

# THE CORNERSTONE OF INDIVIDUAL CONSCIENCE IN AMERICAN LITERATURE BY READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM

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## **Abstract**

Individualism is always to be an interesting issue because of its relevancies with some big cases in America and its impacts toward the other countries, mainly, in Indonesia. This paper is by no means a comprehensive account of individualism or more accurately, individualism, in America. In fact, it is intended to be more suggestive than comprehensive though it is characterized by more summary than controversy. Many ideas as well as some of the highlights of American manifestations of individualism and modes of individualistic thought and philosophy have been added to fit this into a length paper. What follows, then, is merely a look at some of the high-water marks of literary American individualism and an attempt to offer some cursory explanations for this American phenomenon in theory and practice. Reader-Response criticism is used to make perspective and interpretation without a doubt. For Indonesian, they can be more comprehensible about the deep meaning of American individualism than before.

**Key words:** individualism, American culture, Reader-Response criticism

## INTRODUCTION

Some people, mainly, Indonesian assume that individualism is very dangerous toward the existence of Indonesian cultural traits. They believe that it is not suitable with their cultural backgrounds. It denotes negative impacts toward their lives. It is a Western product, or even an American product. As long as we are trapped from this false consciousness, we will lack of motivation to pursue our dreams because of extreme dislike. Here, literature can be a solution in bridging the mutual understanding of culture between America and Indonesia, mainly the canon of individualism interpretation.

To get better understanding about it, Reader-Response approach is used to learn by demystifying literature and connecting it to individual experience. Reader-Response criticism does not provide us with unified body of theory or a single methodological approach for textual analysis. But believing that a literary work's interpretation is created when a reader and a text interact or transact, these critics assert that the proper study of textual analysis must consider both the reader and the text, not simply a text in isolation. For the critics, the reader + the text = meaning. Only in context with a reader actively involved in the reading process with the text, they decree, can emerge meaning (Bressler 1999:67-68).

Individualism lies at the very core of American culture. Hence the most important thing to understand about Americans is probably

their devotion to individualism. The stereotypic images associated with American individuality are not only abundant but abundantly well known the world over. The American cowboy counts among the most powerful and proliferated of these images. He is most frequently depicted as the only human in a vast landscape. He is a loner, a free soul, a man who finds his strength in the solitude of vast stretches of uninhabited countryside. In some cowboy films, his rugged individualism and go-it-alone approach allows them to overcome the odds and not only survive but triumph. His victory is portrayed not only as a personal one but also as a practical and moral victory for all of society and ideals such justice and humanity.

So, what is actually the meaning of American individualism? Some scholars give different perspectives and interpretation about the definition of individualism. Most American said it tends to any responsibility by yourself. For American children, they are trained from very early in their lives to consider themselves as separate individuals who are responsible for their own situations in life and their own destinies. They are not trained to see themselves as members of a close-knit, interdependent family, religious group, tribe, nation, or any other collectively (Althen 1998:5).

Still by borrowing the writing of Athen (6-7), you can see it in the way Americans treat their children. One day I was at local shopping mall, waiting in line to buy Orange juice. Behind me in the line was a

woman with two children, a boy who was about three years old and a girl who was five. The boy had his hand in a pocket of his blue jeans, and I could hear that he had some coins in there.

The boy asked his mother, "Can I get an Orange Juice?" No, she said to him. You don't have enough money left for an Orange Juice. Remember you bought that cookie a while ago. You do have enough money for a hot dog. So you could have a hot dog now if you want to. Or, you could save your money, and sometime later when you have enough money, we could come back here and you could get an Orange juice.

But when Americans hear this story, they usually understand it perfectly well. This mother is helping her son learn to make his own decisions and to be accountable for his own money. Some American parents might not expect a three-year-old make a decision about how to spend money, but they certainly understand what the mother is doing. She is getting her son ready for a world in which he will be responsible for his choices and their consequences. Even his own mother won't be helping him later in life, and he needs to be ready for that.

