

The Woman's Body and the Environment as Critique of Men's Sexuality in Cicilia Oday's *Duri dan Kutuk* (2024)

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Abstract

This paper discusses the intersection of women and nature within the framework of ecofeminism through Indonesian literary works. The presence of a female character as the center of the story, in which is delieanted close to nature, is the main consideration in this research. The main problems in this research are (1) narrative strategies positioning women and nature as a unity. (2) The perspective of the characters treats women and nature as dichotomous and antagonistic elements, and (3) the concept of space uses women and nature as a critique of male sexuality. This research aims to show that narrative strategies contribute to the positioning of women and nature as a unity as seen in essentialist feminism; the perspective of the characters treats women and nature as dichotomous and antagonistic elements, and the concept of space in the narrative has the potential to criticize male sexual desire. This research uses textual analysis using Mieke Bal's (1985) narratology to unpack narrative strategies and Carolyn Merchant's (1995) ecofeminist concept to support arguments about the positioning of women and nature. The results of this study shows that the female body and nature are constructed as one unity with nature, the construction of the female body and nature is divided into *monstrous feminine* and *mother-nature* , and this division is used to criticize male sexual desire. Based on the research findings, it can be said that women and nature are still viewed in an essentialist manner, and instead of making the female body a critique of female sexuality, it actually silences women's voices within a patriarchal framework.

Keywords: women's bodies; environment; men's sexuality; ecofeminism; *Duri dan Kutuk*

Introduction

Women are often associated with nature. The term "Mother Earth," in the Indonesian context, embodies this association; the role of a mother—*nurture*, to give life—is personified to refer to the nation or state. Looking back at the history of the feminist movement in the West, the position of women and nature was only considered around the 1960s and 1970s, when the women's movement aligned with the anti-war and anti-nuclear movements. Ecofeminism then emerged as an intersection between the women's movement and social movements for justice and the environment (Gaard, 2011).

The intersection between women, gender, and nature is a socially constructed association that is fluid and contextual, not ahistorical and static, as explained by Merchant in Gaard (2011). Thus, this intersection can refute the assumption that ecofeminism is essentialist. This intersection is not merely questioning the position of women and nature as objects of oppression, but also aimed to challenge the structure of that oppression. Moreover, when feminism is considered to tend to be anthropocentric, ecofeminism plays a role in explaining the dominance of feminist thought when it ignores the issues of the climate crisis, food and energy justice, species extinction and maldevelopment, animal-based food production and industry, and other social and ecological issues.

Moreover, the position of women and nature is continuously problematized by essentialist views when women are considered to be equal to nature by using sex and gender as associations, which means homogenizing women's experiences and ignoring issues of class and race. Therefore, ecofeminism introduces a branch of material feminist thought, namely a feminist approach that emphasizes material conditions such as economic systems, division of labor, and infrastructure in forming and maintaining gender hierarchies. This approach focuses not only on capitalism, but also on patriarchy as a contributing element to the domination of women and nature.

Criticism of ecofeminism not only emerged from mainstream feminism, but also from earlier feminist philosophers who questioned the position of species within the ecofeminist framework as essentialist and ethnocentric; women are seen merely as a means of reproduction. However, according to Gaard and Gruen, "If animals are equal to women, then women must defend animals" (Gaard, 2011), by demonstrating an intersectional analysis of the structures of oppression as discussed by Plumwood (Gaard, 2011). Thus, just like mainstream feminism, ecofeminism also seeks to unravel the structures of domination over women and nature, both by capitalism (industry, production) and patriarchy (men, women).

After ecofeminism became established as a movement and a school of thought, it also became a literary approach. The ecofeminist lens is used to focus attention on the relationship between women, nature, species, and their relationship to oppression through narrative work. In *The Routledge Handbook of Ecofeminism and Literature* (2023), Vakoch selects, compiles, and reviews world literature that specifically

addresses the issue of women and nature (the environment). She uses an ecofeminist lens to examine specific linguistic, national, and historical subjects, and provides key examples of ecofeminist attributes in literature or analyses of ecofeminist values through canonical literary texts.

Moreover, recent studies focusing on women and nature have also revealed new meanings from various contexts around the world. In the Indian context, the development of ecofeminism has been outlined by Patil (2016) through an analysis of Kamala Markandaya's novel *Nectar in A Sieve* (1954). She analyzes the novel through a close reading and draws on elements of Western ecofeminism. Through her reading of the novel, the study concludes that ecological damage cannot be reduced to patriarchy as the primary cause; nor can ecological problems be reduced to androcentric attitudes, but to anthropocentric ones. In other words, Patil (2016) provides an alternative formulation to ecofeminism and proposes a non-dichotomous view of the exploitation of nature.

