HEROISM OF SAMIRAH AL-ABBAS IN RIORDAN'S THE SHIP OF THE DEAD

Reza Akbar Meidiansyah

Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University reza.akbarm16@mhs.uinjkt.ac.id

Abstract

People tend to associate heroes and heroism with the acts of being brave and risking life. However, actions that have both of these features are far more likely to generate heroic labels than actions that have only one feature. This paper aims to show the heroism of Samirah al-Abbas in the Rick Riordan's third novel of the Magnus Chase and the Gods Of Asgard trilogy entitled The Ship of The Dead. This paper approaches the heroism values of the character by applying the concept of the Great Eight popularized by George R. Goethals and Scott T. Allison. The findings show that throughout the plot of the book, Samirah exhibited six of eight heroic traits, which are caring, charismatic, inspiring, selfless, smart, and strong.

Keywords: heroism, hero, psychoanalysis, characterization, novel

INTRODUCTION

The human tendency to honor the heroes presents to be a universal aspect of the culture of human civilization. Human has respected their heroes since ancient times, proven in cave paintings, folklore, and myths (Becker & Eagly, 2004). As the human mind develops, civilization thrives forth into a more complicated one. It breeds new forms of culture, such as language, social interaction, and the way how human lives their life. The usage of cave paintings, oral traditions, molded myths, legends, and folktales is substituted by written mediums, such as poems, epics, and Eddas. The literature texts somehow outlast the ancient civilization and keep the tales safe, as the modern civilization still speaks of the names and stories of the heroes.

Heroism in modern society is shaped by people's interpretations. People tend to associate heroes and heroism with the acts of being brave and risking life. Yet, the definitions do not wholly point out that it is the connection of risk-taking and service to a socially valued goal that generates the heroic label (Becker & Eagly, 2004). However, actions that have both of these features are far more likely to generate heroic labels than actions that have only one feature. Therefore, persons who take risks merely for amusement or gaining an audience, as in extreme sports, are not perceived as heroes, nor are people who provide valued social goals without risking their own life, as in community service.

In ancient culture, heroes are usually great male warriors who possess spectacular strength or sociopolitical power, as well as an individual who is not defined by other people or society (Noble, 1990). That being said, they are not bound to another individual. They are also respected and revered by civilization throughout history for the reason that heroes represent the best that is in humanity. An example of honoring heroes is immortalization, such as paintings, statues, and tales. That being the case, heroes are more popular than heroines. However, different treatment is often given to female heroes. Female heroes, or heroines, are typically defined by their support roles, such as their relationship with the male heroes, or by their gender roles (Noble, 1990). Heroines cannot live as freely as the heroes. They are not allowed to break the rules to simply enjoy their lives.

Frisk argued that the absence of women in the early literature on heroes points to a close association between heroism and masculinity (Frisk, 2019). However, new studies have discovered that women in post-traditional civilizations have actually started to be recognized as heroes, yet, ironically, often with reference to traditionally female traits, such as caring and giving concern for others. Nevertheless, they are still treated with less recognition than the male heroes in public conversation, even though they display self-sacrificial and brave actions to the same level as men (Becker & Eagly, 2004).

This paper studies the heroism that appeared in Rick Riordan's third novel of the *Magnus Chase and the Gods Of Asgard* trilogy entitled *The Ship of The Dead*. The novel, released in October 2017, narrated the final chapter of the journey of Magnus Chase in stopping Ragnarok and dealing with Loki, the God of Mischief. The paper focuses only on the female character, Samirah al-Abbas, or Sam, since she seems to perform certain heroic characteristics in supporting Magnus Chase's battle against evil. Samirah al-Abbas is characterized as a Muslim girl who is also a Valkyrie, a female fighter in the Norse Mythology, and also the daughter of Loki. The complexity of the background of Samirah al-Abbas as a character that performs heroic acts and heroism in the story thus needs to be explored.