Definitions of individualism are also influenced by some eras as the spirit of the age. In short, there is any distinctive characteristic of the definition in line with the changing of era. It was as Renaissance era, for an example, connected with a philosophy was called humanism. Included in this worldview were support for the idea of the central role



and dignity of the individual; the development of all of the human faculties, especially the artistic ones, and not merely the intellectual ones. The Protestant religion also developed during this period. Led by the German theologian and activist Martin Luther (1483-1546), this revolt against the centralized control of religious thinking and practice by the Roman Catholic Church based faith on the individual's inner experience of spiritual struggle and salvation and was called the Reformation (Kohl 1992:16).

Let me offer another, Emerson's "*Self-Reliance*", he has given great contribution to depict the American cultural identity that still hold by most American nowadays. It is individualism. The development of individualism as an American mind can not be parted from phenomenon living in the society at a particular time. Individualism as a living concept has its connection with history, politics, economics, sociology, and culture of the society where it is nurtured. By looking at the progress of individualism and its spread, it can be assumed that individualism might exist in the future.

Recently, the term of individualism is associated with some issues considered as representative of individualism itself in America. They are : **Individual freedom.** In America, each individual has freedom to take a part in his life. He is free to decide what to do now and in the future. American government or constitution guarantees its people without interference. They are free to speak, to get material wealth, and

to profess a religion. As for the historical data, before the Civil War of the 1860 the American ideal of the free individual was the frontiersman and small farmer. It then developed in different setting like entering the wilderness for getting gold. There they were to be individuals, who were responsible to themselves. The individual was the center to serve what he needed.

**Self-Reliance.** It is a nineteenth-century term, popularized by Ralph Waldo Emerson's famous essay of that title '*Self-Reliance*'. Americans believe that individuals must learn to rely on themselves or risk losing freedom. This means achieving both financial and emotional independence from their parent as early as possible, usually by the age 18 or 21. It means that Americans believed they should take care of themselves, solved their own problems, and "stand on their own feet." Americans believe they must be self-reliant in order to keep their freedom. In order to be in the mainstream of American life—to have power and / or respect—individuals must be seen as self-reliant.

**Equality of Opportunity.** Everyone has the same chance to get a certain status. It is important to understand what Americans mean when they say they believe in equality of opportunity. They do mean that each individual should have an equal chance for success. Americans see much of life as a race for success. For the equality means that everyone should have a chance to enter the race and win. In other words, equality of opportunity may be thought of as ethical rule.

**Competition.** It may take the form of rivalry between individuals within a group, of competitive effort of social groups to gain their objectives, of racial rivalries, or of a contest of culture and institutions for pre-eminence. Competitive effort may be expended to achieve sheer existence and survival, or it may be devoted to a struggle for prestige. Competition is seen as an open and fair race where success goes to the swiftest person regardless of his or her social background. Competitive success is commonly seen as the American alternative to social rank, the more successful a person is the higher his social status is. And competition is seen by most Americans as encouraging hard work.

**Material Wealth.** Material wealth becomes a value to American people. The phrase "going from rags to riches" becomes a slogan for the great American dream. The main reason is that material wealth is the most widely accepted measure of social status in the United States. Because Americans reject the European system of hereditary aristocracy and titles of nobility, they have to find a substitute for judging social status. The quality and quantity of an individual's material possessions become the accepted measure of success and social status. This was a standard of American success, material wealth. Abundant material wealth of the United States has been a major factor in development of the American character.

**Hard Work.** It is a price of material wealth. American people claim that material wealth can be obtained through hard work only. To

get it, they try to expand from one place to another place. In early twentieth, American people expanded to the Northland. The North American continent was rich natural resources when the first settlers arrived, but all these resources were underdeveloped. Only hard work could these resources be converted into material possessions and comfortable standard of living. Hard work has been both necessary and rewarding for the most Americans throughout their history. Because of this, they have come to see material possessions as the natural reward for their hard work. Most Americans believe that if a person works hard, it is possible to have a good standard of living. It is possible to say that hard work is also an ethic in American life. Hard work was coming from Protestant tradition. Protestant tradition probably played an important part in creating a good climate for the industrial growth of the United States, which depended on hard work and willingness to save and invest money. The belief in hard work and self-discipline in pursuit of material gain and other goals is often referred to as "the Protestant work ethic" reflected in Max Weber's work *'The Protestant Work Ethic and The Rise of Capitalism'*