Meanwhile, in the Western context, more specifically in the Polish context, Fregara (2023) views the “ecofiction” trend as being marked by the emergence of novels that raise women's issues such as *Primeval and Other Times* (1996) , *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* (2009) , *The Ugliest Woman in the World* (2001) and *Transfugium* (2018) . She analyzes Olga Tokarczuk's novels through an ecofeminist approach and concludes that the female characters in Tokarczuk's novels are presented as counter-stereotypes, as transgressive types, as rebellious women, and are depicted as being able to disrupt the patriarchal order by transforming themselves into disasters, animals, or men.

Díaz-Llabrés & Jiménez-Rodríguez (2025) examine the relationship between women and nature in two novels by Amitav Ghosh within the context of Indian history. This relationship is informed by the experience of Western colonialism and imperialism, which turned Indian women into objects of oppression and nature into a land of exploitation. However, the two main female characters—Kusum and Deeti—in Ghosh's narrative demonstrate agency and a connection to nature. In other words, the depiction of nature facilitates resistance and helps women find their voice. Speaking about women's resistance and empowerment, in line with this research, Supriya et al. (2025) see Shakuntala and nature as a sisterly relationship in resisting patriarchy through a mythology rewritten by Utkrash Patel. In this case, women and nature (read: wilderness) forge a relationship—not only symbolically but also actively—in harmony; nature becomes a sacred space for catalysts and functions to transform women in resisting patriarchy.

Furthermore, the issue of women, nature, and empowerment is also the subject of research by Gnanabai and Rani (2024). This issue appears in two novels by Barbara Kingsolver. In both novels, women and nature are closely linked, depicting women's empowerment and environmental management; women are depicted as agents of

change in nature management, species protection, and preservation.

Nigus and Abiye (2022) also examined the close relationship between women and nature in Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel *This Mournable Body* (2018). However, they focused on women's perspectives on nature and, through textual analysis, they saw two perspectives on nature: first, rural Black women have a close relationship with nature because their profession is related to agriculture and creates a relationship of mutual need; second, a white Zimbabwean woman, Tracy, only sees nature as a source of income because her profession is involved in the eco-tourism industry, but this perspective is not unique because Tambudzai, despite being involved in a similar industry, sees nature as a life-giving force. This depiction shows that neocolonialism and capitalism are still entrenched in Zimbabwe. Moreover, the depiction of the novel also shows contradictions with the reality of Zimbabwe today.

The relationship between women and nature is the foundation of ecofeminism. This relationship also arises from the binary distinction between public and private (domestic) space. In France's (2019) research, the concept of psychogeography is the focus of attention because it is tied to a masculine perspective that mistakenly underestimates the body, women, and nature as marginalized. Through Olivia Laing's novel *To The River* (2011), France's (2019) research shows that the female character's journey to nature (read: the river) demonstrates the reciprocal association and relationship between women, the body, and nature. Rather than resisting this essentialist view, this relationship is shown as an effort to embrace femininity, the body, and nature with the aim of resisting environmental destruction.

Contrary to France's (2019) conclusion, Mavengano (2023) looks at the relationship between women and nature radically through NoViolet Bulawayo's novel *Glory* (2022), which is written satirically to parallel the female character, Marvelous, with Grace Mugabe, a former president of Zimbabwe from 1996 to 2017. Through an ecofeminist approach, it can be concluded that blaming Mugabe—through the character Marvelous—symbolically explains how women and the feminization of nature are both insulted and held accountable for the downfall of humanity both in the realm of fiction and in the context of Zimbabwean history.

Beyond connecting women with nature and the female body as a means to deconstruct history with nature, Wu (2024) sees the female body as a bridge between human identity and nature through three novels from across geographies, namely *Feng Ru Fei Tun* by Mo Yan, *Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru* by Haruki Murakami and *El Amor en Los Tiempos del Cólera* by Gabriel García Márquez. This transnational study adheres to ecofeminism and produces conclusions in the form of various depictions of the closeness of the female body and nature; in Mo Yan, Shangguan Lushi's body is depicted as a natural resource; in Murakami, Kan ō Maruta's body is depicted as being able to distinguish and gain strength through water from different regions; in Márquez, Fermina Daza's body is depicted as vulnerable to local diseases according to modern

medical views. The closeness of the female body and nature is almost without boundaries so that the female body can be read as an ecological entity itself.

When women's bodies are equated with nature, they are vulnerable to marginalization, and so is nature. So, what can make women's bodies transcend their attachment to nature? According to Wu (2024), it is the intersection of local and non-local elements that creates hybrid traditions. In this regard, the three novels demonstrate this intersection in different ways, such as through the representation of male characters (read: modernity, the West) and technology. This hybridity also plays a crucial role in deconstructing the marginalization of women and nature. Thus, the interaction between local and non-local traditions produces a dynamic that shifts the boundaries between humans and nature.