Recent previous studies on heroism in literary texts were found to distinguish this study with other studies. Shang's thesis (2018) provided an analysis on the heroism in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series using Immanuel Kant, David Hume, and John Stuart Mill's philosophical evaluations of moral righteousness and Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2008). Refieta (2021) shared her comparative study on the heroism in Gilbert's *Robin Hood* and Ridyasmara's *Pitung*. The concept of heroism that Refieta used was taken from Kinsella et al. (2015) that proposes thirteen central features of a true hero. Another thesis by Pangestu (2021) provided an analysis on the heroism in selected fairy tales by the Grimm Brothers using the act of heroism philosophy proposed by Zimbardo (2015). The article by Sari et al. (2021) provided a portrayal of heroism of the female character in Moerdopo's *Perempuan Keumala* by utilizing the heroism values

proposed by Goethals and Allison (2012). Lastly, Yuliasari and Virtianti (2021) provided an analysis on the heroism of the main character in the movie Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters by using the concepts of heroism proposed by Franco and Zimbardo (2006). Utilizing those previous studies, this study focuses on discovering the heroism characteristics, based on the concept of heroism by Goethals and Allison (2012), within the female character, Samirah al-Abbas, in Rick Riordan's Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard: The Ship of The Dead.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is considered as literary criticism as it applies certain theory and approaches to scrutinize the aspects of literary texts. The source of the data of the study is Rick Riordan's third novel of the Magnus Chase and the Gods Of Asgard trilogy entitled The Ship of The Dead published by Disney Hyperion, USA and 432 pages thick. The data used in this study are in the form of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that provide Samirah al-Abbas's characterization that represent heroism and the traits of the heroes. The theory of heroism used in this study is the theory of heroism proposed by Goethals and Allison (2012). For this paper, the novel will only be mentioned as *The Ship* of the Dead and Samirah al-Abbas will be mentioned as Sam.

Goethals and Allison (2012) emphasized that the hero idea is dynamic. Hero story follows a certain narrative structure that highlights personal qualities and behavior that qualify the character as a hero. The heroic attribute of the fictional heroes can be seen in a character influenced by various aspects. The aspects thus provide certain prototypical schema that can be characterized based on the eight main traits of the heroes. The eight traits, which is named as The Great Eight traits of heroism, consist of caring, charismatic, inspiring, reliable, resilient, selfless, smart, and strong. The first trait, caring, is represented by the attribute of compassionate, empathetic, and kind. The second trait, charismatic, is represented by the attribute of dedicated, eloquent, and passionate. The third trait, inspiring, is represented by the attribute of admirable, amazing, great, and inspirational. The fourth trait, reliable, is represented by the attribute of loyal and true. The fifth trait, resilient, is represented by the attribute of accomplished, determined, and persevering. The sixth trait, selfless, is represented by the attribute of altruistic, honest, humble, and moral. The seventh trait, smart, is represented by the attribute of intelligent and wise. Lastly, the eighth trait, strong, is represented by the attribute of courageous, dominating, gallant and leader.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This part is intended to explore the heroic features of Samirah al-Abbas, a female supporting character in Riordan's The Ship of The Dead. This paper utilizes the characterization of Sam and classifies the characterization based on Goethals and Allison's concept of the Great Eight traits of heroism.

Sam often displayed heroic moves that lead to the safety of her friends. This action fits the meaning of the word 'hero' itself, which connotes 'protector' or 'defender'. The word 'hero' has dictionary definitions that resonate with the Greek myth. The definitions are referred to a person with great strength and bravery. From the might and valor, the heroes could develop something exceptional compared to the other characters. These extraordinary traits could be anything, such as power, skill, and even physical features. Thus, the attributes help them to execute good deeds. As a complex character, Sam had actively demonstrated numerous valiant acts that would make her a hero.

The first hero trait that Sam performed is Caring. The caring characteristic could be found in someone if they exhibit acts of compassion, empathy, and kindness. The heroes could show this particular trait whether toward their friends or even foes. The form of compassion could be indicated by an explicit response like stating condolence. It could also be illustrated by micro-expression, such as frowning or wincing. The trait caring is an essential trait a hero must possess. By owning this attribute, the heroes can understand the situation around them. This way, they would certainly lend a hand to those in need.

The first datum proves Samirah's caring trait. This trait was shown after Magnus, Blitzen, and Hearthstone ventured to Alfheim, the home of the Elves. The purpose of their adventure was to kill Hearthstone's father, Mr. Alderman, who had changed into a dragon. The transformation was caused by a powerful curse of greed which Mr. Alderman helplessly failed to break. Once the trio returned from the Realm of the Elves, their friends demanded them to tell about their journey. Blitzen and Hearthstone told them the whole story, which ended badly.

Datum 1

I went below to get pants and shoes. When I came back, the crew was gathered around Hearth and Blitz, who were recounting our adventure in the magical land of elves, light, and reeking dragon carcasses.

