

THE PHENOMENON OF NATURAL RESOURCES EXPLOITATION IN 'MENCARI UJUNG PELANGI': AN ECOCRITIC APPROACH

Fenomena Eksploitasi Sumber Daya Alam dalam 'Mencari Ujung Pelangi': Pendekatan
Ekokritik

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Abstract: *Environment crisis has become the current issues for literary researches globally including in Indonesia. 'Mencari Ujung Pelangi' through an ecocritical approach, is providing a nuanced backdrop against which to explore the intricate dynamics of natural resource exploitation within literary contexts. This study is using eco-criticism lens since it focuses on the relationship between literature and the environment. For the purpose of this study, questions formulated were 1) How does "Mencari Ujung Pelangi" represent nature and environmental issues, and what critique does it offer against anthropocentric attitudes? 2) In what ways does the story promote environmental advocacy and consciousness, and how does it align with ecocritical goals of fostering ecological awareness? Through the protagonist Alfi's eyes, we witness the impact of deforestation and industrialization—the factory replacing the forest—and the subsequent pollution of the nearby lake. The story critiques anthropocentrism—the human-centric view that prioritizes economic interests over ecological well-being—by highlighting the negative consequences of such attitudes.*

Keywords: *ecocriticism, anthropocentrism, environmental advocacy, resource exploitation*

Abstrak: *Krisis lingkungan telah menjadi isu global bagi penelitian sastra, termasuk di Indonesia. 'Mencari Ujung Pelangi' melalui pendekatan ekokritik memberikan latar belakang yang mendasar untuk mengeksplorasi dinamika kompleks eksploitasi sumber daya alam dalam konteks sastra. Studi ini menggunakan lensa ekokritik karena berfokus pada hubungan antara karya sastra dan lingkungan sekitarnya. Untuk tujuan penelitian ini, pertanyaan yang dirumuskan adalah: 1) Bagaimana "Mencari Ujung Pelangi" merepresentasikan isu-isu alam dan lingkungan, dan kritik apa yang ditawarkannya terhadap pandangan antroposentris? 2) Dengan cara apa cerita ini menyuarakan advokasi lingkungan dan kesadaran, dan bagaimana hal itu sejalan dengan tujuan ekokritik untuk meningkatkan kesadaran ekologis? Melalui sudut pandang seorang Alfi, tokoh dalam cerpen ini, kita menyaksikan dampak deforestasi dan industrialisasi—pabrik menggantikan hutan—serta polusi danau. Cerita ini mengkritik antroposentrisme—pandangan yang memprioritaskan kepentingan ekonomi di atas kesejahteraan ekologis—dengan menyoroti konsekuensi negatif dari pandangan semacam itu.*

Kata Kunci: *ekokritik, antroposentrisme, advokasi lingkungan, eksploitasi sumber daya alam*



INTRODUCTION

Ecology and literature are interdependent. Cheryll Glotfelty in Barry (2017) simply defined ecocriticism as a study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Literature requires diverse themes such as environmental issues to engage readers, while ecology needs literature to disseminate its studies to the public. Ecology, as a science, explores the relationships among plants, animals, and humans within their environment, focusing on the natural occurrences and reciprocal interactions in nature. It derives from the Greek words 'oikos' meaning home, and 'logos' meaning science or study.

Endraswara (2016) posits that ecological literature critically explores the intricate interplay between human actions and distinct natural processes within an ecosystem's analytical structure, underscoring the symbiotic relationships within a natural community. This academic discipline unveils the significant role of literature in rendering the environment more relatable and human-centric. Literature serves as a medium to alleviate self-doubt and suppress the emergence of less admirable forms of creativity, such as substance abuse, explicit content, and aggression. This underscores the didactic potential of literature in shaping environmental consciousness.

From these opinions, it can be explained that ecocriticism is a field of study that examines the relationship between literature and the physical environment and can help identify, explore, and even resolve environmental problems. Environmental damage is usually caused by irresponsible humans—though natural factors cannot be overlooked as well—who exploit natural resources for their individual interests alone. It is this form of behavior that leads to the degradation of the natural environment.

Based on the aforementioned view, ecocriticism is an academic discipline that investigates the connection between literature and the physical environment. It aids in determining, investigating, and potentially resolving environmental issues. Environmental degradation typically stems from irresponsible human actions that exploit nature solely for personal gain, leading to adverse effects on the natural world.