## **INDIVIDUALISM IN PHILOSOPHY**

Individualism in philosophy perspective tends to political philosophy dealing with liberalism. Liberalism encompasses political, social, and economic doctrines that emphasize individual freedom, limited government intervention, gradual social process, and a free



market economy. (Rohman, 1999: 231). As a political philosophy, it is a basic principle that individual liberty is an ultimate value for human beings. The primacy of this basic freedom determines the individual position on every social and political arrangement.

Furthermore, liberty is also an essential attribute for human beings in the state of nature. Liberals believe that, first, humans are naturally in a state of nature / freedom (nothingless). According to John Locke, individuals in state of nature are in “... *a state of perfect to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave or dependency upon the will of any other man.*” (Nozick, 1974:10)

Second, as freedom and equality are normatively basic, any limitation of them should be based on rational justifications. As rationality in modern liberal tradition is an individual attribute that is essential to the concept of justice, political authorities and laws that limit the liberty of citizens must be justified rationally, such as by social contract. However, the strategy of justification for this purpose is still debatable. Many classical liberals, who developed contract theories, from Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Immanuel Kant to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, have distinctive features in their theories.

Classical contract theories have an original aim to legitimate political obligations and to show that acceptance of obligations could be

justified by rational individuals. In Hobbesian tradition, it is argued that persons are primarily self-interested, and by their rational assessment, they will find the best strategy to maximize their self-interests that, then, it will lead them to give consent to governmental authority. Meanwhile, Kantian tradition argues that rationality requires respect to persons, which in turn requires that moral principles be such that they can be justified to each person. Thus, individuals are not taken to be motivated by self-interest but rather by a commitment to publicly justify the standards of morality to which each will be held. (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/contractarianism>).

Renaissance era is also an interesting era associated with the development of American individualism. It is a cultural, social, or political rebirth referring to the historical period in Europe around the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that followed the period known as the Middle Ages. During that time there was a break with the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church and the rebirth of interest in classical Greek and Roman art forms (Kohl 1992:15).

The easiest place to draw a quick terminus of originating literary depictions of American Individualism is with the writings of Benjamin Franklin. As a true Renaissance man Franklin was quintessentially an individualist. In his wide range of genre and topic Franklin would advocate freedom of speech and of press (himself being a printer). He would laud the American love of open and spirited debate, depicting a

great turn around from the days of totalitarian rule and the ruthless suppression of dissent in the nascent puritan colonies. Franklin's *Autobiography* relates his personal transcendence above the class and caste of his birth – a feat much less possible had he been born in Europe – and lauds the virtues of individual self improvement—giving the text the character of the self-help book.

The witty aphorisms proffered in his widely successful journal, *Poor Richard's Almanac*, admonish the reader to industry, thrift, self-sufficiency, and personal virtue: "*Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise*"; "*Would you live with ease, / Do what you ought, and not what you please*"; "*God helps them that help themselves*" There were several cultural and geographical factors at the time of Franklin's *Autobiography* that lent the American character to greater receptivity of individualist ideas and breaking away from the communal pressures of the old Puritan influence.

Individualism is also defined in Webster's New Dictionary and Thesaurus as the doctrine that state exists for the individual (1990:282). The individualism had flourished during the Age of Reason, or the Enlightenment. It is the name given to an intellectual and philosophical movement that developed in eighteenth-century Europe and is characterized by its belief that reason, and not superstition or the authority of unexamined tradition, can solve all of the problems of humanity. Enlightenment thinkers rejected the idea that religion can be a

source of truth, and believed instead that application of reason to the evidence of the senses is the sole source of the truth. Nature can be discovered and understood will be seen to be good and beautiful. God's will can be seen at work in nature without the need of supernatural intervention. This attitude toward God and religion, characteristic of much Enlightenment thought, is called deism (Kohl 1992:60-1).