In the context of Indonesian literature, the relationship between the female body and nature can also be found in the contemporary novel entitled *Duri dan Kutuk* (2024) by Cicilia Oday. Almost in line with the conclusions of Wu's research (2024), in *Duri dan Kutuk* (2024) the female body cannot be separated from nature, even the female body is depicted as one with nature (read: trees and plants). The relationship between women and nature (trees, plants) also appears in her short stories published in the mass media, such as *Solilokui Bunga Kamboja*, *Kesepakatan*, and *Bunga apa yang Kau Masukan ke Dalam Mulutmu*. Plants, flowers, or trees serve as metaphors for women and femininity. However, unlike Wu's (2024) conclusion, this study will focus on how the female body is constructed as *monstrously feminine* and how it transforms into *mother-nature*. Furthermore, narratological analysis is emphasized because the novel uses a narrator who moves from one character to another, both inside and outside the story.

The central positioning of women and nature in literary narratives demonstrates resistance to the marginalization of women and nature, both by patriarchy and capitalism. It also plays a role in undermining essentialist interpretations of women and nature. The depiction of female characters and nature (plants and trees) in *Duri dan Kutuk* (2024) appears as two entities that are united and almost inseparable. This research is based on:

- a. How are narrative strategies on women's bodies and nature (plants, trees) constructed through the narrator's voice and the characters' perspectives?
- b. How are the constructions of the female body and nature (plants, trees) depicted as *monstrous feminine* and transformed into the metaphor of *mother-nature*?
- c. How is the transformation of the female body and nature (plants, trees) used—even within a limited “space”, both in the story and the way of telling the story itself—to challenge male sexuality towards women and nature (plants, trees, species)?

Based on the problem formulation above, this research will attempt to:

- a. describes the narrative strategy in depicting the closeness between the female body and nature (plants, trees) so as to create limitations in narrative “space” for the

female body and nature.

- b. describes the construction of the female body and nature (plants, trees) as *monstrous feminine figures* and then turns into a *mother - nature metaphor*.
- c. describes the transformation of women's bodies and nature (plants, trees)—within the limitations of the "space" of stories and narratives—to challenge male sexuality towards women and nature (plants, trees, species).

Methodology

This research uses a textual method with narratological analysis from Mieke Bal (1985) in the form of the concepts of focalization and spatiality. The concept of focalization is to examine the narrative proximity between the narrator, characters, and the subject of the story in the form of the female body and nature (plants, trees); and the spatial concept is to examine the limitations of the story and narrative "space" in observing the female body and nature (plants, trees). Then, these textual findings are presented and juxtaposed with Merchant's theory (1995) to support the argument about the positioning of women and nature in the narrative.

The Concept of Space and Focalization

Bal views the concept of "space" as he does a photographic landscape. He views the photographic landscape as an ambiguous situation: producing and recording a landscape that contains a piece of space, a piece of space that contains a landscape. Therefore, when he talks about *space*, he is not only talking about the issue of "space" but also the issue of time. Moreover, he imagines that if there is a model posing in front of him, he will estimate the distance and freeze the model in a frozen "space."

The concept of *space* is also closely related to focalization because space is then perceived by the focalizer. Therefore, *"there are also spatial descriptions generated by the traveling gaze of an external focalizer, who fails to receive a recognizable embodiment but in fact anticipates or otherwise represents particular characters' visions"* (Bal, 1985: 135). In narrative, spatial descriptions are neglected because the concept is related to setting, and setting is often considered to play no role in the storyline. Bal's emphasis on *space* here relates to how spatial descriptions are generated from the focalizer's view from outside the story. These spatial descriptions have the potential to construct a space or setting in which a story can be relied upon and can also be used as an extension of a particular character's perspective.

Ecofeminism: Female Bodies and the Environment

In an ecofeminist perspective, women's bodies and nature serve as arenas for uncovering structures of domination and power, both patriarchal and capitalist. However, this view is not free from criticism, especially from mainstream feminists. They view ecofeminism as regressive because it places women on an equal footing with nature, a position mainstream feminism problematizes. In other words, mainstream

feminism views ecofeminism as essentialist. Women's bodies are treated as fixed, immutable, unchanging, and ahistorical. Regarding this, Carlassare (1994) stated:

"Essentialism usually refers to the assumption that a subject (for example, a "woman") is constituted by presocial, innate, unchanging qualities. Constructionism, on the other hand, usually refers to the assumption that a subject is constituted by social, historical, and cultural contexts that are complex and variable. Essentialist arguments posit that women and men are endowed with innate qualities or essences that are not historically or culturally contingent, but eternal and unchanging, an outcome of their biology, which is understood to be fixed" (Carlassare in Merchant, 1994: 221)

Therefore, adopting a critical ecofeminist position requires establishing an essentialist perspective. It is precisely when women's bodies and nature are viewed as equals that ecofeminists embrace this position.