In the discourse of ecocriticism, a critical issue raised is the distinction between nature and culture, and whether this dichotomy holds firm or dissolves into self-contradiction when faced with intermediate states that are not absolute. The existence of such intermediate states, akin to shades of grey amidst black and white, does not undermine the reality of distinctions; rather, it enriches the spectrum of analysis. This is particularly relevant to ecocriticism, which acknowledges the existence of pure nature, pure culture, and a blend of both within various environmental contexts.

In their 2021 study, Arianto, Sayuti, and Efendi explore the representations of ecological conditions within the context of Indonesian literature. Their work, published in the journal *Studies in English Language and Education*, provides insightful analysis into how ecological crises are depicted in dramatic scripts, offering a unique lens through which to view environmental issues (Arianto, B., Sayuti, S. A., & Efendi, A., 2021).

Another critical discourse emphasizes the necessity of evolving Indonesian literary criticism to incorporate an ecological viewpoint, especially in an era where development is frequently equated with nature's exploitation. This call to action resonates with the urgent need to reassess our developmental paradigms through an ecocritical lens (Rohman, S. 2015).

Further enriching the field, a comparative study by Liliani and Ryan (2022) harnesses affective responses to poetry concerning tree ecologies and forest conservation in Indonesia, illustrating how emotional engagement can be a potent tool for conservation efforts. Their article, "Embracing Comparative Ecocriticism Through Affect: Representations of Tropical Forest Ecologies in Indonesian and Nicaraguan Poetry," published in *Rile/Jile - An International Peer Reviewed Journal*, adds depth to our understanding of literature's role in fostering an appreciation for and commitment to environmental stewardship.

Those studies clearly showed that environment crisis has become the current issues for literary researches globally including in Indonesia. Collectively, this study formed a robust foundation for examining 'Mencari Ujung Pelangi' through an ecocritical approach, providing a nuanced backdrop against which to explore the intricate dynamics of natural resource exploitation within literary contexts. For the purpose of this study, the problems were formulated as the following: 1) How does "Mencari Ujung Pelangi" represent nature and environmental issues, and what critique does it offer against anthropocentric attitudes? 2) In what ways does the story promote environmental advocacy and consciousness, and how does it align with ecocritical goals of fostering ecological awareness?

Not only This study is using eco-criticism lens since it focuses on the relationship between literature and the environment, but also it is examining how nature and ecological concerns are represented and interpreted in literary works.

METHOD

The research paradigm according to Abrams, M. H. (1953) is widely used in literary studies, in which this study tries to expand further. This paradigm is divided into four categories: work, artist, universe, and audience. These four paradigms serve as the foundation for four literary criticism approaches: objective approach (work), expressive approach (author), mimetic approach (reality), and pragmatic approach (reader). In this study, the researcher will employ the mimetic approach, which is necessary to approach the material object of the research—an anthology titled 'Mencari Ujung Pelangi' by Kalyana Adzhara. By using the mimetic approach, eco-criticism theory, which examines the relationship between literature and the physical environment, will help reveal the connection between literary works and reality. Binding this research only on mimetic approach produces a novel vista of other approaches to be excavated in further research.

This article is descriptive-qualitative research using a literature review method, drawing on several supporting references during the research process. The main data employed here were expositions and events that explicitly mentioned nature as significant narrative device and backdrop. Data collection

is conducted through reading and note-taking, while data analysis involves interpretation, identification, grouping, and drawing conclusions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The book "*Mencari Ujung Pelangi*" (translated as "Searching for the End of the Rainbow") is a collection of ten children's short stories that won the Children's Story Writing Competition (Lomba Menulis Cerita Anak, or LMCA) in 2015. These selected stories were judged objectively by a panel of experts and subsequently compiled and published in an enjoyable book format. The primary purpose of publishing this book was to document and share the works of fellow writers and serve as a means of literary engagement for students.

The story revolves around two adventurous children who set out to find the end of a rainbow. They hope to discover a pot filled with gold coins there. However, during their journey, they encounter a lake near a factory that has been transformed into a dumping ground for industrial waste. Eventually, a devastating flood occurs, threatening the area.

The narrative highlights the conflict between natural beauty and resource exploitation. While the desire for treasure at the rainbow's end persists, the children also witness the negative impact of human activities on the environment. The resolution of the story reflects the community's determination not to allow the factory to be rebuilt, with the hope of restoring the forest and safeguarding the environment.