Still by borrowing the writing of Kohl, In conjunction with their deist beliefs, Enlightenment thinkers replaced ideas of divine authority and the rights of kingship with ideas of universal human rights and the natural rights of all individuals. The ideals of French and American revolutions were Enlightenment ideas. Some thinkers usually associated with the Enlightenment era the philosophers John Locke (1632-1704), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778).

Thomas Jefferson was a distinguish figure in that period. The spirit of individualism rooted in the radically humanistic view that each man is free and has equal right to any other man. Individualism in this period was known as a rational individualism for its affirmation of reason in one's life. Thomas Jefferson as quoted by Allan Nevins and Henry S. Commager wrote:

*"A certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness, That to secure these rights, Government are instituted among men, deriving their just power forms the consent of the governed that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of*



*the people to alter or to abolish such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness"* (1986:85).

Romanticism is also in relation to American individualism. It refers to a style of art and a way of thinking, and to the historical period during which the style developed in Europe, the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. Many romantic ideas were derived from the works of the Swiss-born French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). He contrasted nature, which he believed to be pure, innocent, and virtuous, with society, which he felt encouraged deceit, hypocrisy, and the reign of self-interest needed to maintain an unequal distribution of wealth. In the state of nature, a person's genius can flower and his or her childlike innocence reveals the creative self free of hypocrisy. For romantics, the state of nature and the innocence of childhood are all part of a lost Garden of Eden that society has corrupted. The American writer Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson can be considered romantic writers and thinkers (Kohl 1992:17).

Born as the reaction to neo-classicism and formal orthodoxy, romantic movement brought some prominent changes of outlook. The center of life does not lie on the head but in the heart. It affirmed the supremacy of the heart—the inner life of oneself (Forster 1975:52). It stressed strong emotion, imagination, freedom from classical correctness in art forms and rebellion against social conventions (Spanckeren 1994:115). There are five aspects of American romantic world view

stated by Foster namely romantic individualism, feeling, imagination, the American past and nature.

## **AMERICAN LITERATURE ON INDIVIDUALISM BY READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM**

The principle of Reader-Response criticism includes attention of the role of the reader and a process-oriented approach to reading literature. Reader-Response supports activities that encourage us to draw on our personal experiences, opinions, and feelings in our interpretation of literature. According to Davies and Stratton (1984:3) "Reader-Response addresses this problem by making the learners "active participant(s) in the learning proceeds". The crucial connection between the reader and the text is explained by Rosenblatt's (1978) theory of literary reading, which describes the transactional relationship between a reader and a biography. The events that take place in a literary work occur at a particular time and place, and different readers react to these events in different ways, depending on their unique interests and experiences. Each reader attaches his or her own personal interpretation to a work; thus, a biography is "an active process lived through during the relationship between a reader and a text" and "should not be confused with an object in the sense of an entity existing part from author or reader" (Rosenblatt, 1978:20-21)

This perspective emphasizes the two-way relationship between texts and reader, a perspective that has a much in common with theories of top-down reading, where we use our schemata or familiarity with the topic from background knowledge and personal feelings to help us understand the work and improve our comprehension and interpretation of new information (Price and Discoll, 1977; Schwartz et al. 1998). Because each reader has distinctive experiences and feelings, an author's idea about a work may be described in a multitude of ways.

To get better understanding between meaning and reading. The following paragraphs by still borrowing the writing of Bressler (68-69). Meaning itself is context dependent and intricately associated with the reading process. Like literary theory as a whole, several theoretical models and their practical applications exist to explain the reading process, or how we make sense of printed material. For example, all focus directly on the reading process. What happens, they ask, when a person picks up printed material and reads it? During this interaction, reader-response critics investigate and theorize whether the reader, the text, or some combination finally determines the text's interpretation. Is it the reader who manipulates the text, they ponder, or does the text manipulate the reader to produce meaning? Does some word, phrase, or image trigger in the reader's mind a specific interpretation?

