Respect for Nature in Indonesian Children’s Fiction: Ecocriticism Perspective

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Abstract

Children must be brought closer to nature and the environment, in order to grow the habit of respecting nature so that it takes root into the character of loving the environment. One of them is through fiction books. Fiction written especially for children is an interesting medium to convey ecosophy values and care for the environment. Indonesian children's fiction is a children's fiction that raises many issues of nature and the environment. Not only the physical environment but also the social and cultural environment. This article aims to 1) describe human respect for nature in Indonesian children's fiction; and 2) classifying forms of human respect for nature in Indonesian children's fiction based on various indicators. This study is an eco-critical study that uses a model of environmental wisdom (environmental ethics). Data in the form of texts and discourses were obtained from several selected children's fictions by Indonesian writers. Based on the analysis, it was found that the attitude of respect for nature in Indonesian children's fiction is shown through texts containing human awareness to respect nature, awareness that nature has value in itself, awareness that nature has the right to be respected, awareness that nature has integrity so that it needs to be respected. On the other hand, it was found that human respect for nature in Indonesian children's fiction is not only
motivated by self-awareness but is also influenced by other factors, namely culture such as myths, customs and certain beliefs.

**Keywords**


**Introduction**

Humans are responsible for the extreme changes in the world's climate. This statement has been outlined in a number of news stories in various global media. Ipsos Mori (in Stibbe, 2015) conducted a survey in 2014 to a number of residents in various countries about whether they agree with the statement that the cause of world climate change is humans. The survey results show that 93% of respondents from China agree, 64% of respondents from the UK agree, while only 54% of respondents from America agree. This shows that environmental issues are currently attracting world attention, including in Indonesia.

An unbalanced environment gradually disrupts the order of human life and the entire ecosystem in it. Unpredictable weather changes, environmental pollution, unpredictable disease outbreaks, and the occurrence of social conflicts and emotional friction due to cultural miscommunication are a series of problems that can occur at any time. It has become a law of life that humans and nature must coexist in harmony. Natural disasters that occur are often due to human carelessness and neglect of the surrounding natural conditions.

The world's concern for the safety of the earth and nature is shown by caring for the environment or the go green movement in various parts of the world. the field of science one by one collaborates with other fields of science to study environmental phenomena scientifically. One of them is literary studies. This field of humanities studies finds a gap to contribute in examining the environment from a new perspective, with the assumption that there is a close relationship between literature and the environment. Ecology as a field of science that places the environment as its object of study helps the study of language and literature to reveal deeper and newer environmental phenomena. Meanwhile, in the field of literature, a perspective was born to see that the relationship between literature and the environment cannot be ignored, this study is known as eco-criticism.

The development of science has changed the definition of the environment. The environment is no longer defined in terms of the natural dimension (ecosystem), but also includes socio-cultural space (cultural ecology), so that efforts to maintain environmental
harmony must continue to be encouraged. The final goal to be achieved from the development of social sciences that collaborate with ecology, within the conceptual framework, is the growth of ecosophy which is believed to save the environment and nature inhabited by humans. On the other hand, the environment as a setting and a place for the growth of a language has an effect on the maintenance and development of language.

Of all the efforts to embed messages to the world community to care and love the environment, the world of education actually has great potential to become a pioneer in caring for the environment, especially at the elementary school level. Elementary school is the basis for teaching good and rooted habits and character, for example caring for the environment. Lesson materials can be packaged in such a way as to invite children to be close to the environment both physically and emotionally from an early age. Through textbooks consumed by children, both at school and at home, it will make a significant contribution to the growth of children's sensitivity to the environment.

In the current digital era, education must develop children's problem solving and critical thinking skills, including environmental education as a conscious effort for adults to prepare a generation that cares and loves the environment. The ability to study and view objects and problems from multiple perspectives can be obtained by children through literacy activities. Considering the negative and positive sides of things and making careful and fast decisions are important skills for children to have. Through a series of stories in books, children can realize how a conflict occurs and how it is resolved and how one character interacts with other characters in different cultural systems. Moreover, they will gain a basic understanding of the natural, social, cultural and language in which they grow up indirectly and effectively.