1. Anthropocentrism vs. Ecocentrism

Anthropocentrism is the belief that value is human-centered, considering all other beings as means to human ends. Critics argue it is ethically wrong and contributes to ecological crises. However, proponents contend that anthropocentrism can motivate environmental protection by emphasizing human interests and ecosystems' role as our "life-support system" (Kopnina et al., 2018).

In the context of the anthology, the children's quest for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow reflects an anthropocentric desire for material wealth and personal gain.

"Ayah... memang ujung pelangi itu ada?" tanyaku.

Ayah menurunkan koran yang tadi dibacanya," Kalau itu kurang tahu, mungkin saja ada."

"Lalu, apakah ada guci dan koin emas di ujung pelangi?" tanyaku lagi.

Ayah tertawa mendengar pertanyaanku. "Kamu ini kebanyakan baca buku dongeng ya, ha ha ha...."

"Dad... is there really an end to the rainbow?" I asked.

Dad lowered the newspaper he had been reading, "I'm not sure about that, it might exist."

"Then, is there a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow?" I asked again.

Dad laughed at my question. "You've been reading too many fairy tales, haven't you? Ha ha ha...."

In this dialogue, the protagonist (Alfi) asks about the existence of the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Ayah's response dismisses it as a fairy tale, emphasizing the practical perspective. The laughter implies that the idea of finding a pot of gold is fanciful and not grounded in reality. This interaction highlights the anthropocentric desire for material wealth and personal gain associated with the mythical treasure.

The transformation of the once-beautiful lake into a waste dump due to industrial activities highlights human-centric decisions that prioritize economic interests over environmental health.

"Dulu di sini hutan. Kenapa pohon-pohon di sini ditebangi?" aku kembali bertanya.

Satpam itu terlihat bingung. "Sudahlah! Kalian tanpa izin berada di sini. Kalau kalian mau bertanya, jangan tanya saya! Pergi sana, sebelum aku benar-benar marah!" Satpam itu kembali mengacungkan tongkatnya.

"Bapak lihat asap di situ? Bapak lihat limbah dan sampah di danau ini? Bapak lihat air yang busuk itu? Bapak kok tega. Dulu ini hutan, dan dananya sangat jernih!"

"This used to be a forest. Why were the trees cut down?" I asked again. The security guard looked confused. "Enough! You're here without permission. If you want to ask questions, don't ask me! Go away before I really get angry!" The security guard waved his baton again. "Do you see the smoke over there? Do you see the waste and garbage in this lake? Do you see the foul water? How can you be so heartless? This used to be a forest, and the lake was very clear!"

Alfi's passion for environmental justice undergoes a transformation throughout the story. Initially, she expresses concern about the deforestation and pollution caused by the factory. Her questions reveal an awareness of the impact on nature. However, when confronted by the security guard, Alfi becomes more assertive, challenging the factory's presence and advocating for the environment. Her determination to protect the forest and the once-clear lake reflects a growing commitment to environmental justice. Despite the guard's dismissive attitude, Alfi persists, emphasizing community care and ecological responsibility. Her passion evolves from curiosity to active advocacy, highlighting the importance of preserving nature for future generations.

In contrast, ecocentrism prioritizes non-human elements. It recognizes the intrinsic value of all species and ecosystems, emphasizing their well-being over human interests. Ecocentrism provides a non-contingent basis for protecting the natural world (Kopnina, 2019). Ecocentrism, on the other hand, recognizes the intrinsic value of all living beings and ecosystems. It prioritizes the well-being of the entire Earth community.

In the context of the anthology, the resolution, where the community decides not to allow the factory to be rebuilt, aligns with ecocentric values. It

acknowledges the importance of preserving the forest and maintaining a balanced ecosystem.

The children's realization that the village and its environment are more valuable than the gold coins symbolize a shift toward ecocentrism. They recognize that nature has inherent worth beyond human exploitation.

2. Environmental Degradation and Conservation

Environmental degradation refers to the deterioration of the environment due to resource depletion, habitat destruction, pollution, and ecosystem disruption. It impacts air, water, soil quality, and biodiversity. In Indonesia, a country where deforestation is a major issue, reducing emissions from deforestation has been implemented (Hein, 2018). As one of conservation activities, it involves efforts to protect and sustainably manage natural resources. It aims to prevent further degradation and maintain ecological balance.

In the context of the anthology, the flood serves as a wake-up call, emphasizing the consequences of anthropocentric actions on the natural world.

