities that distinguishes one person or place from others. *Second*, character is a person or figure represented in a movie, drama, or story. This research refers to the first definition which means personality or human character. It suits the quotes from John wooden (1910-2010) "Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are". Based on this quote, a human character should be built early to create a strong character. Therefore, character-building becomes an important topic studied in parenting, education, and nations' culture.

In Indonesia, the government really concerns about character building in education. Literary works are a part of language education in Indonesia. It means characters built in the literature of Indonesian schools and universities are very important. The goal of character building in Indonesia are; 1) to develop the students' ability to become better individuals while also representing the nation's culture and characters, 2) to accelerate the advancement of National Education, and to be in charge of helping students achieve their full potential. and 3) to filter the elements of one's own and other nations' cultures that are incompatible with dignified moral values and national characters.

Based on Pusat kurikulum dan Perbukuan (2010), the Indonesian Ministry of National Education states that there are eighteen values of character building in Indonesian national character and cultural education or PBKB (Pendidikan Budaya Karakter Bangsa) namely; religious, honest, tolerant, disciplined, hard-working, creative, independent, democratic, curious, nationalistic, patriotic, sportive and respective, inclusive and communicative, peace-loving, studious, caring and compassion, empathetic, and responsible.

Poetry

Robert frost (2001) defines poetry as “when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words.” In other definition, Poetry refers to a type of literature that employs the aesthetic and often rhythmic qualities of language, such as phonesthetics, sound symbolism, and meter, to elicit meanings in addition to, or instead of, the prosaic ostensible meaning. Poetry is a broad topic that is as old as history and probably older, and it is the basic and primary form of language itself. Naturally, not every tradition, as well as every regional or individual variation, can or should be included, but the article offers examples of poetry ranging from nursery rhyme to epic. Ina Mustofa (2005:5) states that poetry as a kind of literature is simply another way for us to view the world around us through our imagination. As people, we love seeing, listening, and talking about what is going on around us. When we watch movies, listen to the radio, or watch television, we think of it as a way to broaden our horizons or do things in our imagination.

Barnet (2008: 578) reveals that poetry is characterized by the number of lines, stanzas, or rhymes. It provides us with more than just entertainment; it also justifies its role in our lives. We will conclude that poetry will extend, refine, or enliven our understanding of life. It must provide not only entertainment but also comprehension to make a convincing claim on our attention. Based on the explanation, it is clear that poetry refers to a literary work in which there is a beautiful art that arises from human life. It is the representation of emotions and the depiction of the author's imagination.

Beside emotion and imagination, Darta and Maria (2018) argued that literature including poetry also teaches the readers about strong characters or values. It's because readers can use poetry to not only read the poet's message or intention, but also to focus on life and share the experiences of others in shorter texts. Strommer (2013) states that in only a few lines, poetry's simplicity and sophistication can fascinate, tell stories, and evoke feelings. It brings the readers to previously closed rooms which provides sense beyond words.

The poetry studied in this research is lang leav's poetry in her anthology entitled “Sea of Strangers”. the genre are mostly about romance and life. Lestari (2018) has studied the language style of Lang Leav. She found that lang leav used “to say in brief compass” which means she mostly used daily expressions and common words. It is probably Leav's strategy to ease people to understand her works. Atzi (2020) also researched into this poetry and discovered that hyperbole is the most prominent feature in it because there are so many over-dramatic expressions. It will evoke strong emotions in the readers and indulge them with her words. Based on these strength of lang leav's words, it is interesting to study more about the poetry with other ways of reviewing and in other aspects of meaning and values.

METHOD

Design and Samples

This research is conducted using a qualitative approach while the research design used is content analysis since this study focuses on investigating the character building in Lang Leav Poetry “Sea of Strangers”. There were eight poetries chosen, those are *Sea of Strangers*, *Strength*, *Ad Infinitum*, *My Life*, *To Dare*, *An Impossible Ideal*, *Take Back Your Power*, and *Smoke and Mirrors*. The poetries were chosen based on the diversity of characters each of the poetries had.

Instrument and Procedures

In acquiring the data, the researcher read the poetries in “Sea of Strangers” book and selected several poetry to be analyzed. There were eight poetries chosen, those are *Sea of Strangers*, *Strength*, *Ad Infinitum*, *My Life*, *To Dare*, *An Impossible Ideal*, *Take Back Your Power*, and *Smoke and Mirrors*. The poetries were chosen based on the diversity of characters each of the poetries had.

Data Analysis

According to Patton (2001), content analysis usually refers to analyzing text (interview transcripts, diaries, or documents) rather than observation-based fields notes. In acquiring the data, the researcher read the poetries in “Sea of Strangers” book and selected several poetry to be analyzed. There were eight poetries chosen, those are *Sea of Strangers*, *Strength*, *Ad Infinitum*, *My Life*, *To Dare*, *An Impossible Ideal*, *Take Back Your Power*, and *Smoke and Mirrors*. The poetries were chosen based on the diversity of characters each of the poetries had. After the data collected, the researcher read the poetries for many times to get the meaning of the poetries. While reading the poetries, the words or sentences that indicate the characters are analyzed. As a result, the characters found in the poetries are explained descriptively in the result and discussion section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first poetry that will be discussed is entitled "Sea of strangers". This poetry contains 4 stanzas and there are 4 lines in each.