Women and nature are always positioned as marginal or even victims of human greed (patriarchy, capitalism). The most visible of these positions are women's bodies and nature. Rape and looting are both forms of action that victimize women and nature. Therefore, the role of ecofeminism is to embrace such positioning and make it an arena to reveal the oppression of women and nature, as stated by Carlassare (2024) that *"social/ist ecofeminists' interest in women's bodies as a site of power struggle is one point at which essentialism steps into their constructionist position. The body and biological sex for some social/ist ecofeminists are part of material nature; they are 'natural,' not socially constructed"* (Carlassare in Merchant, 1994: 230). Thus, as one arena, the construction of women's bodies and nature needs to be opened and explored to understand the structures of domination and power that regulate them, both in the realm of activism and the realm of narrative in literature.

Results and Discussion

Cicilia Oday is a writer based in Kotamobagu, North Sulawesi. She was one of the *emerging writers* at the annual *Ubud Writers and Readers Festival* in 2024, and her book, *Duri dan Kutuk*, was published in 2024 by Gramedia Pustaka Utama. It was also longlisted for the 2025 Kusala Sastra Khatulistiwa.

The novel tells the story of a young woman, Eva Wahani—who has just moved to a new rural (?) neighborhood—who is starting her life after marrying Halimun. The young couple was given a colonial-era house by Eva's father, Damar, with land the size of a football field. In the new neighborhood, the young couple live next door to a family—Sara (wife), Anwar (husband), and Adam (only son). Adam is a quiet, pubescent young man with a raging sexual desire. The narrative focuses on Eva and Adam alternately.

The novel is narrated alternately through the third person (outside the story) and the

first person, Sara, within the story. The change of narrator divides the story from one chapter to another, so that the transition between chapters certainly has alternating focalization. Moreover, the difference in focalization then shows three things: the construction of the female body and nature, the transformation of the female body, and the conception of "space" in which the female body and nature are placed. This research will try to describe: (1) the construction of the female body and nature (plants, trees) as one unit; (2) the transformation of the female body from *monstrous feminine* to *mother-nature* metaphorically; and (3) the female body is in the limited "space" of male sexuality.

Women's Bodies and the Environment

To discuss the construction of the female body and the environment, this paper will first show the "female body" as the narrative treats Eva as the female protagonist and the "environment" as both the setting and the non-human character. As a setting, throughout the discussion the word "environment" will be referred to as nature, while as a non-human character it will be referred to as plants or trees. Second, the paper will focus on how the focalization strategy treats these two literary devices.

The closeness of the female body and nature can be seen in three ways: first, by looking at internal and external focalization (from within and outside the story); second, by looking at the character's perspective. Through narrative strategies, both methods equally show the female body and nature in close proximity. The following is how the perspective of a supporting female character, Doria, a housekeeper at Eva's date, responds to the character Sara when Sara is curious about why the young couple moved to the former colonial house. *"Bu Eva yang memilih tempat ini. Alasannya, lingkungan ini masih dekat dengan alam, pohon-pohonnya masih banyak, ladang-ladangnya masih ada. Tapi satu yang tidak dia suka. [...] sungai"* (Oday, 2024: 26). Doria's perspective represents Eva's own body, including its distance from the polluted river. In other words, the female body is constructed to a "certain" natural condition. Such a construction shows contrast and dichotomy, thus creating a narrative split in relation to siding with nature. This contrast and dichotomy will be discussed further in another subchapter.

The female body, besides interacting closely with nature, is furthermore constructed as a unity with natural elements (plants, trees). In relation to such construction, it is also worth noting that this novel also has an absurdist tone, rather than fantasy or magical realism. Absurdity—or let's call it "oddity"—is present in non-human characters, plants, trees, including Eva herself. Through a narrator outside the story, Eva's body is narrated as a unity with the plants.

*Seminggu sekali ia masuk ke kamarnya dan melepas seluruh pakain di depan cermin. Ia mendekat dan memperhatikan daun telinganya yang mulai mencuatkan **tunas kecil** yang sayangnya harus ia cabut kembali. Ia memisahkan **sulur-sulur muda** di antara helai-helai rambutnya, menarik*

*sulur-sulur itu hingga tercabut dari kulit kepalanya. Ia mengangkat lengan kanan dan mencabut **akar-akar halus** yang berjumbai-jumbai. Hal yang sama ia lakukan pada ketiak sebelah kiri. Ia berbalik memeriksa punggungnya, tempat **kecambah-kecambah** tumbuh subur dan beranak pinak hanya dalam waktu kurang dari seminggu. Ia membuka paha dan merunduk untuk melihat apakah kecambah-kecambah yang sama dengan di punggung telah tumbuh di antara selangkangan.” (Oday, 2024: 10)*

The “strangeness” of Eva’s body is more than just being referred to as a unity with the plants. Eva’s body is part of nature itself. Each part of Eva’s body produces small shoots, young tendrils, fine roots, and sprouts. This strangeness is the reality in the narrative. And the narrative strategy divides the reading of the female body into two: first, when the narrative uses a narrator within the story—using the character’s perspective—Eva’s body is considered close to nature; second, when the narrative uses a narrator outside the story—using an omniscient narrator—Eva’s body is considered a unity with nature (plants, trees).