Children's reading materials, also known as children's literature, offer a variety of perspectives that are relatively new for children. Literature can be a medium that provides pleasure and understanding for readers. Literature serves two balanced functions for children, namely instruction and entertainment. Through reading literature, it will indirectly help children construct attitudes about themselves and their surroundings. How to position themselves in the midst of the environment and how to interact with the environment. Fiction and non-fiction stories, poetry and folklore that are full of local wisdom will stimulate children to develop critical thinking skills and foster more effective imagination (Nurgiyantoro, 2010).
Fiction is a genre of children's literature that is not only fun to read by children but also by adults. Some characteristics of a good children's story can be identified such as containing a theme that is fun, imaginative, not lecturing or patronizing, the style of language and conflict offered can be reached by children. In essence, a good children's story is a story written by a creative author and always stands for the interests of children.

The application of ecology in children's fiction through an ecocritical framework aims to make children achieve a character that is higher than just understanding, namely loving the environment. "Love" involves positive emotions and conscience, while "understanding" is limited to cognition. The position of "love something" will encourage someone to give a more real action and reaction, while "understanding" is not necessarily the case. A person may understand something well but not lead to bold and real actions and reactions. Ecosophy or love for the environment is born from a basic understanding and awareness of the environment which is expected to form an attitude of respect for nature. This experience can be obtained by children through fiction.

**The State of the Art**

Several studies related to this research topic are research conducted by Sajid in 2016, with the title Ecocriticism and Environmental Imagination in Kindergarten Children. This research was motivated by the experience of the researcher who was interested in seeing the kindergarten children he taught often show their admiration for nature and the environment. Sajid applies ecocritical theory to study environmental imagination in children's literature. The book he studied was Huges' Iron Giant. From his study, it was found that Iron Giant can be read by children of all ages. When children read Iron Giant, researchers found that children understood the story and enjoyed it. Researchers also state that reading stories, literature, poetry, and fiction leads children to different understandings of things, their world becomes limitless, and they gain a unique focus that they cannot achieve. Thus, the researcher concludes that it is important to be honest and extend the experience of children reading books or asking questions because the whole is an authentic process for children to understand the world.

In addition, Gona (2018) in a study entitled "Children's Literature as An Exercise in Ecological Thinking" was conducted by Gona using an ecocritical perspective. The author argues that Swedish can be used to illustrate ecofantasy. For example, the novel being sampled is Ishavspirater's (2015) The Ice Sea Pirates, which can be read as an exercise in ecological thinking according to Gona. In it there is an interesting interaction between the protagonist and the natural surroundings. This research discusses the topic of how novels
offer readers the opportunity to examine and reflect on various horizons and attitudes towards nature and the relationship between humans and other creatures. This is found in the story and setting of the novel which is narrated through language.

Athanasiou and Krikelis (2020) add to the series of research on children's fiction through their article "Representing Turks in Greek Children's and Young Adult Fiction". This research focuses on how the Turks are viewed in Greek children's literature. Images of the Turkish army have been and remain very negative. The Turks who represented the Ottoman Empire were ruthless conquerors and ruthless conquerors. This study aims to draw a new, more positive image of the Turks in children's literature by analyzing two related factors: nationalism and historical representation. By comparing the negative picture of Turkish and Greek behavior and involving history, the image of the Turks is being re-humanized in Greek children's literature.

Nowadays, ecocritical studies are conducted to study adult literature. This time, the author raised the topic of children's literature, namely the genre of fiction to describe the form of human care and respect for nature, which can be found in the use of texts in children's fiction. Environmental or natural issues are quite crucial in Indonesian children's fiction because Indonesia is a nation with extraordinary nature, but in reality it often experiences natural disasters.

**Ecocriticism**

The world's news in that decade campaigned to save the environment and the statement that humans are one of the main causes of world climate change. Thus, a new term developed in the field of literature called literary ecology. It was first introduced by William Rueckert in 1978 in a critical paper entitled "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism". The word "eco" comes from the Greek with the root word "oikos" which etymologically means "household or earth" which means environment or earth and "logy" comes from the word "logos" which means science or logical discourse. Criticism can be interpreted as a form or assessment of the good or bad quality of something. In simple terms, ecocriticism can be interpreted as criticism of the environment. According to Rueckert, ecocriticism applies ecology or ecological principles in studying literary works (Mishra, 2019).