*“In a sea of strangers,
You’ve longed to know me.
Your life spent sailing
To my shores.
.....”*

The phrase “Sea of Stangers” in this poetry emphasizes that she is waiting for the one who is trying to find her among the millions of people on earth. Meanwhile, the words “*You’ve longed to know me here*” may have two meanings. The person he is waiting for is someone he already knows before, or it could be someone he doesn't

know who and where. *"Your life spent sailing, to my shores"*, this sentence shows the patience of someone who fights for his woman as if he will not stop to search until he finds the woman he loves. So, in this poetry, Lang Leav seems to show that patience is needed whether it is when we want to fight for our beloved ones or wait for someone that will come to.

“.....
*The arms that yearn
To somebody hold me,
Will ache beneath
The heavy oars.*
.....”

Each sentence in this stanza implies someone's struggle to pick up his true love. Starting from struggling to find him, holding him in a hug, taking him to the aisle, to guarding him until time separates. But it cannot be denied that fighting for love is not an easy thing. Even so, he never gave up because he realized that love is needed to be fought. From here, the "hard-working" character can be found easily by the reader.

“.....
*Please take your time
And take it slowly;
As all you do
Will run its course.*

*And nothing else
Can take what only—
Was always meant
As solely yours.”
(Sea of Strangers)*

The words *"Please take your time, and take it slowly"* interpret the meaning to always be careful and not in a hurry to do something. The last stanza in this poetry also shows that there is a religious value in it. In religion, especially in Islam, a person is ordered to fight before submitting to God. In this context, a person should believe that something destined for him will not be allowed by God to become someone else's.

The next poetry discussed in this research is untitled *"strength"*. It is a short poetry with free verse style.

*"Don't let them tell you that your pain should be confined to the past, that it bears
no relevance to the present. Your pain is part of who you are.
They don't know how strong that makes you.”
(Strength)*

This poetry obviously tells about strength. The sentence "leave the pain in the past to face the future" is so famous and always told by people as an advice for someone

living in pain or broken heart. But in fact, to forget pain is not as easy as to talk. Therefore, try to live with the pain is the best way to heal the heart. Turning the pain into a meaningful lesson in life is the real meaning of strength. In this poetry, the main character building is just like its title, strength.

In addition, the words “your pain is part of you are” show the honesty of the writer to express the feeling. It is not easy for someone to tell the sadness because it seems like a weakness to handle the feeling. Most people decide to say “I am okay” and pretend to be the strongest person while deep in their heart screaming “I am not Okay”. In some cases, this fake strength will dangerously involve the mental health and put someone in depression. Nowadays, people are more aware of these cases. Therefore, the quote "it is okay not to be okay" becomes popular and discussed in psychological classes, psychiatric consultations, and even in movies.

*The solution
Is neither
Further or nearer
Like the mirror
Of a mirror
Of a mirror
(Ad Infinitum)*

The poetry above is entitled Ad Infinitum. In Cambridge Dictionary, Ad infinitum means forever or without end. In this poetry, the writer asked us to look at a mirror to know the solution to our problems. What the researcher gets from this poetry is, the solution to any problems is ourselves, not others because in the mirror we are going to see the reflection of ourselves. The size of the problem depends on us. Sometimes, a small problem could be bigger because we are too overthinking. Therefore, when facing a problem, we have to try not to get too carried away with the problem because a clear mind is needed to find a solution for any problems that come insistently. Thus the character building found in this poetry is being creative in problem-solving.

*“I will celebrate this life of mine, with or without you.
The moon does not need the sun to tell her she is already whole.”
(My life)*

This poetry sounds like a confession of a woman who wants to move on after a breakup. She could be happy during her relationship with her ex and she wants to prove that she could be happier without him. It teaches us not to hang our happiness on others. The words “The moon does not need the sun to tell her she is already whole” mean to get freedom in our life without the need for other's people recognition. Living without trying to get other people's recognition will make life feel lighter and freer. Gradually, our self-confidence will increase and we will become stronger because we could stand and feel happy on our own feet. The main character in this poetry is being independent.

*“Spread your wings—now is the time,
To dare, to dream, to reach for the sky.
This is the moment you will soar;
If you want it now—you can have it all.*

*Others will look upon your grace,
And their bitter heart will cry in spite;
The best parts of you—they’ll try to take,
To dim the brilliance of your light.
.....”
(To dare)*

Those are the first two stanzas from “*To Dare*” poetry. It has a strong character which can be identified from the words used by the writer. This poetry also encourages us to be independent, hardworking, and vigorous to reach our dreams. A big dream needs struggles. That is why we have to believe in ourselves that we could get what we want because results will not betray the efforts. After we are at the peak of success we will find gazes of people who look at us enviously, because they do not know our struggles from the beginning. Yet again, success cannot be achieved easily. When someone tries to bring you down, do not let them do that. Keep standing confidently even though under your feet many obstacles are ready to beat you.