The omniscient narrator has its own narrative potential. In certain chapters, this omniscient narration is written in italics and can be read as a “voice of nature” or a bias toward nature because, separately, the oblique narration focuses on the character Eva and the behavior of plants and trees. This oblique narration is written using an omniscient narrator.

In contrast, when the narrative is not italicized, the focus is on either Adam or Sara, not Eve and the plant. Through the use of an outside narrator, the plant is gendered, as seen in the following narrative:

*Dia melihat gerakan di semak-semak mawar dan kembang sepatu. Tanaman-tanaman itu bergerak seperti bayangan tanpa bentuk, bunga-bunganya saling menjulurkan dahan **seperti para wanita** sedang terlibat dalam obrolan mengasyikan. [...] tampak pohon-pohon bugenvil yang membuat gerakan-gerakan gemulai bak balerina. [...] Adam menyadari si beringin putih memiliki wujud **seperti lelaki bungkok** yang sedang duduk berpangku tangan.” (Oday, 2024: 21-22)*

The narrator outside the story may be constructed objectively when the narrator is merely tasked with recording the sequence of scenes. However, it cannot be denied that this type of narrator takes on the perspective of the characters. “He [Adam] saw [...]” and “Adam realized [...]”¹ are the narrator’s ways of conveying the voice through Adam, so that the gender construction of the plants and trees appears to be contrasted with the narrative that uses italics. In other words, gender construction and gender performativity are present when the narrative is deployed through Adam.

¹Ibid

In contrast, when the narrative is written in italics and focuses on Eva, through the use of an outside narrator, plants are depicted as genderless as they appear in the following narrative:

*“Ia tak percaya ada yang mau mengintip tubuhnya yang seluruh batang pohon. Tapi ia lebih tidak percaya lagi bila bunga-bunga mawar berbohong kepadanya. [...] Ia pergi ke belakang garasi tempat penyimpanan bibit-bibit yang ia panen dari tubuhnya sendiri. Mereka **tampak seperti anak-anak kecil** yang polos dan tidak bersalah dan membutuhkan arahan. Mereka akan tumbuh menjadi pohon jati, bila ia tak perlu menyuruh mereka menjadi sesuatu yang berbeda.”* (Oday, 2024: 121)

The narrator conveys the voice through Eva, referring to plants as genderless personifications. The presence and absence of gender through this external narrator raises another issue within the narrative. The narrative's construction presents the image of women as "mothers" to nature, the environment, trees, and plants. This image also poses the risk of bias in the narrative. The image of the mother is divided as the narrative creates a biased perspective toward nature through both italicized and non-italicized narration. The italicized narrative shows Eva as a mother toward nature through her characterization as a female plant spirit. This characterization presents women solely through their reproductive nature, nurturing, caring, and fostering plants as a mother would children.

However, this division creates an antithesis—as a monster—to the positive image of a mother. This can be seen in the narrator's description of the story, for example, the character Sara when she says,

Aku bermimpi Eva Wahani keluar dari hutan gaib itu dengan dahan-dahan tumbuh di sekujur tubuhnya, ranting-ranting memanjang dan berulir-ulir mencuat dari lengannya, dan ada sulur-sulur rambut yang bisa ia kebaskan ke udara menggantikan rambutnya. Ia menarik dan menyeretku sepanjang jalan dengan salah satu rantingnya.” (Oday, 2024: 164).

Unlike the oblique narrative and the Eva-plant narrative, this narrative uses the character in the story, Sara. This depiction explains how Sara's perspective constructs Eva-plant's body. However, more than simply explaining the closeness of Eva's body and the plant as a whole, Sara's perspective positions Eva-plant's body antagonistically.

The Female Body as Monstrous Feminine and Mother-Nature

To further discuss the construction of the female body and the environment, in this sub-chapter, the unity of the female body and the environment (plants, trees) will be written as the body of Eva-plant. For further explanation, the body of Eva-plant is present in an oblique narrative in the form of a flashback narrative, telling the origins of Eva, since, *“bulan bersinar penuh di langit dan Damar menemukan ceruk kecil di dekat pangkal batang. Damar si pemuda bandel itu menyetubuhi pohon itu”* (Oday, 2024: 36).

