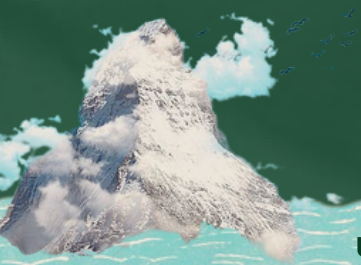
E-ISSN: 2963-3532

13-14 November
2025

Proceedings

The 13th Literary Studies Conference and
The 6th ASLE-ASEAN Ecocritical Conference

LITERARY NARRATIVES, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY: ASEAN PERSPECTIVES



Universitas Sanata Dharma

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Remarks from the President of Universitas Sanata Dharma

Distinguished keynote speakers, participants, presenters, and members of the Committee.

Greetings, and a very warm welcome to you all.

It is my joy and privilege to welcome all of you to the Literary Studies Conference 2025 in collaboration with the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment in ASEAN (ASLEASEAN), which takes up an crucially engaging theme: "Literary Narratives, Climate Change, and Social Inequality: ASEAN Perspectives." This theme is so timely, responding to one of the most urgent, complex, and challenging crises of our time, namely climate change. Given its complexity, any adequate response to it has to be interdisciplinary. By inviting literary creativities, this Conference would be contributing to the creation of new narratives that we urgently need. For, one of our biggest problems today is the loss of common narrative in responding to this crisis. The narrative of progress that modernity has provided us has lost its credibility. Limitless progress proves to be both impossible in terms of the limits of planetary resources, and dangerously self-destructive. This idea of limitless progress and growth has brought us to the brink of ecological collapse and planetary crisis. The situation is getting worse because we lack a common narrative. Bruno Latour has gone even further by saying that our situation is marked by "epistemological delirium", we no longer know how to think correctly about our situation and existential predicament (Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, 2018).

That is why the climate change ecological crisis needs a new common narrative framework that engages us on a deeper level of thinking about our precarious existence. And it is time that Asia functions as a critical context from which this common narrative springs up. It is time that Asian thinkers engage the world from their own context to address this crisis. One of the avenues is to weave a critical narrative from Asian historical engagement with modernity and the West. On this point, Amitav Ghosh, one of the leading Asian writers, has argued that the roots of the problem of climate change that we are facing today go back to the centuries-old geopolitical order constructed by European colonialism. Ghosh offers a critical historical narrative of the climate crisis that is centered around the trade of nutmeg. Here, the context of Southeast Asian, and Indonesian archipelago in particular, is rather prominent. In the dynamics that would become a colonial history, the history of the nutmeg trade is marked by violent conquest and exploitation of both human life and the natural environment (Ghosh, *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*, 2021). The story of the nutmeg becomes a parable for our ecological crisis. It shows in painful ways how human history has always been marked by inequality in terms of power relations; and that this power relations always involve earthly materials and resources, such as coffee, spices, tea, sugarcane, opium, and fossil fuels, that have deep and longer lasting impacts on our physical environment. Similar to Bruno Latour's view, for Ghosh, our crisis is ultimately the

result of a mechanistic view of the earth, which is so prevalent in modernity, in which nature exists only as a resource for humans to use for our own ends, rather than a force of its own, full of agency and meaning. We know that the end result of this worldview is exploitation and deep inequality.

So, we need to shift our epistemology and build a new narrative. We need to move from instrumentalization of nature to respecting the natural world; from exploiting nature to living together with and in nature; from colonialism to a better politics that brings our lives down to earth (Latour), going beyond narrow politics that has been mostly concerned with the national and the global in the traditional sense of the word.

This integral understanding of the relationship between the natural and the humans is found in many of indigenous Asian cultural traditions; and the better understanding of politics that cares deeply about the cosmos is being constructed by new cultural forces that need support from scholars from various disciplines and their academic communities. Here at Sanata Dharma University, we are convinced that ecological crisis is fundamentally related to the much deeper crisis of humanity; and that ecological concerns cannot be separated from social concerns and problems, such as inequality, injustice, poverty, migrations and so forth. Following Pope Francis, we also believe that a technocratic solution is never enough. We need to come together for an integral approach to ecology, in which new narratives of values and visions are so much needed.

As scholars, working from an Asian context, we are better situated to address this global crisis of ecology together. More particularly, literary studies should play a more distinctive role in this interdisciplinary endeavour by engaging the diversity of Asian (or ASEAN) contexts more creatively, with fresh methodologies and frameworks, and thus contributing transformative narratives for the world.

So, finally, I wish you all a very stimulating and thought-provoking conference. On behalf of the whole academic community of Sanata Dharma University, I would like to offer our gratitude to all the speakers, presenters, moderators, participants, and members of the Committee who have worked so hard with a sense of dedication and collaboration to make this Conference a reality.

God bless us all in our endeavor.
Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam.

Albertus Bagus Laksana, S.J., S.S., Ph.D. (Rector, Sanata Dharma University)

Remarks from the Chair of LSC

This year's Literary Studies Conference (LSC) collaborates with the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment in ASEAN (ASLEASEAN) and addresses a timely topic: Literary Narratives, Climate Change, and Social Inequality: ASEAN Perspectives. The collaboration marks the keen and serious attention to both the discourse about nature and the social & political practices that emerged from it. It also widens the networks of scholars, researchers, and practitioners sharing similar concerns about planetary ecological issues impacting the environment. Thus, the organizing committee expresses its profound gratitude for this collaboration.

The organizing committee would also like to extend its gratitude to the plenary speakers, moderators, presenters and participants for their enthusiasm in participating in this conference. This year, the organizing committee received high-quality research articles and abstracts from various regions, such as Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, India, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Pakistan, the United Kingdom, Singapore, Bangladesh, and the United States of America. They signify the importance of addressing this year's themes within academic discourse. Furthermore, the exchanges, in both the online and onsite sessions of the conference, might enrich the effort in comprehending the environmental issues and in formulating contextual solutions from ASEAN perspectives.

On behalf of the organizing committee, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to all the participants attending and participating in the conference. Hopefully, the conference provides you with valuable memories and experiences.

Yogyakarta, 13 November 2025

Simon Arsa Manggala
The 13th Literary Studies Conference & the 6th ASLEASEAN Ecological Conference
Organizing Committee, Chair

Remarks from Chair of ASLE

Distinguished guests, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of *the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment in ASEAN* (ASLE ASEAN), it is my great honour and pleasure to welcome you all to our 6th ASLE-ASEAN Ecocritical Conference and the 13th Literary Studies Conference which over two days will explore Literary Narratives, Climate Change, and Social Inequality from diverse ASEAN Perspectives.

This conference marks not just another gathering, but a celebration of ideas, collaboration, and progress. It is inspiring to see so many familiar faces, as well as new ones, united by our shared commitment to raise awareness about climate change, its impact on Southeast Asia, and most importantly, the role that literary and cultural narratives have played in our distinctive and collective histories, and continue to play currently, in understanding and indeed rectifying our shared environmental predicament.

Over the next few days, we will engage in stimulating discussions, share research and experiences, and explore new pathways for growth and partnership. Conferences like this remind us that our greatest strength lies in our community, the network of dedicated professionals, scholars, and advocates, who continue to move our field forward.

I want to express my deepest appreciation to our organising committee led by Dr Paulus Sarwoto and Simon Arsa Manggala, and the faculty members of the English Letters Department of Universitas Sanata Dharma for their tireless efforts in organising this conference. We are also deeply grateful to the Rector, Dean and Trustees of Universitas Sanata Dharma, Yogyakarta, Indonesia for so generously supporting us and to each one of you for making the time to be here.

As we begin, I encourage everyone to participate fully—ask questions, share insights, and connect with new colleagues. Let us make this conference not only an exchange of knowledge, but also a source of inspiration and renewed purpose. Once again, welcome to the Conference. I wish you a fruitful and memorable experience.

Thank you and enjoy the conference!

Prof. Dr Chitra Sankaran (Department of English, Linguistics and Theatre Studies, National University of Singapore)

President, Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment in ASEAN (ASLE ASEAN)

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 bungkuk** 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.

[1]Ibid

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 selurus 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 rambat yang bisa ia kebaskan ke udara mengantikan 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 pikr 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

> *Ia 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 mengkuti 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 kalaupun 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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The Fate of Animals During the Pandemic: Reflection and Metaphor in Contemporary Vietnamese Literature

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Abstract

This article examines and analyzes the fate of animals in a selection of contemporary Vietnamese literary works. While most literary studies on epidemics tend to emphasize human experiences— including loss, loneliness, and psychological crises—this research shifts the focus to a less-examined subject: animals and their destinies within the context of pandemics. From this perspective, the study elucidates the dual role of animals, both as biological entities affected by catastrophic events and as symbolic representations that reflect human life and society amid environmental crises. This study is structured around three main components. First, we investigate the prejudice that views animals as the origin and cause of disease outbreaks. Second, we focus on analyzing human attitudes and actions toward animals during pandemics. Third, we place animal representations in dialogue with contemporary theoretical frameworks, including ecocriticism, speciesism, and pandemic literature, to propose the idea that animals possess immunological potential and can contribute to improving human health. The research methodology encompasses textual analysis of representative literary works written between 2000 and the present, as well as synchronic and diachronic comparisons of Eastern and Western narrative texts across various historical periods. It also employs an interdisciplinary approach that integrates literature, medicine, ecocriticism, sociology, and cultural studies. The objective of this article is to clarify the role of animals within contemporary literary discourse and to suggest the possibility of redefining the human–nature relationship in the post-pandemic context. This study represents a new contribution to the interdisciplinary dialogue between literature and the environmental humanities in Vietnam, while also promoting a deeper awareness of human ethical responsibility toward other species in an increasingly vulnerable shared world.

