

Animal in Islam: a Literary Study on Eka Kurniawan's "O" Through Alquran Perspective

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Abstract— This paper aims to observe the position of non-human animal which is portrayed within Kurniawan's *O*. The novel narrates the journey of a female monkey named O that looked for her soulmate Entang Kosasih, a male monkey that seemed transform into Kaiser Dangdut after his mysterious disappearance from Rawa Kalong forest. O's journey unexpectedly guided her to meet human characters within the novel. The objective of this study is to analyse relationship between human and non-human animal which focusing on the conflict between Betalumur and Syekh Nuruddin Asyhadie as humans and non-human animal characters because both of Syekh Nuruddin Asyhadie and Betalumur portray distinctively two manners on the treatment to non-human animals. By using qualitative method, this work examines Eka Kurniawan's *O* through literary study framework by using intrinsic approach of Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, and the notion of animal in the Quran by Sarra Tlili to reveal the position of non-human animal characters within the novel. The analysis finds that through Betalumur the novel puts animal as the object of oppression and exploited in a capitalistic way. On the opposite side, through Syekh Nuruddin Asyhadie the novel draws animals as a source of inspiration and are not placed below human authority and domination. Thus, Kurniawan's *O* offers multidimensionality of treatment on non-human animal and help the readers to increase the understanding about non-human animal's usage.

Keywords— *O* (novel); intrinsic approach; non-human animal; Alquran

I. INTRODUCTION

On March 10 2016, Eka Kurniawan's *Man Tiger* was nominated in Man Booker Prize. This prestigious award raised his name as a writer who got international public attention, so did his country, Indonesia. Man Booker Prize history was first held on 1968. Its previous target only covered literary works which are written in English and published in United Kingdom. In 2005 the organizer expanded their selection range to the whole world[1].

The history notes that there are some Asian writers who succeeded to be a Man Booker nomination, such as Mahasweta Devi (2009) and Amitav Ghosh (2015) from India, and Kenzaburo Oe (2005) from Japan. However, there were no Southeast Asian writers succeeded to win this prestigious

award. Then, on 2016 Eka Kurniawan broke this chain and was nominated among twelve selected writers who four of them are Asian [2].

Along his writing career, Kurniawan have released some novels and short stories collections. His latest novel titled *O*, which brought animal as the main axis of its narration. See[3]. The novel draws about O, a female monkey that lived in the forest of Rawa Kalong, where the myth about Armo Gundul spreading among monkeys. The relation that O constructed with human starts from the ambition of Entang Kosasih to follow Armo Gundul's track to become a human. After Entang Kosasih shot Joni Simbolon till death with a revolver [1, p. 223] and he suddenly disappeared from Rawa Kalong, O began his journey to look for his soulmate whom she believed that he has transformed into a human. O's quest to look for Entang Kosasih guided her to meet Betalumur, an animal tamer, who made her to be a performer of The Masked Monkey show. Living with Betalumur put O within exploitation and oppression. Although she had a chance to run away from her authoritarian owner, she never did it. Instead, she just made herself trapped within daydreaming and speculation until she met with Siti, the Kakatua which was educated by Syekh Nuruddin Asyhadie. Unlike Betalumur, Syekh Nuruddin Asyhadie gave animals special treatment. Instead of exploiting animal like what Betalumur did, Syekh Nuruddin Asyhadie taught Siti The Kakatua to read Alquran verses.

This work notes that the relation between human and non-human animal which is portrayed by Betalumur and Syekh Nuruddin Asyhadie as human and non-human animal characters in the novel is a unique because both of them distinctively plays two different manners on the treatment on non-human animals as explained above. Therefore, the analysis explores the position of non-human animal which is resulted from those relation through literary study framework by using intrinsic approach by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren and discourse of animal in the Qur'an by Sarra Tlili.

Rene Wellek and Austin Warren's intrinsic approach is applied to know the structure and development of plot in the novel, while the notion of animal in the Qur'an by Sarra Tlili is believed to support the analysis in explaining the position of non-human animal characters which are portrayed within

Kurniawan's O. The data which is used in this analysis covers Eka Kurniawan's O narrative focusing on Betalumur and Syekh Nuruddin Asyhadie as human characters; while, O and Siti The Kakatua as non-human animal characters in the novel.

II. METHOD

In literary study, there are a lot of methods, concepts, and theories which can be used to support the analysis. By using qualitative method, this work elaborates intrinsic approach to support this analysis to know deeper aesthetic structure of the novel or other literary works as an autonomous object and to explain plot development which is constructed within the novel by interpreting and analysing basic elements of the novel. Those elements are plot, characterization, and setting. Plot is a narrative structure which consists of episodes or chapters in the novel [4, p. 224]. Regarded characterization, it has two different types in general, static and dynamic, and its methods vary. It may appear through physical appearance and sometimes in psychological nature. Setting is the surroundings where a character lives [4, p. 227-229].