Long before ecocriticism appeared, ancient thinkers had shown their attention to nature (cosmocentric). But over time and the development of human civilization, moving to medieval thought which shifted to a divine orientation (theocentric), modern thought
began to drift away from nature and god, and pay great attention to humans as subjects (anthropocentric), which places nature as an object so that it is free to be exploited to realize human interests.

Federico de Onis is the name associated with a movement that challenges modernism, which is then known as postmodernism. In his work "Antologia de la Poesia Espenalo a Hispanoamericana", de Onis considers that technology, science, and science have made humans sicker, therefore a movement is needed to try to call on humans to rework narratives/discourses, or stories that are born, hidden, small, or forgotten and forgotten (Sutanto, 2012). One of the reasons this movement reacts to modernism is the dualistic view of modernism which always divides the world into two parts, namely subject and object, spiritual and material, which results in objectivity to nature and wild destruction. Ecocriticism is a postmodernist perspective that is inherently clearly an interdisciplinary in understanding literature. Literary ecocriticism is based on the idea that literary works must be solid, thus ecocriticism will bring literary works to be wiser towards their environment. (Endraswara, 2016). Even Plato once said that literary works getting closer to nature are good (Endraswara, 2016).

In 1996, Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm announced their ideas about ecocriticism or ecocriticism, through an essay entitled "The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology". Glotfelty applies the concept of ecology to literature, whose approach is to make the earth (nature) the center of his study. Ecocriticism itself can simply be defined as a study of the relationship between literature and the environment (Glotfelty, 1996).

Since this field of science was born in 1978, ecocriticism or green studies has continued to develop in the United States. Not only persisting in one area, the development of science made eco-criticism to the UK in the early 1990s. The green movement in England was pioneered by Glotfelty by establishing The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), and publishing the ISLE (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment) Journal as a way or effort to campaign for the movement. Ecocriticism emerged as the strongest movement in several Western United States universities because the ecocritic approach was different from previous literary criticism. Ecocriticism is widely recognized as a set of assumptions, doctrines, or procedures that appear to exist within academic boundaries.

Another scientist who is interested in doing ecocritical studies is Greg Garrard (2004). Garrard (2004) explains that ecocriticism explores the ways in which we imagine and describe the relationship between humans and the environment in all areas of cultural
outcomes. Ecocriticism is inspired by (as well as a critical stance of) modern environmental movements. Garrard traces the development of the movement and explores related concepts of ecocriticism, as follows: (a) pollution, wilderness, disaster (apocalypse), housing/dwelling (dwelling), animals, and earth.

A number of questions were raised by Glotfelty regarding ecocriticism, including: How is nature represented in sonnets? How is science open to literary analysis? And what are the trade-offs between literary studies and environmental discourse in disciplines such as history, psychology, art history and ethics? (Gerrard, 2004). Ecocriticism is a new perspective of literary understanding (Endraswara: 2016). Endraswara proposes several basic assumptions regarding the birth of ecocritical studies, that 1) literature is born from certain environmental conditions; 2) literature is born to understand the atmosphere of the environment; 3) literature cannot run from a certain environment.

The urgency of ecocriticism in the study of literary works can be done by asking several questions such as: 1) How is nature represented in poetry?; 2) What role can the physical setting (environment) play?; 3) What are the values expressed in the ecological (ecological window)?; 4) How do metaphors about the earth affect the way we treat it?; 5) How can we characterize writing about nature as a literary genre? (Endraswara, 2016).

Indonesian Children’s Fiction

Like literature for adults, children's literature is also divided into several genres. Lukens (2004) divides literary genres into six types such as realism, formula fiction, traditional literature, poetry, and nonfiction. Nurgiyantoro (2014) simplifies the division of children's literature made by Lukens, into five kinds, namely fiction, nonfiction, poetry, traditional literature (nursery rhymes, folktale, folklore), and comics. These five types of children's literature, apart from having similarities in elements, also have differences in other elements. Fiction and nonfiction are distinguished by their content and form. Nonfiction contains stories or factual sources of information, while fiction presents fantasy stories, full of imagination and sometimes contains content that is far from adult reasoning. Children's fiction can be in the form of fairy tales, comics, picture stories and novels.