Keywords: animals; contemporary Vietnamese Literature; ecocriticism; non-human; pandemic

Introduction

During the Covid-19 pandemic, global attention was primarily focused on the fate of human beings. The plight of animals, by contrast, was often overlooked or scarcely mentioned, despite the fact that they, too, were severely affected. In his book *The Future After Covid: Futurist Expectations for Changes, Challenges, and Opportunities After the Covid-19 Pandemic*, Jason Schenker discusses the transformations, challenges, and opportunities that emerged in the aftermath of the pandemic — ranging from unemployment, education, energy, finance, monetary policy, real estate, and national security to tourism and entertainment. However, this work makes no reference to the vulnerabilities faced by the animal world, addressing animals only as commodities within the human food supply chain (Schenker, 2021, 122). Similarly, in its report *Imagining the Future of Pandemics and Epidemics: A 2022 Perspective*, the World Health Organization (WHO) conducted extensive research to retrospectively examine past pandemics, assess previous epidemic threats, and improve strategies for disease preparedness and management, emphasizing the need for coordination and cooperation at all levels to safeguard humanity's future. In this context, the WHO's final message emphasizes the importance of strengthening the "One Health" approach, which acknowledges the inherent interconnection between human health, animal health, and the shared environment in which they coexist.

Over the past two centuries, research in the natural and social sciences has laid a crucial foundation for understanding the complex interconnections among animals, disease, evolution, and culture. As early as the 19th century, Charles Darwin, in *On the Origin of Species* (1859), established the scientific basis for explaining variation, adaptation, and interspecies interaction as part of a continuous evolutionary process. He wrote:

> We have seen that through the process of selection, humans can achieve remarkable results and compel organisms to adapt to their own needs by accumulating small but useful variations that nature has bestowed upon them. Yet Natural Selection is a force that operates ceaselessly and far surpasses the limited capacity of human effort, for the works of Nature are works of Art. (Darwin, 2014, 100)

Building upon this evolutionary foundation, modern scientific thought has expanded its observation of the living world beyond a static and isolated system. It is a complex network of interactions among species, in which every organism serves as a vital link in the dynamic flow of nature's transformations. This perspective necessitates a reconceptualization of the human-biosphere relationship—not as one of domination or mere exploitation, but as a process of coevolution. In other words, human life is deeply intertwined with and profoundly influenced by the lives of other forms of life.

In the twentieth century, Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (1997) further expanded this perspective by demonstrating that microbes and epidemics are not merely biological phenomena but also agents that shape human history, influencing social structures, power relations, and the development of civilizations. Similarly, Baratay (2012), in *Le Point de Vue Animal*, asserted that representing animal suffering and death in literature constitutes a narrative strategy that enables humanity to critically reassess its own central position. He wrote:

> The influence of animals in their relationship with humans and their true role as active agents must be acknowledged, especially since their gestures, behaviors, social interactions, and even their 'cultures' (as recent ethologists have noted) are sensed, perceived, and evaluated by humans in the field, who in turn react, act, and think accordingly. The living animal can no longer be considered a black hole in history[1]. (Baratay, 2012, 30)

More recently, in his work *Spillover: Animal Infections and the Next Human Pandemic*, David Quammen further elucidates the process of viral "spillover" from animals to humans, emphasizing the profound ecological interconnectedness underlying all pandemics. "Ecological instability drives the emergence of infectious diseases. When you shake a tree, something will fall" (Quammen, 2021, 25). These findings, when situated within a literary context, reveal that representations of animals during pandemics become focal points for intersecting biological, historical, ethical, and aesthetic discourses.

The convergence of animal health, human health, and ecosystem health is a defining reality of the twenty-first century. Human activities that accelerate climate change simultaneously contribute to the increasing risk of pandemics. Understanding the past and future of zoonotic diseases, therefore, requires new paradigms for studying the intricate relationships among humans, animals, and the environment. Over the past two decades, literature has re-examined the animal world, offering a more objective assessment of the role of animals in human life, particularly in the context of epidemic outbreaks.

However, in the Vietnamese context, the relationship among animals, pandemics, and literature remains a significant gap in scholarly research. Most existing studies have focused on human experiences during pandemics or on the discourse of disease as a social metaphor (Ho Trinh Quynh Thu, et al., 2022; Nguyen Thuy Trang, 2024).

[1] Quote verbatim: "l'influence des animaux dans la relation avec les hommes, sur leur véritable rôle d'acteur, d'autant que leurs gestes, leurs comportements, leurs sociabilités leurs "cultures" (comme l'évoquent des éthologues récents) sont devinés, perçus, estimés par les hommes sur le terrain et qu'ils réagissent, agissent, pensent en conséquence. L'animal vivant ne peut plus être un trou noir de l'histoire.

Meanwhile, the fate of animals—despite their clear presence in many literary works—has not yet been systematically examined, either in terms of socio-historical representation or symbolic meaning. This research gap highlights the urgent need to revisit contemporary Vietnamese literary texts through the lenses of animal studies and ecocriticism.

This article aims to analyze the fate of animals during pandemic times as a distinctive literary and cultural phenomenon, thereby illuminating how they are portrayed both as victims of biological history and as complex metaphors for vulnerability, dependency, and interspecies entanglement in the modern world. The study not only contributes new materials and perspectives to Vietnamese literary criticism but also affirms literature's crucial role as a discursive space for rethinking bioethical issues in the post-pandemic era.

Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this study, *The Fate of Animals During Pandemics: Representation and Metaphor in Contemporary Vietnamese Literature*, the author employs an interdisciplinary research framework that integrates theoretical and practical approaches, bridging literary studies and socio-cultural realities. Specifically, the methods applied include synthesis and classification, synchronic and diachronic comparison, interdisciplinary analysis, content analysis, and empirical investigation.

Results and Discussion

1. Animals and the Prejudice of Being the Origin and Trigger of Epidemics

Since ancient times, animals have often appeared as integral elements in humanity's narratives of disease, simultaneously regarded as the source of contagion and as companions to human beings. For instance, in ancient Akkadian literature, dogs were considered the cause of rabies (Wu Yuhong, 2001). In the *Book of Exodus* in the Bible, disease and animals are consistently intertwined as metaphors within the *Ten Plagues* that God unleashed upon Egypt to compel the Pharaoh to free the Israelites from slavery. Similarly, the opening of Homer's *Iliad* recounts how Apollo sent a plague upon the Greek army, originating from mules and dogs before spreading to humans as punishment for Agamemnon.

Historically, influenced by anthropocentric thought, literature — along with other fields — paid little attention to the emotions or suffering of non-human animals. In the seventeenth century, French philosopher René Descartes, from a dualistic perspective, sought to separate humans from animals, elevating humanity to the status of nature's owner and asserting that "animals are nothing more than and nothing other than highly complex mechanical devices" (Fontenay, 2013, 31). Animals were thus relegated to a peripheral position, defined as the "other" and excluded from the center of consideration.

In the nineteenth century, Italian scientist Agostino Bassi, in his treatise *Del Contagio in Generale* (1844), emphasized that microscopic organisms could be the cause of human diseases. These theories further consolidated the emergence of the "germ theory of disease" in the late nineteenth century. Such a perspective not only shaped research in medicine and biology but also permeated broader areas of cultural and social life, embedding within human consciousness the assumption that animals were the culprits behind epidemic outbreaks. Later, sociologist J. J. Rousseau opposed this view:

> Everything that comes from the hand of Nature is good; everything degenerates in the hands of humankind. Humans force one type of soil to nourish the products of another, compel one tree to bear the fruit of another; they mix and confuse climates, elements, and seasons. They mutilate the bodies of their dogs, their slaves; they disrupt everything and disfigure everything... nothing is allowed to remain as Nature created it. (Rousseau, 2010, 31)

This serves as one of the foundations upon which we may question long-held, anthropocentric biases toward animals. In contemporary Vietnamese literature, prejudiced views that associate animals with the origin of disease continue to persist, profoundly reflecting how humans perceive, label, and even "blame" other species in the context of ecological crisis. Images of animals as agents of disease transmission are widespread: from wild creatures, livestock, and poultry to parasites and even household pets — all are depicted as potential carriers of pathogens. Such representations expose complex layers of power, ethics, and responsibility within human–animal relationships.

One of the most illustrative examples of this is Do Phan's novel *Flies are Flies*. The narrative is set in a rural village on the outskirts of Hanoi, gripped by anxiety as a sudden cholera outbreak spreads beyond the boundaries of a single commune to engulf the entire province. Many children die of diarrhea due to the lack of timely medical intervention.

> The entire province was placed under a state of medical emergency. Several teams of central health experts were dispatched… Ambulances blared their sirens along the dikes, rushing patients to emergency care. Quarantine checkpoints sprang up along the arterial roads connecting the province to neighboring regions. (Do Phan, 2014, 73)

Following the investigation, the conclusion was reached: "The cause was identified as flies. It has always been so. Everyone agrees. Except the flies" (Do Phan, 2014, 73). In their self-perception as innocent victims, humans attribute all blame to flies. In Vietnamese folk culture, the fly has long been associated with negative connotations. Proverbs and idioms such as "Where there's decay, flies gather," "Sweet honey kills the fly," "Filthy as a fly," "Gratitude as small as a fly," or "Even without illness, longing brings sorrow — like a fly on one's lips," function as metaphors for opportunism, corruption,

and impurity.

Of course, in the world of flies, they are unaware of being seen as vile. From an empathetic, multispecies perspective, Do Phan turns his ear to listen to the voice of the fly. He observes: “There is no war in the society of flies. Their weapon is mutual tolerance for coexistence” (Do Phan, 2014, 207). “In fact, flies never bother humans once they have enough food and space for reproduction. This is their domain. Humans are merely a tiny part of it, capable of coexisting” (Do Phan, 2014, 207). Through a comparative lens that juxtaposes human parasitic behavior toward nature and other species, Do Phan underscores the ecological position of flies in the context of disease. Advances in biology have further revealed the evolutionary significance of flies, as they serve as vital agents for the reproduction and pollination of certain plants and possess biochemical compounds essential for fermentation in the food and processing industries. Within an ecological framework, every species possesses its own *intrinsic value*. Yet, the author provocatively suggests that human behavior is often no more admirable than that of the flies they so readily condemn.