Such questions lead reader-response critics to a further narrowing and developing of terminology. For example, they ask, What is a text? Is

it simply the words or symbols on a page? How, they ask, can we differentiate between what is actually in the text and what is in the mind of the reader? And who is this reader, anyway? Are there various kinds of readers? And what about a reader's response to a text? Are the responses equivalent to the text's meaning? Can one reader's response be more correct than some other reader's, or are all responses equally valid? The concerns of reader response critics can best be summarized in one question: What happens during the reading process? Some prominent factors influencing it are such as the reader, the text, and meaning. How Reader-Response critics define and explain each of these elements determines their approach to textual analysis. Furthermore, such answer also help determine what constitutes a valid interpretation of a text for each critic. Although many reader-response critics allow for a wide range of legitimate responses to a text, agree that reader-response criticism does not mean that any and all interpretations are valid or of equal importance. The boundaries and restrictions placed on possible interpretations of a text vary, depending upon how the critic defines the various elements of the reading process.

American Literature class was initiated in two years ago at College of Languages in UNISSULA. I was very impressed when my class gave analysis on American literature about Emerson's "*Self-Reliance*" and Walt Whitman's "*Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*" I gave an illumination about one of the American identity in culture. It was individualism. The students with their backgrounds explored the



individualism values due to their lives. They were enthusiasm before I gave the readings. Some of them are as follows, supported with my perspective and interpretation.

“What Emerson means when he said *“whose would be a man must be a nonconformist”* (p.1162). I think that self-reliance itself has a meaning identical to the idea of individualism. In the beginning of the essay, Emerson stated that our soul always hears something, which is original, not conventional, whatever the subject is. Therefore, we have to speak of what we, not what other people think. “to believe your own thought” In that address Emerson would urge his audience to throw off the shackles of tradition and conformity. Emerson says *“to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, that is genius”* (1160) .

Emerson also courageously points out that in every man, there is a unique power, which enables him to face his destiny. Man has to do his own best else this power will loose its strenght, and he will have no peace nor can he achieve any success. A man is a being to whom God has given ability or inherent strength to trust himself. *“Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string”* (1161). If a man realizes this and develops self-trust, he will have a new power. On the other hand, if a man is always governed by society in his every action, he becomes weak, turns into a depending person, as well, and will never be satisfied

with himself. Emerson writes "*Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members*" (1162).

A man can keep his genuine thought as long as he is solitude, but it slips away as soon as he enters society. To become a real man, one must be a non-conformist, "*whose would be a man must be a non conformist.*"(1162). The most important thing in the world is the integrity of one's won mind. If the man absolves himself and promises to himself that he will be good, he will then have the suffrage of the world.

As for conformist, Emerson says that the sacredness of traditions is useless since what the tradition explains as good and bad. The only sacred law is that of one's own nature. To do well is to go upright and be vital, and to tell and ct the truth in all ways. Someone's life is for the life itself, not for spectacle. It is better that it should be genuine and steady rather than glittering and faltering. Someone has to be himself, and must go alone without any conformity to anyone else "*I actually am, do not need for my own assurance or the assurance of my fellows any secondary testimony*" (p. 1163).

Besides that, Emerson believes that conformity makes us false in every way. A person should have a greater trust in his nature and in God, than in the laws made by men or in the opinion of society. Furthermore, Emerson argues for not imitating what other people do.

Insist on yourself, we can do what we like to do with our own gift since we have the whole possession of it, whereas of other's adopted talents, we only get a partial and temporal possession. He takes as an example traveling abroad in order to adopt and imitate what we see and find. It is actually the result of a lack of our self-reliance. Some educated Americans think that American culture is poor compared with that of ancient countries, so that they travel abroad to search for culture, and then imitate what they have found without realizing that their own country has a culture no less than such action, according to Emerson, really shows a lack of self-reliance.

When the Romantic movement flourished in America in the nineteenth century, some people became increasingly dissatisfied with idea of rationalism, which dominated intellectual life in the eighteenth century. From the above discussion, it is seen that Emerson's individualism in his "self-reliance" was influenced by the romantic individualism which proclaimed that feeling and imagination were central. Individualism or self-reliance was connected with the idea that dignity of man requires that a man has to insist on himself and never imitate on the men.