Since the main focus of this analysis is to explore position of non-human animal characters in Kurniawan's O, it also uses discourse of animal in the Qur'an by Sarra Tlili. The discourse is regarded as the most appropriate theory to decipher the nature of non-human animal within Kurniawan's O, because it covers not only animal within philosophical landscape but also ethical view. Tlili's writing is quite comprehensive to explain this theme, because besides Alquran and Hadith, she also undertakes Islamic exegetical traditions (*Ilm' Tafsiir*), those are Ibn Jarir At-Thabari, Fahr Ad-Din Ar-Razi, Ibn Abd Allah Al-Qurthubi, and Ismail Ibn Kathir [2, 11-12].

Tlili examines *tadhilil* concept through several verses from Alquran, which are related with animal issue, Hadith and four exegetical texts. She finds that those verses grant humans a type of control over animals. The verses state that humans can obtain some benefits from animals. These benefits can be categorized into material, aesthetic, and religious [2, p. 76].

In accordance with the material benefit, and the comments from four exegetes, humans are given permission to eat (*kulu*) parts of animals slaughtered by Islamic way, but hunting to kill animal is forbidden. Humans may use animal, such as horses and camel to fulfil the function of transportation but, this permission does not acceptable to other *an'am*, such as cow that is appointed to plough the land. The animal also can become a source of warmth for human by use parts of animal, such as sheep's feather, as clothes, blanket, etc. Unless, hides of animal whose meat are not permissible, such as carnivorous animal [2, 79-87].

Enjoyable moment could be found when someone meets animals that present healthiness from their physical appearance. This psychological experience is referring to aesthetical benefit of animals [2, p. 88]. Then, religious benefit of animals often referred to process of *i'tibar*, a condition when someone interprets the existence of all creatures among him or her as the demonstration of God's attributes and metaphysical truths [2, p. 89-90]. Thus, the point of explanation above is, based on the Quran verses and its comments from exegetes

(*mufasssirin*), humans' ability to control animals does not mean that they are freely to do anything what they want to other animals because, "there are no actual authority is given to humans in this respect" [2, p. 01].

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Before discussing the position of non-human animal characters in Kurniawan's O. The need to decipher the development of plot and characterization is necessary to know the structure of the novel. The data in this study is focused on the relationship between Betalumur and Syekh Nuruddin Asyhadie as human characters; and O and Siti The Kakatua as non-human animal characters. Table 1 below is provided to draw intrinsic elements of O:

TABLE 1
INTRINSIC ELEMENTS OF O

Characters	Characterization	Plot	Setting
O The Monkey	An animal Faithful Sentimental	O decides to look for Entang Kosasih after the incident of The Police's firing and Kosasih's mysterious disappearance. O arrives in the market and find figure of Dangdut's caesar who she believe as Entang Kosasih. O meets Betalumur who recruits her as performer of The Masked Monkey show.	Rawa Kalong The market The market
Betalumur	Lazy Pesimistic Not well educated	Betalumur exploits O to earn money by turning her as the performer of The Masked Monkey show's performer. Betalumur unfairly treats O from material and non-material sides.	Crossroad One damaged building in Jakarta (Betalumur's domicile).
Siti The Kakatua	Lazy Pesimistic Not well educated	O unexpectedly meets Siti The Kakatua and talk about the will to become a human.	One damaged building in Jakarta (Betalumur's domicile)
Syekh Nuruddin Asyhadie	Religious Brave Animal caretaker	Syekh Asyhadie meets with Siti The Kakatua when he gives speech to his student. One-day Syekh Asyhadie finds the Kakatua recites Qur'an verse that wondering his self.	Nur Wahid Valley Nur Wahid Valley

Table 1 draws that O's narrative started when Entang Kosasih stole a revolver from Sobar The Police in Rawa Kalong. Entang Kosasih's action was completely controlled by his belief that he could become a human if he did what human do. Unfortunately, the incident happened to Entang Kosasih when Sobar The Police shot Entang Kosasih's head to revenge his friend's death. O as Entang Kosasih's fiancé just moaned duo to his dead. However, the mystery appears when Entang Kosasih's corpse cannot be found. This unexpected incident makes O to believe that Entang Kosasih has transformed into human and decide to go to the market looking for him. Her arrival to the market makes O trapped deeper in illusion of Entang Kosasih that he became a human. A man with guitar and tassel stuffs on his shirt, and hairy chest, for the sake of earth and sky she believes that he is Entang Kosasih[1, p. 277]. At this moment, O meets Betalumur; the masked monkey show's owner, who makes O to be a performer. Nonetheless, this havoc does not put O in a stressed situation. Instead, she believes that through the masked monkey show she can learn to become a human and pursue his love, Entang Kosasih The Dandut Caesar.