Although Do Phan acknowledges that flies do carry *Escherichia coli* — a pathogenic bacterium associated with cholera outbreaks — he also emphasizes that the *E. coli* present in flies is almost entirely harmless. “It is true that shrimp paste contains a significant amount of E. coli bacteria, but they are harmless. After all, not every *E. coli* strain causes cholera” (Do Phan, 2014, 77). In essence, humans are the true invaders of the flies’ habitat. Moreover, human activities — including the release of polluted water, chemical waste from industrial development, and uncontrolled discharges from traditional craft villages — have severely contaminated the environment. These anthropogenic factors lead to ecological degradation, species degeneration, and cause flies to become deformed, diseased, or die without apparent reason.

> A swarm of flies lived for about a month around the wastewater pit of a household producing vermicelli in the village. Several generations of young flies were born there — frail and sickly. They suffered from a strange disease, paralyzing all six legs. They could only fly and remain motionless, unable to crawl or maneuver. Their foraging became sluggish. They grew emaciated and weak… Some monstrous flies even hatched — with their paired wings fused into one, resembling a tennis racket without a handle. (Do Phan, 2014, 72)

Throughout human development, humanity has relentlessly destroyed ecosystems — essentially dismantling the shared home of all living organisms. Humans have appropriated the territories of flies and countless other species. But what will happen if, one day, animals have nowhere left to live? Will they rise up and eliminate humankind through disease, in the very same way humans once sought to eradicate them? By allowing these “marginal” creatures to speak, Do Phan illustrates that flies are no longer merely the “culprits” blamed for spreading disease and death. The way society treats them — from baseless accusations to acts of total extermination — exposes a collective

human psychology: the readiness to sacrifice other species in order to preserve one's own safety.

This prejudice against flies and the consequences of their eradication are further explored in Nguyen Vinh Nguyen's short story *The Fly Incident*. According to the author, children are taught this bias from an early age: "Our children have been equipped with standard textbook knowledge: they know to feel disgust toward flies (because flies are insects that carry disease!)" (Nguyen Vinh Nguyen, 2008, 87). The author even proposes a provocative hypothesis: if humanity continues to stigmatize flies excessively and kill them brutally, the day may come when "flies will strike back against our world. And a fly storm will become reality" (Nguyen Vinh Nguyen, 2008, 95).

Similarly, Do Phan's novel *Flowing Through the Darkness* portrays the outbreak of avian influenza among animals, occurring in parallel with a cholera epidemic among humans. The prevailing public opinion holds that poultry is the primary source of infection. Chickens and ducks in rural areas become the focal point of fear and avoidance. However, through a calm and objective narrative voice, the author reveals that the true causes lie elsewhere — in the practices of hunting wild birds, keeping ornamental birds, unhygienic animal slaughter, and the consumption of raw poultry blood (*tiết canh*)[2].

The character Lao Quang in the novel makes a living by trapping wild birds and selling them to collectors of exotic species in the city. Using his keen hearing, he captures healthy, melodious birds while releasing the injured or sick ones back into the wild. Humans have confined animals, transforming them into objects of amusement. As Randy Malamud notes in *Zoo and Human Power*, the domestication of wild animals is fundamentally intended to "grant humans a sense of pride in their indirect participation in the hegemonic power of culture" (Malamud, 2015, 190). Consequently, human trapping and domestication practices inadvertently weaken birds' immune systems, cause genetic degeneration, and make them more susceptible to disease — conditions that may, in turn, render birds potential "hosts" for pathogens.

This argument is scientifically grounded. In *Spillover: Animal Infections and the Next Human Pandemic*, David Quammen traces the scientific investigation into the origins of SARS-CoV-2, citing experts who widely agree that the virus most likely originated in a wild animal — possibly a horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus* spp.) from southern or central China — before spilling over into humans via an intermediate host.

> But which animals, and how did they transmit the pathogen to humans? Those questions can only be answered by venturing into the forests, streets, markets, and restaurants of southern China to gather evidence. (Quammen, 2021, 225)

[2] *tiết canh:* a Vietnamese dish made from the fresh blood of animals.

Like a detective investigation, Quammen's narrative captivates readers as he presents evidence of both legal and clandestine cross-border trade routes that funnel wild animals from Southeast Asian countries into China to satisfy the demands of the nation's yewei (wild taste) culture. This cultural appetite encompasses extravagant culinary preferences, the use of natural remedies, and a fascination with exotic aphrodisiacs. The research team notes that "markets also provide a favorable environment for pathogens to switch hosts and spill over into humans" (Quammen, 2021, 228).

Thus, Do Phan's novel *Flowing Through the Darkness* exposes a profound paradox: humans — through their destruction of habitats, wars, and patterns of migration — are in fact the underlying cause of disease outbreaks, yet they attempt to absolve themselves of responsibility by placing the blame on animals.

Sharing the view that the origins of human epidemics lie in humanity's exploitation of nature to satisfy its tastes and appetites, Nguyen Quang Thieu's work *On the Trucks Carrying "Corpses"* recounts an incident in a rural village, told with a sense of magical realism that blurs the line between fact and fable. The story goes that villagers discovered rare white turtles in a lotus pond — an exceptional and precious species. They decided to "capture them all to make turtle soup." Armed with hoes, shovels, sticks, ropes, and bamboo baskets, the men of the village surrounded and captured every white turtle. The turtles stared back at the humans with eyes full of surprise and strangeness. In the frenzy of slaughter, the white turtles disappeared as if they had never existed.

Soon after, the land suffered repeated crop failures, and a chickenpox epidemic spread uncontrollably. Some villagers went blind; many were left with lifelong disabilities as a result of the disease. Interpreting this seemingly superstitious tale, Nguyen Quang Thieu argues that "the villagers had broken the structure of the universe — a structure that, within our limited and desire-driven perception, we are incapable of understanding" (Nguyen Quang Thieu, 2012, 141).

In the final chapter of *Spillover: Animal Infections and the Next Human Pandemic*, Quammen addresses the underlying reasons behind the emergence of zoonotic diseases — pathogens that spread from other species to humans. This phenomenon is not new, yet it is occurring with increasing frequency. He argues that humanity's enormous population, the vast number of domesticated livestock, the destruction of natural habitats, and the breakdown of ecosystems — all these factors could easily be framed as nature's retaliation against humankind. Quammen carefully emphasizes that humans are, in fact, part of nature — and that is precisely the problem. As in the Bible, the ultimate issue stems from humanity's failure to obey divine law. Animals have contributed nothing to this wrongdoing, yet they must share the consequences with humans in innocent solidarity.

From a different perspective, Thuong Ha's novel *Nalis Drifted to the Shore of*

Destiny envisions a virus that attacks humans and paralyzes daily life. Similar to Covid-19, this virus — called "Nalis" — becomes the central agent of crisis. Tracing the origins of Nalis, Thuong Ha demonstrates that microorganisms existed long before the emergence of *Homo sapiens*. Over time, humans have evolved, utilizing their hands and intellect to reshape the natural world.

> When humans recklessly clear forests, cut down trees, and hunt wildlife, ecosystems also gradually change. Some species are driven to extinction — not by natural selection, but by the selection imposed by humankind. (Thuong Ha, 2021, 151)

The emergence of Nalis in the novel serves as both a warning and a message to humanity. Time and again, Nalis and its viral "siblings" — along with their many variants — have appeared within human society as signals, urging people to live in harmony with nature. Yet humanity has persistently ignored these warnings, responding instead with arrogance and contempt toward the natural world. The wrath of Mother Nature, manifested through pandemics, is a devastating and karmic punishment that humans must ultimately face.

> Humanity's economic activity was brought to a standstill by the pandemic. Yet the volume of emissions released into nature dropped to one-third of previous levels. What we are doing is not merely holding humans accountable for their actions, but also restoring a natural world that should rightfully exist. (Thuong Ha, 2021, 155)

Through this narrative voice, *Nalis Drifted to the Shore of Destiny* reads like nature's desperate cry for help — the deep, echoing call of the forests, and the sorrowful voice of microorganisms invisible to the human eye. They are all around us, suspended in the invisible air, enduring alongside humanity the anguish of climate change, earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, and droughts.

In reality, the Covid-19 pandemic plunged humanity into darkness: hundreds of millions were infected, millions died, families were torn apart, and countless children were left orphaned. Humanity was consumed by a series of urgent questions: Where did this virus come from? Can we control the pandemic? How much longer will we suffer under its grip? Thuong Ha addresses and unravels these anxieties through the symbolic figure of *Nalis*. Nalis — like Covid-19 — is ultimately just a name for the virus that causes disease in humans. In the face of pandemics, we are quick to blame animals, as if the causes were entirely unrelated to human behavior. Voiceless in the human world, animals are made to bear the weight of catastrophe — subjected to suffering, injustice, humiliation, and resentment.

To challenge this misconception and to affirm that "all species, including humans, are equal," contemporary writers adopt a humanistic ecological perspective to defend vulnerable forms of life. Moreover, their narratives are often constructed around a

mirrored structure: the way humans treat animals is ultimately the way humans themselves will be treated.

At a deeper ideological level, attributing the origins of disease to animals functions as a metaphor for humanity's denial of its own responsibility toward nature. By engaging with such imagery, contemporary Vietnamese literature contributes to the deconstruction of anthropocentrism, exposing human culpability in ecological transformations that lead to the emergence of pandemics.