The characteristics of children's fiction are not much different from adult fiction. Both have elements of a detailed theme, plot, character and setting. However, the use of language in children's fiction is highly adapted to the language and emotional development of children. The idea of a story in fiction is generally a representation of the social situations and values of a particular area, and such social interactions cannot be
separated from the linguistic interactions that form expressions and narratives. The textuality of children's fiction not only begins by considering some assumptions about the characteristics of language that can be reached by children, but also pays attention to how the language construction used can open up new linguistic insights for children, for example by playing elements of rhetoric and figurative language. In fact, works of fiction spark the imagination of the reader, thereby developing one's ability to think and act in a morally desirable way (Goga and Uluru 2018). Through fiction, all potentials in children are expected to develop.

Children's literature is developing in several countries such as America and the Nordic countries. Meanwhile, in Indonesia children's literature began to be published in the form of reading books since the 70s. Initially, several works of children's literature presented stories of family and children's lives involving the environment as a background. For example, Toha Mohtar with Julius R. Siyaranamual and Asmara Nababan, in 1971 published a special magazine for children called Kawanku magazine. Dwiyanto Setyawan through his phenomenal works in the 80-90s era such as: Sersan Grung-Grung series and Kelompok 2 & 1 series, and Arswendo Atmowiloto in his Kiki and Komplotannya series, Imung series, and Keluarga Cemara. In 1998, Murti Bunanta wrote the book Si Bungsu Katak. Then in the era of 2000 several writers appeared including Djoko Lelono with his work Anak Rembulan: Negeri Misteri di Balik Pohon Kenari (2011). Recently, an Indonesian children's book writer, Okki Madasari, appeared, who started his career by writing a number of adult novels until he finally became interested in writing children's books in 2018. The children's book he gave birth to is the Mata Exploring Archipelago Series: Mata di Tanah Melus (2018), Mata and Manusia Laut (2019), Mata dan rahasia Pulau Gapi (2019). Finally, the writer with the pen name Tere Liye surprised fiction readers in Indonesia by publishing his latest book series, Seri Anak Nusantara. Some of them have titles, Si Anak Pelangi and Si Anak Badai. The progress of writing children's literature in Indonesia is marked by the emergence of adult literary authors who have begun to explore children's literature.

The development of children's book production, especially in Indonesia, must be accompanied by scientific studies on children's literature. At the academic level, generally, children's literature research is still in the form of library research and uses a structuralist approach and is descriptive in nature (Sarumpaat, 2010). Meanwhile, Hunt (2005) states that there are three important elements that must be present in the study of children's literature, namely text, children's, and adult criticism. The relationship between the three is quite complex in an effort to develop children's literature as part of scientific studies. Literary works as a cultural product can be viewed from various dimensions, such
as form, ideology, language, style, presentation technique, structure, author, creative process, linguistic aspects and a number of other dimensions (Rahman, 2014).

Discussion

Ecocriticism aims to show how literary works care about the environment and can play some part in solving real and urgent ecological problems (Endraswara, 2016). Indonesian children’s fiction is viewed with an ecocritical study through an environmental ethical model containing some data in the form of text which is presented as follows:

The Ability to Appreciate Nature

Respect for nature can be marked by the birth of awareness in humans to respect nature. This can be seen in the following text.

“Mereka menguburkan kucing-kucing, mengembalikan penyu, dan ikan yang masih hidup dikembalikan ke laut. Lalu orang-orang mulai membangun kembali apa yang rusak, dengan apapun yang tersisa.” (MDML, hlm 191).

In this text, it can be seen how humans treat marine animals that were also victims of the tsunami. Humans become aware that animals that live in the sea have the right to live and be protected as humans protect other humans.

Awareness that Nature has Value in Itself

“Bagiku, hutan adalah salah satu tempat terindah yang Tuhan ciptakan di bumi ini. Udara yang sejuk dan hijau pepohonan menjadi suatu hal luar biasa yang dapat dinikmati oleh para makhluk.” (DP, hl. 21).