Having pointed out Emerson's man idea in his 'self-reliance'. It concludes that he believes in individualism or non-conformity absolutely. He has a strong belief that a man has to trust himself, since he has his own power, mind, and originality of thought. It is very

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interesting to compare between Emerson's "Self-Reliance" and Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry". Both of them are in Romantic era which their work supports each other. But in Whitman's work, his poem contains wider meaning about individualism dealing with society. He stresses the idea of personality. An individual does not stand alone. An individual has to be a member of society. This membership involves both the rights or duties that accompany freedom. Whitman wants to identify the principle of equality and individuality. He admits his self-identify clearly as the section 7:

*Closer yet I approach you  
What thought you have now, I had as much of you-I  
laid in my stores in advance  
I consider'd long and seriously of you before you  
born  
Who was to know what should come home to me  
Who knows but I am enjoying this  
Who knows, for all the distance, but I am as good as  
looking at you now, for all you can not see me*

He also stresses to breakdown resistance friendship as the section 6:

*It is upon alone the dark patches fall  
The dark threw its patches down upon me also  
...  
I too knitted the old knot of contrariety  
Blabb'd, blush'd, resented, lied, stole, grudg'd  
Had guile, anger, lust, hot wishes I dared to speak*

After read this poem, I also found one interesting aspect to be discussed. It was the idea of transcendence. I know that Walt Whitman

is one of American Romanticism's greatest names. So he is also one of transcendentalists like Emerson in that era. Of course most of his writings and poets are still influenced by romanticism such as sentimentality for nature, stress over relentless change, and the domination of all by individual. And one aspect of his poet, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" that adheres to the American Romantics characteristics is the ideas of transcendence. I am also interested in this point because Walt Whitman differs from other Transcendentalists in regard to the fact that he did not take himself out of society like Thoreau, nor did he completely submit to a higher Divine Power like Emerson. The important idea of Emerson's "Self-Reliance" is the relation between the "Soul" and the "Divine Spirit", which Emerson expresses:

*"The relations of the soul to the divine spirit are so pure that is profane to seek to interpose helps. It must be that when God speaketh, he should communicate not one thing, but all things; ... All things are made scared by relation to it" (1168).*

In this statement Emerson emphasizes that mankind would build up direct relation with the Creator. No church is necessary. For Emerson, all things in nature became center of thought. All things become sacred. All things in nature become important instruments, bridging the relationship between a human being and his Creator. In applying Emerson's suggestion, Whitman relates an incident from own life in nature, i.e. *"What gods can exceed these that clasp me by the hand, and with voices I love call me promptly and loudly by my highest name as I*

*approach?*" (Sec.7, line.95), which hastens his communication with God.

Also in "Self-reliance", Emerson contrasts between individual and nature. Individual have tradition acquired knowledge of god in directly, base on the experience of the other people through religious teachings and religious ceremonies. Yet, thing of nature, like the rose or grass, trust the themselves perfectly to God. He say:

*"This should be plain enough. Yet see what strong intellects dare not yet her God himself, unless he speak the phraseology of I know not what David, or Jeremiah, or Paul ... If we live truly, we shall see truly. It is as easy for the strong man to be strong, as it is for the weak to be weak. When we have perception, ... When a man lives with God, his voice shall be as sweet as the murmur of the brook and the rustle of the corn."*

Compared by Emerson's essay, in Whitman's poem, we find that he took the human factor and social issues into consideration in his poetry. If we have ever read Whitman's poetry, we can see that in Whitman's poetry can be separated into three modes of transcendence or dialogue : (1) A dialogue between the self and the external world; (2) A dialogue between the self and another; (3). A dialogue between the self and the spirit. They are illuminated in the following stanzas: "*Which fuses me into you now, and pours my meaning into you?*" (Stanza 8). It describes the communication between the writer and the reader. The writer and the reader to nature "*Flow on, river flow with the flood-tide,*

*and ebb with the ebb-tide!"* (stanza 9). In stanza 2, "*Others will enter the gates of the ferry and cross from shore to shore*" He uses images of people going from shore to shore on the ferry. All of the people who take the ferry to one side will always take it back again. I think in this case that Whitman tried establishing a relationship with humanity in regard to the circle of life and human existence. His writing style permits inclusiveness of all human beings. Inclusiveness works because it is a poem about me (individualism).