2. Human Actions and Attitudes Toward Animals During Pandemics

Rooted in long-standing human prejudices against animals, our perspectives often fail to recognize that the natural world itself is a victim. However, with the rise of the animal rights movement, scholars have increasingly acknowledged that animals, too, possess emotions and can experience trauma and suffering during outbreaks. Moreover, the tendency to regard animals as mere "collateral damage" reveals a deeper truth: culturally, there is no fundamental difference between how we conceptualize human health and animal health.

In fact, prior to the advent of the "germ theory of disease" and the chemicalization of medicine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the boundary between human and veterinary medicine was far less distinct. Rejecting the germ theory, Rudolf Virchow famously emphasized: "Between animal and human medicine there is no dividing line — nor should there be. The objects may differ, but the experience obtained constitutes the basis of all medicine" (Saunders, 2000, 203).

Later, Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari observed:

> History has shown that the massive increase in human power has not necessarily enhanced the happiness of individual Sapiens and has often caused immense suffering to other animals. Over the past few decades, we have made significant progress in improving human living conditions, reducing poverty, disease, and war. Yet the situation of other animals is deteriorating faster than ever before, and the advances achieved by much of humanity are too new and too fragile to guarantee anything. (Harari, 2022, 615)

Confronted with the threat of species extinction, the question of how humanity acts and responds to the animal world has become a central focus of interdisciplinary research. Beyond the realms of medicine and epidemiology, pandemics expose — with striking clarity — the fate of animals as the silent victims of environmental crises.

In this spirit, contemporary Vietnamese literature has begun to reflect on how humans interact with animals during times of epidemic. Through actions and attitudes, one can discern deeper layers of cultural, psychological, and ethical dimensions within human society. Literature, with its reflective function, not only reconstructs these modes

of behavior but also exposes the limitations of anthropocentric thinking when confronted with the nonhuman world.

One of the most significant epidemics of the twenty-first century was the H5N1 avian influenza outbreak, which lasted from 2004 to 2009 and caused severe losses to both humans and livestock worldwide. Of particular concern was the virus's high mutability and its rapid transmissibility — both from animals to humans and between humans — with complications often proving fatal. A close reading of literary works reveals varying responses of both government authorities and ordinary citizens to poultry, the animals identified as the presumed source of the pandemic.

A striking image of human extremity toward animals during the H5N1 outbreak is found in Nguyen Ngoc Tu's short story *The Endless Field*. When the avian flu spread across the Mekong Delta provinces, Ut Vu and his children were forced to evade veterinary officers. They roamed endlessly across vast, desolate fields, leading a nomadic existence in constant flight. Their fear was that if they entered any village, their flock of ducks would be confiscated, exterminated, and buried alive: "We couldn't cross the Bim Bip river through the Kien Ha region either, since veterinary quarantine there was very strict. And, as we heard, the avian flu was still spreading" (Nguyen Ngoc Tu, 2012, 171). For farmers, such a loss meant "no capital for the next season" — the complete devastation of their livelihoods.

By presenting a multidimensional perspective and diverse human responses to a global health crisis, Thien Son's novel *The Dead River* offers readers profound insights into a period marked by anxiety and uncertainty as the avian influenza pandemic spread across Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas. High-level alerts about the H5N1 virus — with its capacity for genetic mutation and potential for human-to-human transmission — placed the world under a state of heightened concern and red-level warning. For Vietnam, a country whose economy remains largely dependent on agriculture, the outbreak inflicted enormous material and psychological losses. The sight of "hundreds of thousands of poultry being destroyed from the South to the North," as workers in full-body protective suits and masks buried hundreds of sacks of chickens and ducks mixed with lime and disinfectant chemicals, became a deeply wrenching image for farmers.

> One farmer, who had spent his entire life tied to the fields, chose to end his life to follow his chickens to the other side. He left behind a suicide note expressing his boundless love for his poultry and his dream of opening farms and caring for them in the afterlife. (Thien Son, 2017, 285)

Thien Son's novel functions as a series of vignettes depicting the relentless impact of the epidemic on human life. While the author does not delve into specific individual cases, his panoramic view reveals two opposing human attitudes in the face of a pandemic: on one hand, the implementation of brutal epidemiological measures against animals — mass culling, burial alive, and chemical decomposition of poultry; on the

other, the profound grief and empathy of farmers toward the animal world. More than anyone else, these farmers shared an intimate bond with their livestock. Rather than employing clinical medical terminology, Thien Son renders the epidemic through the lens of social psychology: when pushed to the brink of existential threat, humans are willing to annihilate the very beings they once lived alongside, as if erasing the perceived source of danger. This behavior reflects a recurring historical pattern in pandemic responses — the "purification" of nature to safeguard human survival, even at the cost of other forms of life.

Do Phan's novel *Flowing Through the Darkness* portrays the profound sense of helplessness surrounding the state's brutal handling of livestock suspected of carrying disease. Communities that had relied on animal husbandry for generations suddenly turned their backs on poultry — once both their primary livelihood and their familiar "companions." Individual animals were dragged out, suffocated in sacks, and incinerated in rituals that were simultaneously "purificatory" and violent, as if their destruction were the only means of redeeming the community.

> Avian influenza broke out abruptly. People had already died. The entire country was terrified. A nationwide order was issued to cull all poultry. Authorities strictly controlled every route into the city to prevent even a single bird — living or dead — from reaching the market. (Do Phan, 2011b, 202)

What is particularly noteworthy in Do Phan's narrative is that the epidemic is not merely framed as a biomedical threat; it also becomes a lens through which deeper social anxieties are revealed. The outbreak exposes primal human fear and a profound lack of empathy toward weaker forms of life. The haunting image of poultry being reduced to ashes is not only a tragedy for the animal world but also serves as a powerful metaphor for the isolation, scapegoating, and violence that human societies are willing to unleash in moments of collective panic.

Do Phan's novel *Flies are Flies* pushes the exploration of human behavior even further by depicting human responses not only toward domesticated animals but also toward wildlife. When information spreads that flies are the source of a deadly viral strain, the people in the novel launch large-scale "hunts," burning down fly habitats and exterminating them en masse.

> Now it is the flies' turn to be elevated to Enemy Number One — and the only enemy that remains. Gone are the days of politely urging households to clean their toilets and animal pens. Health workers, fully equipped in protective suits with gasoline-powered sprayers strapped to their backs, spray every corner within reach. (Do Phan, 2014, 74).

What begins as fear of infection quickly escalates into an ecological massacre, as humans, in the name of "safety," legitimize the destruction of nature. Do Phan even allows the flies themselves to deliver a crucial indictment of human hypocrisy:

> The swarm of flies resented humanity's inconsistency. They had once dumped garbage and manure as if inviting the flies to come and thrive. Then, all of a sudden, they declared a mass extermination, spraying chemicals as toxic as Agent Orange once was — DDVP — which would persist in the sprayed areas for dozens of fly generations. (Do Phan, 2014, 75).

This statement encapsulates a dual tragedy: in their fear of disease, humans sever themselves from nature and destroy the ecological links essential for balance — a disruption that will ultimately come back to threaten their own survival.

Alongside depictions of violence and extermination, some contemporary Vietnamese literary works adopt more complex and multidimensional approaches in portraying human responses to animals during pandemics. Vo Dang Khoa's short story *Flying Camels* explores the deep psychological contradictions within the human community: on one hand, people slaughter herds of camels, believing them to be the source of disease transmission, ecological imbalance, food scarcity, and even natural disasters; on the other, such actions instill in them profound guilt and anxiety. As one adolescent character exclaims:

> Camels — they are as gentle as sand. But when too much sand is swept up by the wind, it fills the sky. Who dares to claim that a sandstorm is not dangerous? So camels are guilty! Camels must… die! It's the only solution, however difficult — at least it's easier than facing the looming sandstorm. (Vo Dang Khoa, 2023, 45)

Camels are, in fact, not native to Vietnam. Originating from the deserts of Africa and Asia, they are highly adapted to harsh, arid environments. They were introduced to Vietnam for tourism purposes — used in leisure activities, transportation, and commercial attractions. In *Flying Camels*, these animals are exploited and mistreated: forced to carry goods and tourists along the sandy coastal regions of central Vietnam, and even turned into targets for human amusement through hunting games. "The souvenirs passengers took home were the humps of the camels they had just killed — used to make soup or inhalation remedies for flu, highly valued for their 'utility'" (Vo Dang Khoa, 2023, 50).

Tragically, camels — gentle and trusting by nature — do not anticipate danger nor comprehend the pain of witnessing their companions slaughtered. "Camel slaughterhouses were established, including mobile butchering units that processed camel meat on-site to make pet food" (Vo Dang Khoa, 2023, 51). Even worse, human cruelty escalates to unimaginable levels: camels are loaded onto airplanes and dropped from great heights, "a brutal method of landing humanity had never tried before," yet animals are forced to endure such horrific deaths. The massacre and extermination of camels in the story transcends mere survival instincts — it symbolizes humanity's deliberate severance from nature itself, the very foundation upon which human life

depends.

Notably, in many literary works, human behavior toward animals during pandemics goes beyond mere reactions of fear or violence — it becomes a metaphor for how societies deal with "the Other" in a broader sense. When threatened, communities tend to isolate, expel, or even annihilate what they perceive as different — ranging from disease-carrying animals to human beings suspected of infection. In *The Dead River* by Thien Son, alongside scenes of poultry being brutally buried alive, infected individuals are also quarantined, forced to confront death and the stigma imposed by their communities:

> Another person caught the flu and died just hours after being admitted to the hospital. The body was immediately taken away for cremation. The deceased's home was surrounded and disinfected. Even family members dared not approach. Neighbors avoided the place; some even moved away. (Thien Son, 2017, 285)

Here, literature expands the meaning of pandemics beyond the realm of medicine, turning them into mirrors that reflect power dynamics, mechanisms of exclusion, and the vulnerabilities embedded within human social structures. This thematic concern recalls the South Korean novel *28* by Jeong You-Jeong, which portrays an outbreak of "red eye" disease in the city of Hwa Yang. Authorities initially speculated — without any scientific evidence — that dogs were the source of the contagion. Nevertheless, a brutal campaign to exterminate dogs ensued. Armed personnel stormed dog farms and killed the animals with bayonets, without justification or the owners' consent. Many families, terrified, abandoned their once-beloved pets. Stray dogs were captured and buried in mass graves.