It is from the hybridization of humans and teak trees that the body of Eva-plant is born. In other words, humans (read: men, Damar) have raped nature and produced a hybrid of a demon. And, *“Damar menamai bayi itu Eva—sebagaimana Eva lahir dari patahan takdir, dan yang kelak menjadi ibu dari segala yang hidup.”*²

It should be emphasized that this flashback in the form of an oblique narrative explains Eva's life history briefly by summarizing and thus also encompassing Eva as merely a body and how that body is viewed and treated as shown through the following quote:

“Eva anak istimewa: ia bisa berbicara dengan semut, serangga, rumput, dan bunga-bunga; ia juga bisa membuat tanaman di sekitarnya menari dan bernyanyi. Namun, orang sekitar lebih tertarik bila Eva berbicara dengan anjing atau kucing. Eva sering jadi korban perundungan karena tampangnya, pernah dikatai manusia sirkus.” (Oday, 2024: 37).

Through this skewed narrative, Eva's plant-like body is presented in two ways. On the one hand, she is seen positively, with the ability to connect with nature. On the other, she is a kind of anomalous body, a monstrosity. In other words, she is *monstrous*. *feminine* and *mother - nature*. Moreover, the narrative moves statically, questioning Eva's body as an anomaly until she grows up and is viewed by other characters like Sara and Adam.

Moreover, the closeness of Eva's body to nature personifies and genders the plants. “They” are born from Eva's body as plants with human characteristics. This personification and gendering of the plant characters, as a consequence, also divides them into a dualism: the plants from Eva's body and the plants from the wilderness. One is brought to life by the narrator—given a voice and perspective—because it is personified and made into a character, while the other merely becomes a narrative ornament, a setting, an inanimate object. This dualism of nature also gives rise to another consequence: a dichotomous, antagonistic nature, as seen in the following narrative.

*“Tiba-tiba seutas sulur gading merayap seperti seekor ular dengan menyergap lengan-lengan ketiga anak lelaki itu. [...] sulur-sulur itu sekuat tali tambang yang ditambatkan pada jangkar. Sementara itu, gadis-gadis yang baru saja memetik bunga-bunga terompet ungu memiliki gigi-gigi sekecil beras dan seputih tulang, tapi rancung seperti mata gergaji. Darah memancar dan merembes ke seragam putih gadis-gadis itu ketika mulut-mulut terompet kecil ungu mengunyah daun telinga mereka **dengan rakus dan buas.**”* (Oday, 2024: 33)

The scene is a narrative with non-italicized letters. Therefore, an outside narrator is

² Ibid

used to record the scene objectively, demonstrating that the plants—which are extensions of Eva's body—are *monstrous*. They live not only through metaphor but also as characters in the narrative, becoming embodiments of the monster, and consuming human victims.

Furthermore, the antagonistic nature of the plants is also reinforced through their own voices. In another scene, when confronted by Adam, one of the plants says, *“Dia pikir di siang hari, kita sama dungunya dengan mawar-mawar di taman kota yang bisa ngapa-ngapain,’ timpal mawar dari tangkai yang lain”* (Oday, 2024: 72). The voice from the rose bush directly proves the nature of the plants to be in conflict: the plant is aware and the plant is stupid. However, it is also interesting to note that the plant's voice is only presented to the character of Adam. The conflicting nature of the plants is emphasized through another scene where the narrative is written using italics.

*“Konon, **burung dara** dan **kutilang** yang hinggap di tajuk-tajuk raksasa tak akan pernah bisa kembali melintas terbang; bahkan **burung elang** atau **burung hantu** yang terbang menjerit-jerit, seketika tidak akan terdengar lagi suaranya saat melintas di atas pohon-pohon siluman”* (Oday, 2024: 133).

In addition, the narrative reinforces the construction of nature as a monster and a predator of other natural elements, in addition to humans. The narrative is conveyed through Sara's perspective. From Sara's perspective, the trees are depicted as *monstrous*. She knows the ghost trees are alive, anomalous, and uncontrollable, but she is determined to conquer them after she suspects Eva has sexually harassed Adam. This starts from reporting Eva to the police to trying to intimidate others into destroying the trees in Eva's yard.

“The monstrosity of the trees is described as invincible to man-made objects such as when “mata gergaji listrik langsung bengkok bahkan ada yang langsung terlepas dari mesinnya ketika menyentuh batang pohon” (Oday, 2024: 155) or when the trees were set on fire, but “tidak lebih dari lima belas menit, lambat laun api mengecil hingga padam meskipun hujan tidak turun dan angin tidak bertiup”³. Likewise, when Molotov cocktails were thrown into the trees and “bom-bom itu hanya membuat pohon-pohon bergidik seolah-olah digelitik, [...]”⁴

Thus, the demon trees are antagonistic to humans and the species around them. While the bodies of demon plants and trees are depicted antagonistically through their predatory actions against humans and other species, Eva's body remains on the verge of the duality of *monstrous femininity* and *mother-nature*. And, to maintain this position, the narrative constructs Eva's body as an asexual woman with limited mobility, just like a tree.