Sam shook her head. "Oh, Hearthstone. I am so sorry about your dad." The others murmured in agreement.

(Riordan, 2017, p. 249)

The datum above shows how Sam expressed her sympathy by saying that she felt the lost for her friends' father and also gesturing her expression by shaking her head. This gesture is then followed by the others when they murmur in unison to hints that they also sympathized with Hearth and Blitz. Since the sympathy for the lost is expressed with a certain gesture, it can be seen as a form of empathy or concern one would show to their acquaintances or relatives.

The above datum is one of the evidence that show Sam had a certain caring trait. Aside from her empathy, she is also described as compassionate and kind to Magnus and her other friends since they had been having a long journey together in stopping the

Ragnarok, a catastrophe that can destroy the people of Asgard. After the death of Alderman, she even offered others to hold hands together and help the others to fly, because only Sam who has the ability to fly.

The second hero trait that Sam shows in the story is charismatic. The trait is represented by the attribute of dedicated, eloquent, and passionate, and is also often linked with leadership. Characters shown with a high level of charisma would frequently be identified a hero as well as a leader. Charismatic characters are dedicated and passionate about what they do. They are also eloquent figures, which could help them gain support and assistance from their allies. They can even bend their enemies to their will with their speech.

In the novel, Sam demonstrated her charismatic figure due to her experience which had shaped the attributes of charisma in herself, such as eloquence and passion. Sam once used her eloquence skill when Aegir and his nine daughters started attacking her and her friends. The jotnar were attacking them because they desired to see the heroes die. Before Aegir and his daughters could get their hands on the heroes, Magnus distracted them by mentioning mead, which referred to Mead of Kvasir. That was the moment where Sam jumped into action. She changed the subject of discussion for distraction as shown in datum 2 below.

Datum 2

Aegir cradled his cask. "What exactly do you have to say about mead?" "I'm glad you asked!" Then I realized I had no answer. Once again, Samirah to the rescue. "We will explain!" she promised. "But stories are better told over dinner, with good mead, are they not?" Aegir stroked his cask affectionately. "An aperitif, with a fruity edge." (Riordan, 2017, p. 90)

The datum 2 above happened when Magnus succeeded to gain Aegir's attention. The jotun deity requested elaboration of what he knew about mead. Unfortunately, Magnus ran out of ideas and he was rendered speechless. Sam then quickly promised Aegir that they would explain about the mead later after the meal. Aegir, who was tempted by the offer, agreed to follow Sam's proposal. This act shows that Sam is eloquent and persuasive towards Aegir to abide by what Sam uttered to him. Judging by the way Aegir agreed to what Sam proposed without any objection, she had proven herself to be an effective communicator.

Sam was not officially the leader of the group. Nevertheless, Magnus and the others often regarded her as one due to her charismatic persona. She was committed and devoted to the mission tasked to her even when the mission was operated during the fasting month of Ramadan. Her dedication in helping Magnus and the others made her manage to focus on thinking and trigger her eloquence overcoming the challenge posed by their enemies. As an addition, Sam once made her friends obey her imperative order without any rebuttal. With her charisma, Sam had also led her comrades to achieve success in their adventure.

The third trait, inspiring, is also performed by Sam. As a Valkyrie who had experience in many situations, Sam also possessed this inspiring trait. Her education made her qualified to give inspirational thoughts that could help not only herself but her comrades as well to overcome any kind of obstacles or even dangers. One evidence for the example of Sam's inspiring trait is when she, along with Magnus and Mallory had successfully retrieved the Kvasir's Mead from Suttung's possession. Datum 3 below shows her inspiring trait to her friends.

Datum 3

Sam slung the flask over her shoulder. "I might be able to outfly them, at least as far as the ship, but carrying two people? Impossible. Carrying even one will slow me down."

"Then we divide and conquer," Mallory said. "Sam, take the mead. Fly back to the ship. Maybe one giant will follow you. If not, well, Magnus and I will do our best against both of them. At least you'll get the mead back to the others."