> The dogs began falling into the pit. At first, just a few, then a heap quickly formed. They bounced upward as they fell, trampling the bodies beneath them, clawing over one another in a desperate attempt to escape. Soldiers encircling the pit stabbed them with bayonets and pushed them back down. Others slashed at the remaining dogs, pressed against the wire cage, and dragged them out. Big dogs, small dogs, black dogs, white dogs… some had their eyes gouged out, others were pierced through the belly, some stabbed in the back — blood spurted as they fell into the pit. (Jeong You-Jeong, 2019, 245)

Such treatment of animals is mirrored in the way those infected with the "red-eye" disease — as well as those trapped within the city of Hwa Yang — are quarantined, confined, and ultimately left to "live or die on their own." Amid the bleak, blood-soaked, and tragic pages of *28*, Jeong You-Jeong illuminates the resilience of humanity as people struggle to rise above loss, anger, pain, emptiness, and isolation, striving instead to sow compassion and forgiveness. "We are all products that nature has created by chance. We are beings who live by owing and repaying one another" (Jeong You-Jeong,

2019, 485).

Novel *28*, alongside contemporary Vietnamese literary works, not only portrays pandemics and their devastating consequences but also serves as a reminder of the deep interconnectedness between humans and other species. These narratives raise profound ethical questions about human responsibility and essence in the face of catastrophe.

From the above discussion, it becomes evident that human responses to animals during pandemics are not merely a series of physical actions — such as killing, exterminating, controlling, or protecting — but also reveal profound limits to morality, cognition, and humanity itself. Contemporary Vietnamese literature, in representing these actions, transcends mere reflection of reality to become a critical discourse, compelling us to confront a fundamental question: in the fight against disease, are we truly protecting life, or are we impoverishing the very foundations of life itself? As literature suggests, human reactions to animals amid epidemics are deeply paradoxical. They embody both survival instinct and self-destructive behavior; they aim to safeguard life while simultaneously denying humanity's essential bond with nature. Through pandemic narratives, literature probes deeply into the human condition in relation to the nonhuman world, granting animals an equal voice in articulating pain and suffering. As ecological thinkers have poignantly reminded us, "we believe that animals have no language simply because we do not understand their cries" (Fontenay, 2013: 39).

3. Animals as Symbols of Immunity and Harmonious Lifestyles in the Natural Environment

When pandemics occur, alongside the stigmatization and avoidance of animals, human thinking often turns to the development of vaccines as a means to control disease outbreaks. The creation and distribution of vaccines marked a major breakthrough in biomedical science during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One of the most significant contributors to this field was the French microbiologist Louis Pasteur (1822–1895), who developed vaccines against anthrax and rabies. He also proposed using the term "vaccine" as a general designation for all preparations used to induce immunity, extending beyond its original use by Edward Jenner in 1796, who first applied the term specifically to smallpox prevention.

In the twenty-first century, humanity has continued to build on these achievements of modern medicine, successfully developing various vaccines to combat emerging infectious diseases caused by environmental instability. However, the reality remains that, even long after the introduction of vaccines to curb the spread of Covid-19, society has yet to return to a state of complete safety. The Covid-19 pandemic, along with other

infectious diseases, still poses risks of resurgence, disrupting social life and producing unpredictable consequences.

Therefore, medicine alone is not a sufficient solution to prevent epidemics. Moreover, vaccines themselves have long been the subject of intense debate among various social groups. There are many reasons behind vaccine resistance, but most concerns center on the vaccination process itself. In essence, vaccination involves introducing a component of a pathogen into the body, prompting an immune "reaction" that trains the system to defend against future exposure to the pathogen — whether virus, bacterium, or toxin — without causing the actual disease. Occasionally, however, vaccination can lead to risks or adverse reactions. Such risks depend on the type of vaccine, the recipient's health condition, and individual immune responses. Additionally, recent reports of counterfeit vaccines and improper manufacturing practices have raised further concerns, posing a threat to both public health and human lives. As a result, humanity continues to search for the most effective strategies to prevent infectious diseases.

Literature dealing with the theme of disease not only recounts humanity's tragedies but also suggests ways to prevent illness and strengthen both physical and mental resilience. No matter how advanced modern science becomes — discovering superior treatments, inventing sophisticated medical devices, or building state-of-the-art hospitals — one indispensable remedy remains: the *"vaccine"* of compassion toward all living beings and peaceful coexistence with the Earth. This metaphorical vaccine, beyond profit and material concerns, represents the most fundamental and enduring form of healing.

Thuong Ha's *Nalis Drifted to the Shore of Destiny* powerfully illustrates this reality. Pharmaceutical corporations exploit disease for profit, producing counterfeit vaccines and thereby accelerating humanity's descent into death, both more swiftly and more painfully.

> More than a year has passed, and despite the rising death toll, despite the social upheaval, despite the economic paralysis, there are still those who act out of selfish motives. Alongside the scientists and compassionate individuals who dedicate themselves selflessly out of love for humanity, there remain people unable to relinquish their greed and desire. Even now, as the pandemic remains uncontrolled, these same people — powerful capitalist conglomerates — exploit the crisis to manipulate vaccine prices or even sell counterfeit doses. Witnessing such a society makes the virus realize that the devastation caused by this pandemic has still not been enough to awaken humankind. (Thuong Ha, 2021, 281)

In the pursuit of a vaccine to combat the epidemic, and when confronted with the Nalis bacterium alongside the profound disappointment over humanity's cruelty in producing counterfeit vaccines to harm others, the writer Thuong Ha discerned that the

most effective "vaccine" is, in fact, peaceful coexistence with nature.

> If humans do not change their habits and fail to respect the laws of nature, and remain noisy in their consciousness, then the Earth will not stop warming, natural disasters and floods will persist, and even existing viruses will vanish only in peace with humanity. (Thuong Ha, 2021, 378).

To make the world a better place, humans must transform their behaviors and attitudes toward the natural world. In particular, eliminating the notion of *human centrality* along with ambitions of dominance and authoritarian control is an effort that many writers seek to promote. Indeed, as Thuong Ha asserts:

> What is truly terrifying in this world is not Nalis, nor disease, nor natural disasters. The most frightening force is human greed. It is this greed that acts as a bitter potion, which, once ingested by humanity, leads to its destruction. It manifests as the insatiable desire for global domination. Heaven or hell, hungry ghosts or beasts, all lie hidden within the decay of the human soul. An unbounded demonic mentality reigns over a blue planet that cries out more with each passing day. Spare us. If one day this world disappears and humans perish en masse, it will not be due to disease, nor to Nalis. It will be entirely the result of human selfishness. (Thuong Ha, 2021, 174)

Thus, in the endeavor to rescue humanity from the brink of "extinction," it becomes evident that the most effective vaccine is not developed or manufactured in modern laboratories or industrial plants. Rather, it is the vaccine of compassion, cultivated within the human heart. Thuong Ha further reflects retrospectively on microorganisms that existed long before *Homo sapiens*, noting that over time, humans have developed, using their hands and intellect, to reshape and intervene in the natural world.

> When humans engage in rampant deforestation, tree felling, and indiscriminate hunting of wildlife, ecological landscapes undergo a gradual transformation. Some species consequently face extinction—not due to natural selection, but as a result of human-imposed selection. (Thuong Ha, 2021, 151).

In the novel, the emergence of Nalis serves as a warning and admonition to humanity. Repeatedly, the relatives and variants of the Nalis virus appear within human society, delivering cautions and urging humans to live in harmony, yet humanity persistently ignores these warnings, arrogantly dismissing the natural world. The wrath of Mother Nature, expressed through pandemics, constitutes a severe and consequential form of retribution that humans inevitably endure.

Epidemics can be understood as a form of natural selection, a storm that sweeps away organisms deemed genetically weak and incapable of adaptation. Simultaneously,

disease resembles the “offspring” within each individual, persisting indefinitely and constantly propelling humans into a precarious oscillation between life and death. Combating it requires a cooperative interplay between humanity and nature. As Camus observed: “The plague bacillus never dies and never entirely disappears. It can remain dormant for decades in objects, clothing; it patiently waits in rooms, in cellars, in coffins, in shawls, and in heaps of paper… and one day, to bring calamity to humans and teach them a lesson, the plague may awaken its rats and drive them to die in a city living in happiness and prosperity” (Camus, 2002, 319). Thuong Ha asserts similarly: “This pandemic will not end if humans remain blinded by their own greedy and selfish desires” (Thuong Ha, 2021, 281). The prioritization of personal gain and materialism has led to pragmatic yet environmentally destructive actions, fostering conditions that are conducive to the emergence and proliferation of pathogens.

Accordingly, in literary narratives, the symbiotic relationships among nature, microorganisms, animals, and human immunity are often presented as an effective therapeutic model. For example, Do Phan’s novel *Flies are Flies* recognizes animals as an essential component of the immune ecosystem, serving as “biological partners” that accompany humans in adapting to disease and cultivating a lifestyle in harmony with nature. Flies, often regarded as trivial creatures, acquire significant meaning in scientific contexts; their larvae—maggots—harbor beneficial bacteria used in the production of probiotics and enzymatic compounds.