The text presented above is data from indicators of human respect for nature because they realize that nature has value in humans. In that sentence the writer realizes that things like cool air, green trees are extraordinary things that can be enjoyed by humans as creatures who live side by side with nature.

Awareness that Nature has the Right to be Respected

“dia masih ingat janjinya pada lumba-lumba bahwa ia ke Atol bukan untuk menangkap ikan. ia tak akan menangkap banyak ikan untuk dijual” (MDML, hlm 103)
“Semua hewan itu hanya marah jika diganggu,” kata Sam. Bambulo jadi merasa bersalah mendengar itu. Ia sama sekali tak bermaksud mengganggu si Gurita. (MDML, hlm 72)

The text above shows that nature really has a right to be respected. Meanwhile, humans who realize this have an attitude that deserves to be used as a good example. In this sentence, it is stated that a character in children's fiction feels very guilty because he has done an action that disturbs the octopus, so the octopus becomes angry.

**Awareness that Nature has Integrity**


“Kamu sudah membantu menyelamatkan seluruh lautan. Lautan akan membantumu.” (MDML, hlm 197).

“Hidup di dalam hutan mengajarkanku bahwa alam selalu bisa diajak bekerja sama” (DP, hl 39).

**Awareness in the form of Respect for Nature to Exist, Live, Grow and Develop Naturally**

“Bambulo juga berulang kali mendongak, mengagumi bulan cantik yang berjalan mengikutinya. Kenapa baru kali ini ia melihat purnama di tengah lautan?” (MDML, hlm 90).

“Semua orang Sama menangkap ikan dengan jaring dan kedo-kedo. Kedo-kedo itu semacam pancing yang mereka buat sendiri dengan serabut kelapa” (MDML, hlm 34).

Nature and humans are two things that coexist, the relationship between the two greatly determines the sustainability of an ecosystem. One of them is messed up, then the other will face the same problem. Humans as creatures who are given the ability to think are expected to act wisely to become pioneers in saving the environment. Saving the environment also means saving human life itself.

Indonesian children's fiction entitled *Mata and Manusia Laut* by Okki Madasari and *Dua Panglima* by Suci Amalia presents a series of stories about how humans and nature are actually inseparable parts. In the book *Mata and Manusia Laut* a boy named Bambulo is described who has great respect for the sea and all the creatures in it. Bambulo, who calls himself a sea man, feels guilty if he accidentally damages one of the marine biota. Meanwhile, in the book *Dua Panglima*, it is said that an Indonesian soldier named Manila
led the Ganesha operation, namely an operation to save elephants from clashes with residents in an area.

Another fact found in Indonesian children's fiction texts is that culture, customs and myths also influence the growth of Indonesian people's respect for nature. It can be seen in the following text. “Mereka tak pernah pakai bom dan berbagai racun untuk menangkap ikan. Bagi mereka, itu akan melanggar larangan Sang Penguasa Lautan. Itu juga akan merusak dan membunuh saudara-saudara kembar mereka.” (MDML, hlm 35).

In this text, it can be illustrated that other factors behind the respect of Indonesian people to nature are culture, customs, certain myths or beliefs. as in the text, they think that the fish in the sea are their brothers. Therefore, they feel they have a responsibility to take care of their siblings. In fact, they believe that the use of poison and bombs in the sea is a form of violation of the Lord of the Seas.

**Conclusion**

This study provides an understanding to the reader about how nature is presented in children's literature, especially the fiction genre. Understanding of the importance of bringing children closer to the natural environment in which they grow up. The results of this study can also help parents and educators at the elementary school level in choosing reading materials for their children or students. The ecological discourse in Indonesian children's fiction will color the children's view of Indonesian nature, so that in the end it is hoped that respect for nature will grow in Indonesian children. Another contribution of this study is in the form of a novelty about the factors that influence the growth of respect for nature in humans. Based on the data analyzed in Indonesian children's fiction, it was found that respect for nature is not only influenced by human consciousness but is also influenced by elements of culture, myths and certain beliefs.

**References**