(Riordan, 2017, p. 298)

Datum 3 above happened when Gunlod had informed them that opening the cave's door will alarm Suttung and Baugi right away. Sam then initiated a plan to anticipate the arrival of the *jotnar*. After a little bit of exchanging ideas, the plan was finally completed. Using her flight power, Sam planned to outfly Suttung and Baugi to take the flask with the Mead of Kvasir back to their ship. She made it clear to Magnus and Mallory that she could not carry both of them while trying to fly faster than two powerful *jotnar*. This inspired Mallory to concoct a more solid plan so they could keep the Mead out of enemies' reach and deliver it back to the ship unharmed. The three decided to implement Mallory's diversionary tactic, which involved dividing all three of them. Mallory thought that Sam would distract one of the *jotnar* and he would pursue the Valkyrie. Therefore, she and Magnus would take care of the other one.

During the entire plot of *The Ship of the Dead*, Sam had only demonstrated an inspiring act once. However, that single act had a significant outcome. The initial plan Sam created had Mallory inspired to perfect it. As the consequence, they could defend themselves against the incoming attack from their adversaries. The plan was also executed to finish their mission, which was to bring the Mead of Kvasir safely to the hands of their friends who await them in the harbor.

Another outstanding hero trait that Sam performed is selfless. Selfless characters are frequently depicted as ones who are willing to put others before themselves. They even would execute an act of sacrifice, as long as it could help them to save other people's lives. Heroic characters are portrayed to demonstrate this trait as well. They are

altruistic, honest, and humble toward their friends or sometimes foes. In addition, heroes have moral codes that they have vowed not to break, such as not hurting or killing their enemies.

As a Valkyrie who was tasked under direct orders from Odin, Sam had developed a selfless characteristic. She had to put her missions ahead of her personal interests. Anything or anyone not related to her missions should be put aside. Sam was also willing to assure the safety of others first. She did not want her actions to hurt or even harm those who are innocent. When Magnus, Sam, and Mallory were in Flam looking for clues for the location of Kvasir's Mead, they spotted a lady whom Mallory suspected as Loki. They followed the lady into a train. Mallory also claimed that the lady was the one responsible for her death back in the 1970s. For this particular reason, Mallory swore that she would kill that mysterious lady with any means necessary as shown in Datum 4 below.

Datum 4

A low growl started in Mallory's throat.

"Hold on." Sam grabbed her wrist. "There are a lot of mortals on this train. Can we at least confirm that this lady is Loki before we start killing and destroying?"

(Riordan, 2017, p. 261)

Datum 4 above shows that, before Mallory, who was filled with resentment and anger, could do anything reckless, Sam tried to reason with her first. The low growl in her throat indicated that she was in a rage and ready to unleash it on the mysterious lady. Because there were many innocent humans on the train, Sam asked Mallory to make sure that the person they were following was truly Loki. If they were going to fight, Sam did not want them to hurt anyone uninvolved. This deed points out Sam's selflessness because she prioritizes other people's safety before engaging in potentially harmful acts.

As a Muslim girl, Sam also performed the trait of selflessness when she had to help Magnus and the others in saving the future of the world when she also had to fast during the fasting month of Ramadan. Since fasting during the Ramadan month requires the Muslims to retain from eating and drinking during certain hours, the body condition of the Muslims will most probably show lack of nutrition and power in executing physical activities. However, without thinking about her personal condition during the fasting month, she could contribute to the accomplishment of her team in saving the world.

Another heroic trait that Sam performed in the story is smart. Her experience as a Valkyrie combined with her intelligence turned Sam into an astute person. Her acute perception helped her to adapt to the harms or dangers that her enemies pose. Therefore, Sam always could create any plans to counter them and even save herself and her

friends from any threats. Her quick wit once helped her and her comrades in their mission of looking for Kvasir's Mead. When Magnus, Sam, and Mallory had arrived in Suttung's cave where the Mead was stored, they had to face Suttung's nine *jotun* thralls who guard the cave as shown in Datum 5 below.

Datum 5

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"Kill them?" Red polled his buddies.

"Yes, probably kill them," Tattoo agreed.

"Hold on!" I yelled before they could take a vote, which I had a feeling would be unanimous. "We're here for a very important reason—"

"—which does not entail our deaths," Sam added.

"Good point, Sam!" I nodded vigorously, and the thralls all nodded along.