> The demand for maggots from the United States and even neighboring Asian countries is substantial. They are used for a wide range of purposes, from raising poultry, livestock, turtles, eels, and frogs to keeping ornamental birds and recreational fishing. Andrew noted that maggots can also serve medicinal purposes. Larval therapy has existed since the sixteenth century. Physicians Baron Larrey and Joseph Jones, serving under Emperor Napoléon Bonaparte, employed live maggots to treat necrotic wounds in soldiers. They discovered that the maggots consumed only the necrotic tissue, leaving healthy cells unharmed. Today, even in neighboring Thailand, doctors use larval therapy to treat colitis, with patients ingesting two doses of five hundred maggots each. Documented successes have been reported. (Do Phan, 2014, 243)

Within this progressive framework of thought, the work extends the concept of “disease prevention” beyond the confines of conventional medicine. Rather than relying solely on pharmaceuticals and vaccines, the author proposes an ecological approach to prevention: restoring habitats, protecting biodiversity, minimizing disruptive interventions in natural cycles, and learning to coexist with other species as companions rather than adversaries. This represents a form of “peace vaccine”—a vaccine of understanding, care, and reconciliation that cannot be synthesized in a laboratory.

> Today, with the latest research in biodiversity, we are compelled to reconsider our perceptions of this small, bothersome, and often disliked

> creature. It is an integral part of life on our blue planet. The risks it poses do not necessarily outweigh the benefits it provides. This message calls for awareness in fostering a balanced Earth. All plants and living beings on this planet must be respected. (Do Phan, 2014, 306)

One of the humanistic aims of ecological criticism is to create a "negotiation between humans and the nonhuman world" (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996, xix). At a deeper textual level, Do Phan's *Flies are Flies* establishes a frank, democratic, and mutually supportive dialogue between humans and animals. Accordingly, the immunological message conveyed by the author emphasizes empathy and the shared responsibility of maintaining ecological balance with the nonhuman world.

The animal world also plays a crucial role in stabilizing ecosystems, mitigating environmental harm, and thereby generating clean air conducive to human health. The essay *There Was Someone Who Left the City* by Nguyen Quang Thieu examined the pathologies of modern humans. He recognized that animals and plants play a crucial role in controlling pathogens and sustaining the life cycles of many organisms.

> If that nature, if that clean and harmonious environment, did not exist, disease would afflict them. Among these, there is an illness that is not fatal to the body but can destroy the human spirit: the disease of depression and apathy. According to psychophysiological researchers, children raised in a pure and balanced natural environment commit crimes at rates several dozen times lower than those living in a world where nature is degraded or disconnected from them. Many medical centers worldwide have employed nature to treat depression, autism, and apathy in both children and adults. (Nguyen Quang Thieu, 2012, 106)

Through this, Nguyen Quang Thieu implicitly asserts that immunity is not merely the body's ability to resist viruses but also the strength of a diverse, stable ecosystem in which humans do not stand outside or above nature but are an integral part of it.

It is undeniable that if humans fail to live in harmony with nature and instead adopt an attitude of domination, confrontation, and destruction, they inevitably bear the consequences for their health and survival. In the novel *Forest of Humans*, Do Phan depicts an environment disrupted by bestial desires, placing both nature and humanity in peril. This is particularly evident in the fate of animals believed to have medicinal properties, such as bears. Rumors circulated that bear bile "cures all diseases," prompting humans to invade forests and hunt bears for their bile. Even when supply fell short of demand, people sought every means to satisfy their insatiable ambitions. On the outskirts of cities, bear bile production facilities proliferated. Bears were confined in cages, enduring miserable deaths. Such acts reflected a blatant disregard for animal life, underpinned by a utilitarian and apathetic mentality: "even if it does not cure any disease, at least it is not harmful." Consequently, the fate of bears approached extinction, disrupting ecological balance. Moreover, keeping bears in residential areas

posed risks of zoonotic diseases, potentially spreading to human communities. In pursuit of profit, humans might poison one another without remorse, adulterate substances, mix chemicals, and add preservatives to maximize revenue, disregarding that one day they themselves might suffer the consequences. Within the cycle of consumerism, humans are simultaneously the cause, the victim, and the patient of the crises arising from the hunting and killing of endangered animals.

Every species possesses a life of its own and deserves respect for that life. Humans bear the duty and responsibility to protect all living beings and to respect the non-human world as an integral member of the natural ecological system. The lives of flies in *Flies are Flies* and bears in *Forest of Humans* serve as evidence of a natural world endowed with voice, cognition, illness, and emotion akin to humans. Ecocritics have argued that "the perception of nature as mute and voiceless primarily reflects our own refusal to listen rather than the communicative capacity of nature itself" (Kate, 2002, 151–178).

Drawing on his experience as a journalist-turned-novelist, Truong Van Dan presents a reflective and profound examination of human responses to treating illness amid environmental degradation. In the novel *Little Hands in the Rain*, the author not only condemns acts of environmental and resource destruction but also poses a philosophical and humanitarian question: do modern humans still have the opportunity to reconcile with nature? This inquiry serves as a key to achieving a peaceful and healthy life in the future. Through logical arguments and a synthesis of Eastern and Western knowledge spanning classical to contemporary thought, Uncle Thuan's guidance in the novel *Little Hands in the Rain* not only enlightens cancer patients like Gam but also encourages readers to develop a profound awareness of humanity's actions toward the natural world.

> The rivers are not dying by chance; they are being killed by humans. Dams are constructed, disrupting ecosystems. Headwater forests are being clear-cut, while toxic industrial waste continues to flow into rivers and onto the land. Sharing the same fate are the seas, the air, and the very habitats of humans themselves. "You see, for many years we have no longer had the flood season, only destructive floods. The floods ravage the plains, destroy crops, and sweep away homes. The aftermath of floods brings the threat of drought. You also know that floods appear because natural forests no longer exist. (Truong Van Dan, 2011, 198–199)

Uncle Thuan's observation carries significant prognostic implications, suggesting that environmental destruction is not a random phenomenon but an inevitable consequence of consumerism and unchecked human expansion. The author skillfully employs enumeration and vivid imagery to emphasize the predicament: the environment is being devastated, natural disasters are intensifying, humans are afflicted with more illnesses, yet they are advised to live in a "clean and beautiful" environment—a bitterly ironic counsel.

In the essay collection *When the 21st-Century Covid-19 Pandemic Passed*, Tran Dac Phu emphasizes the causal relationship between environmental change, human lifestyle, and viral diseases, noting:

> There are organisms that exist only in forests, in their specific habitats. When we destroy forests or penetrate deep into them for exploitation, humans come into contact with these organisms, or the organisms are forced to migrate because their habitats are lost. Inevitably, this leads to interaction between humans and these organisms, transmitting viruses and bacteria to humans, thereby spreading diseases and disrupting civilized society. For example, chimpanzees in African forests transmitted HIV/AIDS, and civets transmitted SARS to humans… If they remained in their wild habitats, they would not transmit viruses to humans. (Suong Nguyet Minh, 2021, 205–206)

When nature is displaced and encroached upon, the lives of all species, including humans, are affected. Viral strains that originally did not belong to the human world now attach to human hosts, parasitize them, and generate novel diseases, challenging the fields of medicine and science. In the contemporary era of consumerism and industrialization, the discourse on animal rights continues to resonate as a warning, an appeal, and a caution against an ecologically impoverished and stripped world, as well as against the emergence of pandemics unleashed by Mother Nature. Establishing ecological ethics thus requires humans to change their attitudes toward nature, protecting, caring for, and respecting all living beings.

Affirming that human destruction of nature has contributed to the global Covid-19 pandemic, Suong Nguyet Minh's memoir provides a compelling argument:

> Humans are arrogant: they move mountains, fill seas, pile stones to patch the sky, force water to flow backward, and control the rain. These phrases all reflect a desire to subjugate nature rather than live in harmony with it. I still believe that each individual exists independently, and on this suffering Earth, we must coexist in peace. Brutal attacks on nature provoke nature's uprising against humanity. Viruses are also a way that nature resists humans. (Suong Nguyet Minh, 2021, 204)

Thus, nature is both a crucial factor in the emergence and proliferation of disease and a means of healing and restoration for humans. Numerous studies confirm that immersing oneself in nature can help humans balance life pressures, relieve stress, rejuvenate the spirit, and enhance both physical and mental well-being.

From an ecocritical perspective, contemporary Vietnamese literature is gradually shifting its focus from "conquering disease" to "living in harmony with life." Animals are portrayed not merely as victims or vectors of disease but also as "teachers" guiding humans to slow down, recognize limits, and reestablish their relationship with the

planet. The most enduring form of immunity does not arise from injections but from the restoration of a symbiotic connection between humans and nature, as emphasized in numerous literary works.

Conclusion

Today, the world has established animal welfare organizations and societies dedicated to preventing cruelty to animals, which continuously advocate for equality with non-human species. Contemporary Vietnamese literature, in its reflections on pandemics, has enriched the concept of "immunity" by offering a more comprehensive perspective: humans cannot overcome disease solely through confrontation or elimination, but through humility, sharing, and the restoration of harmonious relationships with nature. Through an interdisciplinary and comparative approach, this paper demonstrates that representations of animals in pandemic narratives exhibit diverse perspectives: animals are depicted as sources and vectors of disease; sometimes as innocent beings subjected to brutal treatment; and at other times as playing a positive role in human immunity and health improvement. Thus, animals—transitioning from scapegoats to symbols of ecological balance—serve as a reminder that "health" is not merely a state of the human body but a reflection of the harmony of the entire shared ecosystem in which we coexist. Literary works on the theme of disease consistently reflect a convergent effort to trace origins and causative factors. Numerous elements are implicated in the emergence and transmission of illnesses, among which researchers pay particular attention to the interactions between animals and humans during pandemics, highlighting the close interconnection of these factors. Through pandemic narratives, many authors implicitly assert that immunity is not solely the body's capacity to resist viruses but also the strength of a diverse and stable ecosystem in which humans are neither external to nor above, but integrally part of. Moreover, only literary texts that represent pandemics can truly engage with the suffering and losses endured by humans and animals on Earth. Consequently, the study of literature related to pandemics has become both essential and requires an ecologically informed humanistic understanding.