Sudah dua tahun yang lalu ketika aku dan Ferdi mencari ujung pelangi. Di pagi hari itu, terjadi keributan besar. Banjir bandang terjadi. Danau dekat pabrik kini meluap. Menerjang apa saja yang dilewatinya. Ayah dan Ibu berlari menuju kamarku yang berada di lantai dua. Menyelamatkan diri dari terjangan air danau kotor, yang sekarang memenuhi kampung. Aku panik ketakutan. Tapi Ibu bilang, aku harus tenang.

It's been two years since Ferdi and I searched for the end of the rainbow. That morning, there was a great commotion. A flash flood occurred. The lake near the factory overflowed, sweeping away everything in its path. Mom and Dad ran to my room on the second floor, escaping the surge of dirty lake water now flooding the village.

I panicked in fear. But Mom said I had to stay calm.

The flood represents a natural disaster that significantly impacts the environment. The overflowing lake (previously near the factory) carries pollutants, debris, and contaminated water into the village. The description of the water as "kotor" (dirty) and the smell of the lake indicate environmental degradation due to pollution. The presence of the factory near the lake likely contributed to the pollution. The deforestation (trees being cut down) and industrial activities (as evidenced by the factory) have altered the landscape. The text portrays the impact of environmental degradation (due to industrialization and pollution) and the community's response during a natural disaster.

In terms of environmental degradation, the following excerpt represents it clearly by the author.

Semuanya kini telah berubah. Ya ampun, sudah berapa tahun aku tidak pernah lagi ke tempat ini? Ternyata tempat ini sudah bukan lagi hutan. Aku terperanjat melihat pemandangan yang ada di depanku. Hutan ini kini berganti dengan pabrik besar.

Pohon-pohon ditebangi, dan hanya menyisakan sedikit pohon yang beruntung masih bisa bertahan hidup. Asap mengepul menuju langit dari cerobong pabrik. "Kok bisa jadi begini? Kemana pohon-pohon yang tadinya berdiri kokoh di sini?" Aku mulai kecewa.

Everything has changed now. Oh my, how many years has it been since I last came to this place?

This place is no longer a forest. I was startled by the sight before me. This forest has now been replaced by a large factory. The trees have been cut down, leaving only a few lucky ones still standing. Smoke billowed into the sky from the factory's chimney. "How could it become like this? Where have the trees that once stood tall here gone?" I began to feel disappointed.

The transformation of the once-forested area into a large factory reflects environmental degradation. The deforestation (trees being cut down) and the presence of smoke from the factory's chimneys indicate human impact on the natural landscape. The loss of trees and the change in air quality contribute to the degradation of the environment. The description of the previously clear lake now being black and filled with trash highlights environmental degradation. The polluted water, foul smell, and floating debris indicate contamination. The contrast between the past (a pristine lake) and the present (a polluted lake) underscores the impact of human activities. Alfi's disappointment and surprise reveal her emotional reaction to the changes in the environment. Her memories of playing in the forest as a child intensify her feelings of loss and concern.

In terms of conservation, Ferdi's pragmatic response ("*Tidak usah dipikirkan. Kita tidak bisa berbuat apa-apa.*"; "Don't think about it. There's nothing we can do") reflects resignation but also highlights the challenge of addressing environmental issues.

Ferdi menepuk punggungku lalu berbisik, "Sudahlah! Tidak usah dipikirkan. Kita tidak bisa berbuat apa-apa. Lebih baik kita lanjutkan perjalanan kita menuju danau." Aku berjalan lesu. Sudah tidak punya semangat untuk melanjutkan perjalanan.

Ferdi patted my back and whispered, "Come on! Don't think about it. There's nothing we can do. It's better if we continue our journey to the lake." I walked on, dejected. I no longer had the spirit to continue the journey.

The polluted lake serves as a call to action, emphasizing the need for responsible stewardship and conservation efforts. The community's decision not to allow the factory to be rebuilt (as mentioned earlier) shows a collective effort toward conservation.

3. Ethics and Responsibility

Ethical responsibility entails recognizing principles and values, acting responsibly, and distinguishing right from wrong. In the workplace, it involves adhering to a code of ethics (Arianto, B., Sayuti, S. A., & Efendi, A., 2021). For

nonprofit boards and leaders, ethical responsibility extends beyond legal compliance—it involves making decisions that align with the organization's mission and the well-being of stakeholders. Establishing a clear code of ethics ensures consistency and accountability. Key ethical dilemmas include handling tainted money, fair compensation practices, privacy concerns, avoiding impropriety, and practicing good stewardship of funds

Satpam itu tertawa. "Dengar ya, anak kecil. Pabrik ini berdiri atas izin pemerintah. Kalian mau ditangkap polisi? Hayo segera pergi! Sebelum tongkat ini memukul kalian!"