³ Ibid, 156

⁴ Ibid, 156

la putuskan tak akan membersihkan tubuhnya lagi. Meskipun begitu, hari itu ia tetap melepas seluruh pakaian dan memosisikan tubuhnya dan memberinya cahaya matahari yang berlimpah. Cahaya matahari tak hanya membantunya bisa melihat dengan jelas, tetapi juga menutrisi kecambah-kecambah di tubuhnya.” (Oday, 2024: 120)

As the embodiment of *mother-nature*, Eva displays no sexual desire whatsoever, other than the desire to grow plants in her yard, which “*seluruh batas pekarangan selas hampr seribu meter persegi*” (Oday, 2024: 13). Moreover, the ghost trees “*memiliki kesadaran dan kepekaan terhadap niat-niat manusia. [...] Setahun sudah ia menjalankan misi hijau ini*” (Oday, 2024: 126). She and Halimun have secretly scattered tree seeds from Eva’s body to be planted in dry areas across Indonesia to grow into forests.

Female Bodies and Male Sexuality.

To discuss the female body as a critique of male sexuality, emphasis must first be placed on the concept of “space.” In this discussion, space is understood as two things: abstract space and concrete space. Abstract space is closely related to how the narrator presents Eva’s body “within” a limited perspective, allowing Eva’s voice to appear through the perspective of another character. Concrete space is related to Bal’s (1985) concept of the representation of setting and how that setting presents Eva’s body solely “within” a limited space.

First of all, Eva’s body is present through the narrator outside the story when the narrative perspective is channeled through the character Adam.

*“Dari samping, tubuh telanjang itu terkesan pipih seperti ikan pari, dan kedua lengannya terkesan lebih panjang daripada rata-rata orang dewasa. [...] selangkangan perempuan itu nyaris tertutup seluruhnya dengan kecambah yang lebih lebat dan lebih panjang daripada di punggung. [...] tubuh perempuan itu seperti pahatan kayu yang belum selesai dan dibiarkan tak sempurna. Tubuh yang lurus tanpa lekuk, nyaris tanpa buah dada, dan bokong yang tak menggoda. **Namun, itu tetap tubuh perempuan.**” (Oday, 2024: 49)*

The depiction of Eva’s body is observed through binoculars by Adam from the second floor of his house. The *monstrous* female body is emphasized by the narrator, “*namun, itu tetap tubuh perempuan.*”⁵ The body becomes an object of gaze as well as a sexual object. The depiction of the female body as a sexual object can be read as a challenge to the stereotype of the female body in the masculine view because, through the narrator outside the story, Adam observes Eva’s body in order to achieve ejaculation. However, this challenge is hampered by how the narrative provides

⁵ Ibid.

boundaries to space. Second, the *monstrous body* is not present in spaces other than the bedroom. Eva's body will be a normal female body when she is present outside the bedroom. When she interacts with Sara and when she holds an English course for children. However, even outside the bedroom, the *normal body* is still limited by how the narrative provides boundaries only "inside the house" or "in the yard."

From Adam's perspective, the *monstrous body* is a sexual one because he becomes aroused when he sees Eva's naked body. In this sense, male lust is also seen as a means of dividing the female body into two: the body as an object of sexual desire and the body as an object of socio-cultural construction. And when Adam cannot achieve both conceptions of the body in Eva's body, he desires another body. *"Adam selalu berseri-seri ketika membicarakan Nala, dan wajahnya selalu memerah jambu tatkala melihat Nala"* (Oday, 2024: 57).

However, as a sexual object, Eva's body is more frequently present than Nala's when Adam is in a state of arousal. According to him, *"tidak sulit membuat sketsa wajah Eva Wahani. Kepalanya yang lonjong dan lebar di bagian dahi mengingatkan si bocah pada telur ayam terbalik, kedua matanya hanya terdiri dari dua titik kecil, dan selajur hidung di tengah-tengah dengan bibir berbentuk garis horizontal di atas dagu."* (Oday, 2024: 72). Thus, in addition to Eva's physical presence in her own room, an extension of her body is also present in Adam's room.

This room can be read as a private space. It should be a safe space for sexuality. Adam doesn't direct his sexual desires directly at Eva, but rather at the image of her body. However, the boundaries of this private space are then violated by a demonic plant that "enters" Adam's room and rapes him.

"Dia mendapati kelopak-kelopak merah menempel di sekitar zakar dan penisnya yang telah terkulai. [...] di bahkan mendapat beberapa helai kelopak mawar terselip di balik kulit kulupnya. Dia harus menarik kulit penisnya ke belakang untuk menjangkau kelopak-kelopak merah yang menyempil itu" (Oday, 2024: 81).

The phantom rose bush appears through a wet dream but appears in the form of pieces of petals, confirming the presence of the phantom body after the rape. As a consequence of the dream, *"[...] dia dipaksa bangkit dan terus berjalan setelah diperkosa habis-habisan"* (Oday, 2024: 83) and would still feel pain when he directed his sexual desires towards women because *"Kamu [Adam] dikutuk tidak akan pernah bisa merasakan nikmatnya persetubuhan. Seumur hidup"* (Oday, 2024: 114). However, ironically, the body of a normal woman is used to break the curse. It is also through the dream that he obtains the pleasure of ejaculation, as narrated below.