After teaching an American literature class, I received feedback that indicated students' positive attitude towards literature and suggested that they would continue to read American Literature in the future. Nevertheless, some problems with the Reader-Response approach have been identified as follows: (1) Student's interpretations may deviate greatly from the work, making it problematic for the teacher respond and evaluate, (2) Selecting appropriate materials can be problematic because the level of language difficulty and unfamiliar cultural content may prevent students from giving meaningful interpretations, (3) The lack of linguistic guidance may hinder students' ability to understand the language of the text to respond to it, (4) The students' culture may make them reluctant to discuss their feelings and reactions openly. Therefore, even though Reader-Response has many advantages for learners, it still presents problems that need to be tackled in actual practice.



## CONCLUSION

I am positive by learning some great experiences and histories from big countries will support us to have clear vision as a nation. We also realize that Indonesia is multiculturalism and pluralism supported by the environment of fundamentalism, liberal and moderate. In relation to the existence of other cultural values in our home, absolutely they give positive and negative impacts toward Indonesian culture. In short, we must be selective. But if we claim that our culture itself is the absolute truth, it will trigger conflicts. Not every foreign culture is too bad, but it can motivate us to be more competitive than before. See competitiveness with opportunity oriented not risk oriented. We must be proud of our culture but we do not want to be any alien in our home. We are like fish in aquarium, the foreigners can see our activities from outside but we can not see them well. Being selective of other culture is one way to keep our culture alive.

I am sure Indonesia still should (must) keep to learn. After comparing and contrasting with Individualism ala America in a deep meaning, we can learn such as individual freedom, competition, self-reliance, equality of opportunity, and hard work. If we only still hate extremely other cultures because of the differences, we can lack motivation to competitive with them.

In relation to the above issue, so what does the American theme of individualism mean in the Indonesian context? How is it perceived? How is it received? One thing is certain, in contrast to the American inclination Indonesian literature and culture has historically been very much less attuned to Individualism. Indonesia's most known author, Pramoedya, is avidly social-realist in his writings. Marxism, though technically still illegal to teach, is perhaps the most popular of western philosophies for abstract (though no one is a true Marxist in practice) critiques of policy (particularly the excesses of capitalism and the devastating impact of inadequate regulation), ideas, and literature.

In most recent context, individualism is linked with democracy in Indonesia, for an example, democracy as a practical possibility of individualism is also linked with the rights of the people pertaining the government. Democracy refers not only the right of life, liberty and happiness individually and personally, but also to the rights of people in determining their own government. People have a central and strong position and right in establishing their own government system. They have rights to abolish the government if the government is corrupt or weak and institute again a new government that can secure and save their lives and freedom.

When evaluating the relevance of approaches to teaching American Literature to university language students, it is useful to consider the following mainstay principles as follows: (1) **The purposes**

**of learning.** Teacher firstly should give the purposes of learning as well as the definition of it. The students with their curiosity will embrace the course through their experiences. In addition, they will inevitably forge strong connections with the plots, themes, and ideological assumptions of literature and will become active learners that embrace critical thinking; **(2) Activities in the classroom.** The study of American literature is amenable to student-centered activities that offer opportunities for debate, discussion, and interpretation. Therefore, the choice of texts and activities is crucial because these selections will make the difference between passive reading and active involvement with a literary text; **(3) The place of Meaning.** Meaning is the result of the two-way relationship between texts and readers, depending on readers' experience, the reading context, and the difficulty, style, and form of literary language. Meaning is also influenced by how students relate to the author' portrayal of identity, culture, gender, and social class; **(4) Role of the teacher.** The teacher is an important facilitator and guide when it comes to offering a choice of texts and ways to interpret them. He or she must plan and prepare to involve students in lessons and encourage them to express their viewpoints; **(5) Role of the student.** American literature has the power to create opinions and individual meanings for students; hence, they will typically be the ones to initiate and sustain activities based on the literary themes that resonate with them. This will help students become active classroom participants and will lead to autonomous learning.

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