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Animal Voices: The Exploitation and Representation of Turtle Doves in *Kooong* (1975) by Iwan Simatupang

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Abstract

Animal studies as part of an ecocritical approach not only show the exploitation of animals, but also strive for a more active role for animals. Iwan Simatupang's novel *Kooong* (1975) presents the role of a turtledove actively responding to the situation in the story. In addition to showing a narrative of exploitation, the novel shows the trauma of the animal that prevents the turtledove from escaping exploitation. The novel also uses animal forms to depict human actions towards animals. This study uses an ecocritical perspective to broaden the reading of Iwan Simatupang's work, which is synonymous with an existentialist approach. To examine the exploitation and relationship of the turtledove and other characters in the story, this study will use Greimas's (1966) narratological analysis. This study also uses Bleakley's (2000) theory of animal form to examine the representation of the turtledove. By focusing on animals as part of nature, this study shows that animals position themselves not as objects, but as subjects.

Keywords: animal studies; animal exploitation; trauma; ecocriticism; *Kooong*

Introduction

Animals are a vital part of the environmental ecosystem. Animal exploitation not only threatens them but also the ecosystem as a whole. Exploitation and other forms of violence against animals are a particular challenge in Indonesia. Data from the Asia for Animals Coalition for the 2020-2021 period shows that Indonesia ranks first in terms of animal abuse content on social media, with 1,626 posts. This figure is significantly higher than the United States, which ranks second with 296 posts.

Another source, World Animal Protection, publishes the Animal Protection Index to assess countries' success in protecting animals. In the index, Indonesia received an E score, indicating that much remains to be done to recognize animal emotions and feelings, implement animal protection laws, and demonstrate the government's

commitment to global animal welfare standards from the OIE (Asmariah, Permana, and Semendawai, 2023).

Animal exploitation often focuses on endangered and wild animals. Domestic animals, pets, and animals far from extinction are often overlooked in this narrative. Yet, numerous cases of animal exploitation and violence occur all around us. Paying attention to domestic or pet animals is crucial. The World Society for the Protection of Animals conducted a survey in Indonesia in 2011, and the results showed that the pet population in Indonesia has increased.

Literary works often present animals as both symbols and reflections of the realities of life. Garrard (2004) stated that studies of the relationship between animals and humans in the humanities are divided between philosophical considerations of animal rights and cultural analysis of animal representation. However, exploitation narratives in literary works, particularly in Indonesia, often focus on endangered and wild animals. For example, the short stories "Macan" by Seno Gumira Ajidarma and "Harimau Belang" by Guntur Alam. Both highlight the issue of exploitation of tigers and leopards, which are protected and sacred wildlife.

One literary work that addresses the issue of exploitation of domestic animals is *Kooong* by Iwan Simatupang. The novel explores the relationship between humans and animals, where animals play a role that influences the lives of the characters. The exploitation narrative emerges for the character of the Turtledove due to myth and economic motives.

Despite the narrative of exploitation, the novel *Kooong* is often read through the existentialist approach of its characters. Mahayana (1993) found the concept of "Superior Man" in the main character, Sastro. Although discussing existentialist narratives, the relationship between humans and the environment still appears in the discussion. Hondro (2017) examined the character of Burung Perkutut, but his discussion still focused on existentialism. Based on these two studies, this study will focus on examining Burung Perkutut through an ecocritical approach to further demonstrate the forms of exploitation of the character.

Djupri (in Rampan, 1985) demonstrated a relationship between nature and the characters in Kooong, although he did not comprehensively discuss the relationship between the two. In this study, modern culture transformed the characters' personalities into more consumerist ones, thus altering the relationship between humans and nature in the novel *Kooong*. Based on these findings, my research will focus more on the relationship between humans and nature as represented by Burung Perkutut.

Ecocritical research on Iwan Simatupang's work was previously conducted by Ied Veda Sitepu (2024). This article discusses one of Iwan Simatupang's poems, entitled "What Do the Stars Say in the Sea?" Based on this research, Iwan Simatupang's poem

demonstrates the unequal relationship between women and men in coastal areas, where women are victims of economic conditions. The beach in the poem symbolizes the relationship between humans and nature, between home and the outside world, or safety and uncertainty. Based on this research, this study alone will add to ecocritical research on Iwan Simatupang's work, particularly the prose genre that is Iwan Simatupang's authorial identity.

Ecocritical research, particularly examining the relationship between humans and animals, in Iwan Simatupang's work may be something new. However, in general, literary research examining the relationship between animals and humans is frequently conducted. Estok (2007) discusses the representation of animals in Shakespeare's works. This research shows that Shakespeare frequently uses animal metaphors to define humans. Animals serve not only as symbols but also as tools for criticizing meat consumption and the exploitation of living creatures. Estok emphasizes that an ecocritical approach must be more explicit in connecting animal exploitation and the broader environment. However, Estok has not used a clear concept in examining the relationship between humans and nature. Sukmawan (2016) employed a clear ecocritical concept when examining animal representations in oral traditions. The concept used was Bleakley's three animal forms. In this study, this concept will be applied to modern literature.

Based on these two studies, this research attempts to fill a gap in the study of animals and humans in literary works by examining the exploitation of unprotected animals. The research will also examine how physical animals are transformed and represented into psychological and symbolic animals in these works.

Methodology

This research will employ textual analysis using the descriptive analytical method. Descriptive and analytical methods can be combined as long as they are not contradictory. The descriptive analytical method is carried out by describing facts, followed by analysis (Ratna, 2013). In this research, facts related to exploitation and representation will be presented in both descriptive and citation form, and then analyzed using ecocritical concepts.

The novel *Kooong* tells the story of the search for the meaning of freedom. Nearly every character in the story engages in this activity, triggered by the loss of the turtledove belonging to the main character, Sastro. The novel uses a fragmentary concept, so each character shares the same goal.

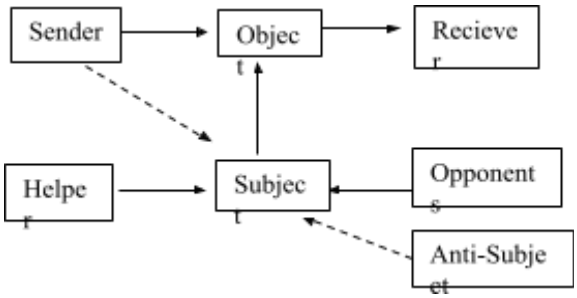
This research will focus only on events that intersect with the turtledove. The characters who interact intensely with the turtledove in the novel, along with their roles, are:

- **Turtledove**: acts as the driving force of the story. Turtledove also has a goal of

seeking freedom. This goal stems from her life experiences, including witnessing events, including exploitation.

- **Sastro**: The main character and owner of Turtledove for 10 years. Sastro saves Turtledove from exploitation by bird sellers and keepers who over-raise Turtledoves. Through his relationship with Sastro, Turtledove tries to find the meaning of freedom.
- **Bird Seller**: captures Turtledove. The bird seller treats Turtledove cruelly.
- **Turtledove Keepers**: These are people who overestimate and treat turtledoves. This results in the birds being captured. Turtledoves also develop a conscious awareness of silence due to the excessive treatment from their keepers.

This research does not delve beyond this character due to the novel's fragmentary format and minimal allusion to the Turtledove character. Three events related to Turtledove will be analyzed using the actant scheme developed by A.J. Greimas to examine the narrative development in the novel *Kooong*. The use of Greimas's narratology takes into account the research objective of examining the narrative of exploitation within the story. Ratna (2013: 138) states that Greimas prioritizes action over the actor. Research that focuses on animals also aligns with this theory. According to Rimon-Kenan (1983: 34-35), an actant is an action, but it does not always have to be human; it can also involve non-humans. The actant scheme is a diagram that connects Subject/Object, Sender/Receiver, and Helper/Obstacle. In certain works, there is also an antisubject that acts as a consistent obstacle for the subject.



This research will utilize Bleakley's (2000) concept of animal form. This concept categorizes animals into three forms: biological animals, conceptual animals, and psychological animals. Biological animals are animals that are "considered ordinary," treated literally or essentialistically. Conceptual animals are described as signs in language or symbols within a system or code. Conceptual animals are often termed figuratively, such as metaphors ('a terrible situation'), similes ('cunning as a fox'), or allegories ('The Wind in the Willows', 'Brer Rabbit', 'Animal Farm'). They are used semiotically, such as in the naming of sports teams ('Toronto Blue Jays', 'Chicago Bears') or cars ('Jaguar', 'Beetle'), or symbolically (the bear represents power; the peacock, arrogance). Psychological animals exist in the realm of the mind. Psychological animals are neither 'real' in the biological sense, nor 'abstract' in the cognitive sense, but participate in both the physical and nonphysical worlds. Animals emerge in the psychological realm—or the habitat of the soul or personal and cultural

imagination—as tangible and sensual images that cannot be reduced to the realm of ideas, but are also not literal or concrete.

Belakley's theory is important because of the transformation of the role of turtle doves. Belakley also emphasizes that hunting for the pet trade is one of the factors causing animal extinction. This process also appears in the novel *Kooong* by Iwan Simatupang.