*“Men don’t compare us
With other women
They compare us
To an ideal.”
(An Impossible ideal)*

This poetry probably refers to the writer’s experience with men or perhaps her research on men’s thoughts about an ideal woman. Some people especially men may think her thought is judgemental and subjective. However, it is not a research, it is a poetry. Bates (2009: 210) explained that one of poetry or poem purposes is using words to express ideas and emotions. Both are really personal. Therefore, the poet is permitted to share her own perspective of something.

The word “*impossible*” seems like a disagreement expression. She argues that such ideal women do not exist and it is impossible to reach. It is a suggestion for men to be more realistic in a relationship and love women as they are. For women, it is a respectful idea that women should love themselves, and no need to be perfect just because they want to be loved. The writer is a woman and she is so honest in expressing her thought. She really inspires the readers about being realistic and respectful.

*“Greet the world with no expectation
Love as though you have never been hurt and betrayed*

*Let go of the ones who takes so much from you
 Yet offer nothing in return
 This is how you take back your power.”
 (Take back your power)*

The idea of this poetry is about how to heal the broken heart and get back to happiness. She proposes three ways of it. First, “*Great the world with no expectation*” means we have to live with people around us without having too much hope or expectation in them. By doing it, we can avoid being disappointed and heartbroken. The second is forgetting the bad experiences in the past. Third, forget and leave a person who treats us like nothing but a commodity. These tips are the character-building to be strong and loving.

*“I know you are young and there is so much life left in you. But deep down, you know she is the one. It’s true the world is a great big place, and you are not done exploring every inch of it. But, sweetheart, it’s all just smoke and mirrors. And if you don’t make her yours now, someone else will. And you are going to regret it for the rest of your life.”
 (Smoke and mirrors)*

The writer also tells us a dilemma to choose between reaching big dreams -such as careers, wealth, and passions- and stop at a place to be with someone we choose as our beloved spouse. The writer reminds us that all the dreams maybe not as worth having a happy life with someone we love. The writer describes the dreams as “*It’s all just smoke and mirrors*”. It is because the chance might not come twice. If we ignore to propose, she/he will probably belong with someone else. This poetry tries to remind us of the importance of making a decision not only from our thought but also from our hearts. Trying to hear our deep-heart is the best way to be happier in the future. The character building in this poetry is about honesty, caring, and loving.

The following table will represents the character buildings found in Lang Leav Poetries “Sea of Strangers.

Table 1. The character buildings in Lang Leav Poetries “Sea of Strangers”

Poetry	Character Building
Sea of strangers	Patient
	Hard working
	Religious
Strength	Strong
	Honest
Ad Infinitum	Creative
My Life	Independent
To dare	Independent
	Hard working
	Confident

An Impossible ideal	Realistic
	Respective
Take back your power	Strong
	Loving
Smoke and mirrors	Honest
	Caring
	Loving

According to the table, there are twelve characters found in the poetries; patient, hard-working, religious, strong, honest, creative, independent, confident, realistic, respective, caring and loving. The seven characters (religious, honest, hard-working, creative, independent, respective, and caring) match the Indonesian national character and cultural education written in Pusat kurikulum dan Perbukuan (2010). The rest of them (patient, strong, confident, realistic, and loving) are not mentioned there but deserved to be taught as the development of Indonesian character building. These character buildings in Lang Leav's Poems are also supported by Darta and Maria's (2018) revelation that literature, including poetry, contains not only the poet's message or intention, but also strong characters and values.

The explanation above has elaborated the characters contained in every poetry. However, the majority of the poems depict women's strength when faced with the pain of heartbreak, waiting, romance, and insight into everyday life. Morin (2018) stated that strong women never think that sadness is weakness, never give up to gain the life goal, never compare them selves to others, never let others limit their potential, and never attempt to be perfect. Therefore, the characters such as patient, hard-working, independent, confident, and realistic are closely related to the characters of strong women. Those all characters are the implicit messages from Lang Leav to the readers, especially women.

Lestari (2018) and Atzi (2020) who has analysed lang leav's "Love and misadventure" revealed that the language style mostly used common words in daily life and consists of many dramatic hyperbolas. The beauty of her words has also found in this edition "Sea of Stranger". It is very related to the occurrences in love stories. As a result, all readers will have an easier understanding to the meaning. Her segmented readers, such as youngsters or even adult women, will be deeply touched by her words.

CONCLUSION

Through the content analysis of eight poetries written by Lang Leav in "Sea of Stranger", the researcher found several character building appears in these poetries, they are patient, hardworking, religious, strength, creative, independent, confident, being realistic, respectful, honesty, caring and loving. From the eight poetries analyzed, almost all of those poetries explain the women's strength when they feel the pain of heartbreaking, waiting, romance, and insight of everyday life. These

poetries are very relatable to the events that occur in a love story. Besides the beauty of the words which can make the readers immersed in the atmosphere of the poetry being read, these poetries also contain a lot of inspiring messages.

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