"Bukan izin dari pemerintah, Pak, tapi izin dari kami, warga di sini. Kami merawat hutan ini dari dulu."

The security guard laughed. "Listen, kid. This factory was built with government permission. Do you want to get arrested? Get out of here before this baton hits you!"

"It's not the government's permission, sir, but the permission of us, the local residents. We've been taking care of this forest for years."

Alfi's response reflects an ecocentric perspective. She emphasizes that the forest and the lake are not just about legal permits (as indicated by the factory's government authorization) but also about the community's care and stewardship. By asserting that the forest was cared for by the local residents, Alfi highlights the intrinsic value of nature beyond human interests or legalities. Her argument implies that the well-being of the environment should be a collective concern, not solely determined by bureaucratic approvals. Alfi's statement aligns with ecocentrism by emphasizing the importance of community involvement and long-term care for the natural environment.

Barry (2017) argued that ecocriticism sheds light on the vital issue of our relationship with the environment. It prompts us to consider whether distinctions, such as the nature/culture divide, are inherently self-contradictory due to their lack of absolute boundaries. While intermediate states exist, they don't invalidate fundamental distinctions. For example, we can envision an "outdoor environment" with four areas: wilderness, scenic sublime, countryside, and domestic picturesque. Although these areas blend elements of both nature and culture, the core distinction remains intact. Even if all areas were different degrees of culture, nature would still exist, akin to how drizzle remains distinct from rain.

In the context of this anthology, the "outdoor environment" of scenic sublime based on Barry's (2017) concept, can be seen in the following excerpt

"Ya, aku juga ingin melihat hutan kembali, dan juga danaunya. Sudah lama tidak pergi ke sana. Sebaiknya kita berangkat sekarang, nanti keburu sore." Aku tak sabar dan langsung berlari.

"Yes, I also want to see the forest again, and the lake too. It's been a long time since I went there. We should leave now, before it gets too late." I couldn't wait and immediately started running.

The scenic sublime encompasses awe-inspiring natural features that evoke wonder and reverence. These areas often attract tourists and outdoor enthusiasts seeking to experience nature's grandeur. The sublime combines beauty with a sense of vastness and power. Examples include forests, lakes, mountains, cliffs, and waterfalls.

CONCLUSION

The anthology of "Mencari Ujung Pelangi" clearly represents nature and environmental issues as the central of its narrative. The transformation of a once-pristine lake into a polluted, blackened waterbody serves as a powerful symbol of environmental decline. Through the protagonist Alfi's eyes, we witness the impact of deforestation and industrialization—the factory replacing the forest—and the subsequent pollution of the nearby lake. The story critiques anthropocentrism—the human-centric view that prioritizes economic interests over ecological well-being—by highlighting the negative consequences of such attitudes. Alfi's emotional response and her determination to protect the environment align with ecocritical goals. The community's decision not to allow the factory to be rebuilt reflects collective responsibility and care for the natural world. Overall, "Mencari Ujung Pelangi" underscores the need for a shift toward ecocentrism, emphasizing responsible stewardship and ecological consciousness.

"Mencari Ujung Pelangi" shares thematic elements with other literary works that explore environmental issues, human-nature relationships, and ecological consciousness. Some of those literary works are "The Lorax" by Dr. Seuss; this classic children's book emphasizes environmental conservation and the consequences of deforestation, and "The Giving Tree" by Shel Silverstein; this is a poignant children's book that illustrates the selfless relationship between a tree and a boy. It raises questions about resource exploitation and the balance between taking and giving.

These works, including "Mencari Ujung Pelangi," encourage readers to reflect on their connection to nature, the consequences of human actions, and the importance of environmental stewardship. They invite readers to reflect on their relationship with the environment. Moreover, those literary works critiques anthropocentrism by portraying its negative effects (e.g., pollution, loss of natural beauty) and advocates for ecocentrism through the community's collective decision. Ultimately, ecocriticism encourages us to explore literary works through an ecological lens, examining how they shape our perceptions of nature, human-nature relationships, and environmental ethics.

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