Unfortunately, as the performer of Betalumur's masked monkey show, O rarely got suitable material and non-material feedback. Instead, Betalumur often gave O punishment if she did not do her job in the show or do something that Betalumur hated without reason. Betalumur even has a tool which is designed to punish O. "Three pieces of half dried palm leaf stick, which is bounded by elastic ring is enough to make a monkey defeated, to give it hell [...] It will mark O's back with crossed straight line. At first those lines look in pile, then its form cracks which appearing tiny blooded trenches." [2]

The havoc which befalls on O does not only about Betalumur's disciplinary, but also in unfulfilled primary needs of living creature. Betalumur puts half intention in caring O's material need, such as "When O just about peels her banana, Betalumur suddenly takes it back and cut it off into two pieces. Half of it for O and half another for his self." [1, p. 38]

What Betalumur did to O, as mentioned in the citation above, implies that he exploits O in a capitalistic way. This means that Betalumur gives O, as production tool, material and non-material feedbacks a minimal as possible, then he can take advantage as much as possible from the masked monkey show's business. Tlili explains this as the opposition of Qur'an values which are related with non-human animal usage, because in controlling non-human animals the permitted act in taking benefits from them lied on certain factors. What Betalumur did is collided with aesthetic and material usages that Tlili explained. The aesthetic usage refers to Betalumur's act in providing O's eatery. Qur'an's value suggests human to "take them out to pasture (Q.An-Nahl: 6 in Tlili, 2015, 88)" which imply the suggestion to fulfil non-human animal's primary need that is food. Regarding material usage, Qur'an categorizes it into three kinds of benefits, those are: consumable flesh of certain animal (*an'am*), transporting loads for animals that have strong power and producing wear stuffs from animals that have hides which not include as part of their meats[2, p. 79-87]. It shows that benefits which can be

advantaged by human is limited and considered. However, what Betalumur did to O (as monkey) is not acceptable, because there is no reference which portrays that exploitation, through The Masked Monkey show, on non-human animal is permitted. Moreover, Betalumur's position as animal's owner draws that he puts animal as mere an object of exploitation which is acceptable to be oppressed. This attitude is not permitted because "humans does not have any authority to do it"[2, p. 91].

Betalumur's unfair treatment also covers other non-human animal characters in the novel, such as his attitude toward the arrival of Siti The Kakatua. He reacted by "taking small rocks in various sizes; as big as a pingpong ball till a hand's fist from the building yard. He throws those rocks to Siti The Kakatua without any consideration." [1, p. 96]. Siti's arrival gets O's attention to ask about vision to become a human. In fact, Siti perceives O's question by revealing consequence of becoming a human. "Trespassing from monkey's world to human's is a big deal. Once you step in, you will never come back" [1, p. 101]. Siti, a name given by Syekh Asyhadie, is a female kakatua bird educated by Syekh Nuruddin Asyhadie. He is a religious man who lives in the abandoned prayer-house (*surau*) at the suburb. Her first meeting with Syekh Asyhadie happened when he taught his students at Nur Wahid valley. Kakatua often attended his religious lecture that made him wonder, because "At that time, he saw a Kakatua reciting a verse that he often cited, Al-An'am, verse 106[1, p. 160]. Syekh Asyhadie responded this moment by glorifying God's name. "Allah the Enormous." Syekh Asyhadie murmurs while wiping hands to his face. "Bird, *Nur (Light) Wahid (One)* is not just mere a name for this valley. It not only gives light to human, but also all creatures around it. Allah gave that light to you. Allah The Most Holy[1, p. 160].

What Syekh Asyhadie did, as mentioned in the citation above shows that he regards the moment of Qur'an recitation by non-human animals as part of God's miracle. Tlili explains this treatment as part of non-human animal treatment which is suited with Qur'an values. What Syekh Asyhadie does is a process of *I'tibar*, a condition when humans regard the existence of all creatures around them as a part of God's existence[2, p. 89-90] which is included into religious treatment of non-human animals. Therefore, Syekh Asyhadie regards Kakatua as a source of his inspiration to increase his faith toward God. In addition, beside taking advantage from religious side Syekh Asyhadie also cared about Kakatua's primary need; food, by "[...] bringing her many gifts, especially fresh and delicious fruits[1, p. 162], and did not place animals below his position as humans and domination by putting them as well as God's creature, For instance, Syekh Asyhadie also applied the practice of teaching and learning for non-human animal characters in the novel by "[...] teach Kakatua another Qur'an verses[1, p. 161]." Thus, Syekh Asyhadie shows the positive treatments on non-human animal appropriate with Quranic values.

IV. CONCLUSION

The analysis above draws that between Betalumur and

Syekh Asyhadie, there are contrasts portrayed within their relationship with non-human animal characters in Kurniawan's *O*. The novel, through *Betalumur*, depicts position of non-human animal as an object of exploitation and oppressed under *Betalumur*'s authority. On another side, through Syekh Asyhadie the novel places non-human animal characters as a source of inspiration and treated as well. In short, the novel offers the readers the knowledge to reconsider the righteous treatment on non-human animal.

The writer adds that literary work which portrays phenomenon of human and non-human relationship like Kurniawan's *O* to increase the sense of awareness about non-human subjects, especially animal. However, this work is very simplistic analysis on Kurniawan's *O*. The writer suggests that Kurniawan's *O*, as autonomous object, can be analyzed through philosophical and other perspectives, because every character within the novel portrays its own uniqueness which can be further evaluated.

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