(Riordan, 2017, p. 283)
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Datum above happened when the guardians of the cave, the nine thralls were tasked by Suttung to keep anyone away from the Mead. They complied with the order with any means necessary and it was evident that they would not hold back. The proof of their ruthlessness was shown when the heroes met them for the first time. One of them whom Magnus referred to as 'Red', asked his fellow thralls to kill their visitors right away, which was agreed by another *jotun* whom Magnus called 'Tattoo'. This mere utterance presented enough threat to put the heroes' lives on the line. Magnus then instinctively yelled and told them that he and his friends were looking for an important reason. Sam's quick wit came into play by telling the thralls that the heroes did not need to die for the reason they were looking for. The nine thralls, who were all not quite bright, agreed to not execute their initial plan. Yet again, Sam's intelligence helped her and her friends to escape peril that could lead to their death.

As a daughter of the god of mischief renowned for his ingenuity, Sam inherited the ability thus the trait of smart is one of her main weapons. With her intelligence, Sam had successfully outwitted her enemies several times to gain the upper hand. Because of her intelligence, she had formed an extremely useful alliance as well. Sam was also capable to concoct a plan in dire times. Therefore, Sam's smart personality was the best help for her and her comrades.

The last heroic trait that Sam performed is strong heroic trait. A hero could gain a greater ability, which is sometimes referred to as 'superpower', through the development of their basic physical or psychological strength. The development could be obtained by hard work of self-training, as well as enhancement through a chemical reaction, cosmic radiation, or even divine bestowment. One obvious example is Sam herself. The mere status of Valkyrie, which was bequeathed by Odin, granted her the power of flight and super-strength. In addition, she controlled the power of shape-shifting due to her father's genetic inheritance. Sam's superpowers came from both Odin and Loki, two major figures who were honored as gods in Norse Mythology, which

made them divine bestowments. Besides her brawn power and unique abilities, Sam held psychological strength as well, by the virtue of her intelligence.

Through the whole story of The Ship of the Dead, Sam had shown her strength at the beginning of their mission. When the group was sailing, a storm raged and struck their ship. The phenomenon, which was ultimately revealed that it was the work of Aegir's nine daughters, caused the heroes much trouble. They were hopelessly vulnerable against the power of nature as shown in Datum 6 below.

Datum 6

With a cry of despair, T.J. lost his grip and hurtled into the maelstrom. Sam zoomed after him. Thank goodness for Valkyrie powers of flight. She tackled T.J. around the waist and zigzagged back to the ship with him, dodging the grasping hands of the sea giantesses and various pieces of luggage we were shedding like ballast.

(Riordan, 2017, p. 73)

Datum 6 above was one moment where Sam was forced to utilize her super-strength As a consequence of the powerful storm, the wind was strong enough to hurl T.J. into the rampaging hurricane. With the combination of her ability to fly and super-strength, Sam launched herself toward T.J. and snatched him midair. She then successfully brought him to safety. This act proves that Sam was strong enough to carry a person while flying at relatively high speed. Her super-strength also made her able to withstand the wind, so she was not tossed away like T.J.

The findings above are mostly to represent Sam's heroism throughout the plot of The Ship of the Dead. Although the findings only provide six of eight heroic traits listed in the concept popularized by Goethals and Allison, as a character, Sam is a heroic character. The great eight heroic traits are actually inseparable since by having the trait of caring, charismatic, inspiring, selfless, smart, and strong, Sam is indirectly characterized as resilient and reliable too. Sam's values of heroism are all forged by various aspects that happen in her life journey. Those aspects are whether internal or external. For instance, her experience and relatives played a role in shaping her personality. On the other hand, her intelligence and resolve helped her to utilize her skills. Heroes are often depicted as caring and charismatic individuals who are likely to inspire people around them. They are also selfless for they often show the tendency to put others' interests before theirs. In addition, heroic characters usually are smart and strong individuals, being able to eventually defeat their enemies, either using their brains or brawn. Referring to the concept of the great eight heroic traits, Sam is characterized as a heroic character and performs the values of her heroism.

CONCLUSION

Using the concept of the great eight, it is concluded that Samirah al-Abbas is characterized as a heroic character. By observing the direct characterization as the data above, she exhibited six of eight heroic traits of caring, charismatic, inspiring, selfless, smart, and strong throughout the story. However, through the indirect characterization, she also exhibited reliability and resilience. Since Rick Riordan's *The Ship of the Dead* is the third installment of the *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard* trilogy, Sam's values of heroism were forged by many factors, such as her background, experience, family, friends, and her own resolve. The heroism values were actively expressed through her actions. This paper thus suggests further studies are executed to explore the issue whether heroism and masculinity are interrelated even though the character is a female character.

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