"Dalam tidur, sekujur tubuh Adam bergetar lembut. Sensai senyar yang menyenangkan merambat hingga lutut dan telapak kaki, sedikit pun tiada rasa sakit; hanya kenikmatan tiada tara mengikuti pelepasan paling intens"

yang pernah dialaminya sejak dua minggu terakhir.” (Oday, 2024: 102)

Thus, the curse is used to challenge male lust. But at the same time, the curse itself feels odd when it questions space. Male sexual desire exists in the private sphere, and in this case, Adam does nothing against women or nature. This sexual desire exists in the realm of the mind and is expressed through. Even if Adam's sexual desire has destructive potential, the narrative does not display this potential either explicitly or implicitly. Moreover, when rape is depicted in the narrative, nature is actually destructive to humans, just as the demonic trees prey on the neighbors' children.

On the one hand, Eva and Halimun's kindness in the reforestation mission is portrayed as ecological activism. On the other hand, the narrative betrays this kindness through the antagonistic depiction of this ghost plant character. This plant is indeed described as *“memiliki kesadaran dan kepekaan terhadap niat-niat manusia”* (Oday, 2024: 126) when Eva whispers something to them. In other words, the plant is like a child to a mother. But whispering what? Certainly whispering good intentions. So, is this antagonistic nature also the result of Eva's whisper? When did this antagonistic nature emerge? Likewise, is nature truly antagonistic towards humans?

At the end of the story, Adam never escapes the curse and is instead transformed into a strange tree after he is discovered missing and enters Eva's forest home. He suddenly appears as a *“pohon misterius [...] di lihat dari mana pun pohon itu tidak tampak seperti pohon apa pun yang pernah ia lihat di mana pun”* (Oday, 2024: 188) so that Sara cannot accept Adam's transformation into a strange tree. In contrast, the other victims also transform into trees. But the narrator treats the transformation as accepted by their respective family members. Each victim can be seen as *“sebatang palem botol”* (Oday, 2024: 183), *“pohon palem dan pohon asam”* (Oday, 2024: 184).

Seeing Adam's transformation, unlike the other families, Sara cannot accept Adam's presence as a tree because *“ia percaya walaupun Adam harus kembali dalam wujud tumbuhan, seperti para korban lain, anak itu setidaknya muncul dalam wujud pohon pinus, misalnya, atau pohon cemara atau pohon akasia atau pohon bonsai atau pohon kersen yang ringkih dan berulat juga boleh”* (Oday, 2024: 189). Adam's transformation and Sara's rejection make the curse narrative on the verge of confusion. When does the plant spirit become friendly to humans and vice versa? The problem with the curse is the absence of scenes that explain human actions towards nature itself, except for Adam. Even if Adam's masturbation or sexual desires are considered excessive, the narrative does not show the implications of Adam's sexuality towards women and nature. These behaviors and desires exist in the private sphere. The challenge of the woman/nature voice also appears in the private sphere, but has consequences outside the public sphere

Conclusion

Based on the textual analytical analysis through narratology in the form of the narrator's voice and the character's perspective and the explanation of the ecofeminist concept on the female body and nature in the novel *Duri and Kutuk* (2024), there is an issue of essentialist feminism represented by the character Eva as a mixture of the human body and plants/trees. More clearly, the results of this study can be concluded in three things: first, the narrative strategy in the form of the narrator's voice and characters contribute to the construction of the female body and nature (plants, trees) as a metaphorical unity, and the mixture of the female body and nature is a consequence of male sexual desire which is symbolically arbitrary towards nature. The character Eva is born from Damar's uncontrolled sexual desire for a teak tree.

Second, the narrative strategy treats the female body and nature as a metaphorical split between the *monstrous feminine* and *mother-nature*. Through narrators outside the story and within the story (Sara and Adam), the female body is viewed as a duality. On the one hand, it is considered a loving entity that is the source of life, on the other hand, it is considered a destructive entity that devours both humans and nature itself. Third, the narrative strategy of the concept of space treats the female body and nature into narrow and limited compartments. Through the concept of space—both abstract and concrete—the female body is enclosed within the private sphere. The character Eva is only present in the room, and even if she is present outside the room, the space is still within the house. She is present when peeped at and when gossiped about by other characters. In this way, the female body and nature, instead of having the potential to critique male sexuality, are instead enclosed by the narrative as mere bodies in the private sphere.

Thus, the research findings demonstrate that women's bodies and nature are still viewed in essentialist ways; women's bodies are still viewed based on their bodily function, as machines for the production of life's seeds and the sustainable maintenance of nature. In other words, women's bodies have yet to truly emerge from the grip of male sexuality and patriarchal thought

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