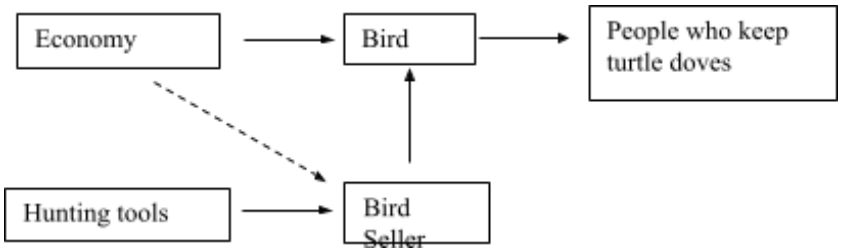
Results and Discussion

1. Exploitation Narrative

a. Exploitation Triggers Trauma

The exploitation of the Turtle Dove in the novel doesn't just have a direct physical impact. Human actions against it traumatize the Turtle Dove. This trauma makes it difficult for the Turtle Dove to accept human presence. As living creatures, animals can process this. Keraf (2014) states that both humans and animals possess cognitive and emotional abilities. Both animals and humans experience the process of awareness, recognition, knowing, and feeling through their cognitive abilities, albeit to varying degrees.

In *Kooong*, the act of exploitation begins when the Turtle Dove is captured by the hunter. This is explained in the following actant scheme.



The narrative depicts the capture or hunting of turtle doves as a result of economic reasons. Turtle doves are highly prized, one reason being their vocalizations, or "kooong" in the novel. The narrative explains that turtle doves are caught after they eat bait from bird sellers. The beneficiaries of this activity are the people who keep the birds, as the purpose of the capture is to sell them.

The result of this incident is the arbitrary actions of the turtle dove seller. From the perspective of the Turtle Dove character, it appears that the turtle dove seller acts without any remorse. On the other hand, the turtle dove's cynical view of other turtle doves who still want to sing after being subjected to such treatment is evident.

> "Life in the market isn't as easy as it was with that widower, who's a occultist. Sometimes his new master forgets everything. Understandably, he has many other birds for sale. He sells a variety

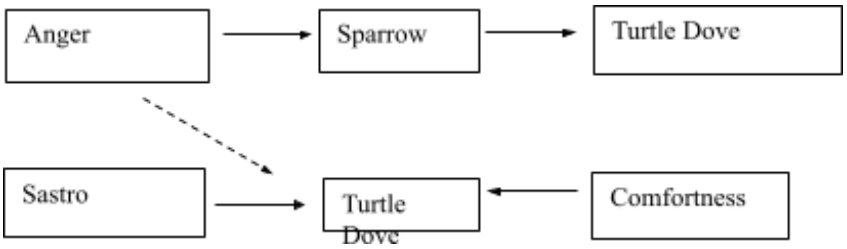
> of things. He's not the only turtle dove. There are dozens of them. Is it his fault that he forgot to pay attention to his empty food trough?"
>
> (Simatupang, 2013, p. 84)

This quote not only shows the Bird Seller's disregard for the turtledove, but also highlights the Turtledove's perspective, questioning the actions of the Bird Seller. Exploitation is synonymous with excessive worship. This is also present in the novel. This situation traumatizes the turtledove. One example is the excessive worship of turtledove keepers, particularly those with loud voices. This traumatizes the Turtledove, who was not blessed with a loud voice.

Freud (2019) states that trauma can lead a person to a dead end, losing interest in the present and future and becoming completely absorbed in their past. In the novel, *Kooong*, exploitation becomes a past experience that locks the Turtledove's thoughts. The trauma the Turtledove experiences due to the treatment of a handful of people makes her assume that others will do the same. This view is also expressed when the character Sastro buys her. However, the trauma slowly disappeared when the Turtle Dove learned about Sastro's kindness.

b. Exploitation Triggers Trauma

In this narrative, two actant schemes describe related events. These two actant schemes demonstrate the development of the characters' perspectives on animal husbandry. Although related, the elements in these actant schemes differ.



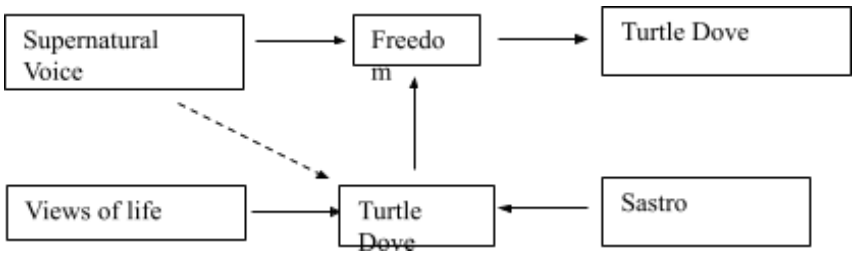
The turtledove's quest for freedom begins when Sastro forgets to close the cage door one day. At that moment, the turtledove doesn't consider leaving the cage due to the comfort it has received from Sastro for 10 years. However, the turtledove still leaves the cage, angry after hearing the Sparrow's harsh words about it.

The obstacle in this actant scheme isn't just the comfort the turtledove receives from Sastro. The trauma of the events leading up to meeting Sastro dampens its desire to leave the cage.

> "But what's the point of this freedom if a bird trapper will soon appear and catch it and put it in a cage that might be even worse than Mr. Sastro's!"

(Simatupang, 2013, p. 78).

These two factors cause the turtledove to initially only leave the cage briefly. However, the turtledove eventually flies away. This is due to a vision outside the cage and a sudden, supernatural voice the turtledove hears. In this incident, the Turtle Dove character is absolutely certain that he wants to leave Sastro temporarily to enjoy his freedom. This incident is built up in the following actant scheme.



Although Sastro acts as a barrier in the incident, no direct action is taken. The barrier is more about the comfort and concern of the Turtle Dove character towards Sastro. Nevertheless, the Turtle Dove character continues to fly for a while, proving its will as a free subject, no longer an object merely used by humans.

In addition to the Actant Scheme, Greimas also developed a Functional Model to illustrate the narrative's structure. The functional model is divided into three parts: (1) the initial situation, (2) the transformation, and (3) the final situation. In the Functional Model, there is a meeting between each actant. The functional model also shows the transformation from the initial situation to the final situation. This condition also occurs in the Turtle Dove character.

Initial Situation	**Transformation**			**Final Situation**
Turtle doves are exploited by humans	**Proficiency Test Stage**	**Main Test Phase**	**The Stage of Glory**	Turtledoves seek the meaning of freedom
	Turtledoves experience exploitation, from hunting to abusive treatment. Turtledoves witness practices of excessive worship, which makes	The turtledove received different caretakers, both of whom were wealthy. The turtledove's doubts about	The comfort of being a pet makes the Turtle Dove hesitate to seek freedom.	

	them feel inferior to other turtledoves.	the first wealthy man caused it to run away. The second wealthy man, Sastro, was also doubted by the turtledove. But later, the turtledove accepted Sastro as its owner.		

Based on the actant scheme and functional model, it is clear how the Turtle Dove in the story is not only an object but also has the capacity as a subject. The actant scheme also shows the existence of human actions that motivate the Turtle Dove to act. In the actant scheme, there are no obstacles to the practice of hunting, indicating that hunting Turtle Doves is something normal. However, if we look at the perspective of the Turtle Dove character, we find a narrative that the event triggered trauma for the Turtle Dove character.

2. The Form of a Turtle Dove

In the novel Kooong, the turtledove is a common turtledove. Besides its inability to make sounds, it exhibits no other distinctive characteristics. The turtledove's thoughts and perspectives are conveyed either directly or indirectly by the narrator. However, the role and treatment of the human characters toward the turtledove make it more than just an ordinary animal.

Bleakley (2000) proposed the concept of animal representation or embodiment into three forms: biological animal, conceptual animal, and psychological animal. Biological animals are those considered "ordinary," treated literally or essentialistically. All actions of the characters in the novel *Kooong* toward the turtledove, such as feeding, bathing, and sunning the turtledove, represent ordinary treatment of the turtledove as a biological animal.

In the novel, the turtledove also experiences unusual actions, such as worshipping a particular turtledove with high economic value. The turtledove serves as a symbol that distinguishes its owner's status from that of other inhabitants. Birds as symbols in

Bleakley's work are known as conceptual animals.

Bleakley explains that conceptual animals are often used figuratively, such as metaphors ('a terrible situation'), similes ('cunning as a fox'), or allegories ('Wind in the Willows', 'Brer Rabbit', 'Animal Farm'). They are used semiotically, such as in the naming of sports teams ('Toronto Blue Jays', 'Chicago Bears') or cars ('Jaguar', 'Beetle'), and symbolically (bears represent strength; peacocks, arrogance). In *Kooong*, turtle doves are used as a symbol to indicate one's well-being due to the established myth that turtle doves can bring good fortune. The turtle dove's symbolic appearance also triggers the exploitation or hunting of turtle doves.

> "…Just because I happened to have a normal turtle dove. One that wouldn't kooong anymore, I was then rumored throughout the country as a madman. Out of my mind. Someone to be avoided."
>
> (Simatupang, 35-56).

This quote demonstrates the turtle dove's symbolic role in society. The character, Sastro, who is prosperous and kind to others, is subjected to negative views simply because he keeps a turtle dove that can't sing. The turtle dove as a symbol not only harms the turtle dove itself but also impacts humans.

The turtle dove in the novel *Kooong* also has the form of a psychological animal. Bleakley argues that psychological animals are not 'real' in the biological sense, or 'abstract' in the cognitive sense, but participate in both the physical and nonphysical worlds. Animals appear in the psychological realm—or the habitat of the soul or personal and cultural imagination—as tangible and sensual images that cannot be reduced to the realm of ideas, but are also not literal or concrete. This concept suggests that the turtledove is something humans believe serves a specific purpose. In the context of the novel *Kooong*, the turtledove becomes an animal that fills the loneliness of the human character.

> "...again, the turtledove gives him direction. In this state of being "lost" and "searched," it has managed to perch more intimately in Mr. Sastro's heart and become a guide for his next steps."
>
> (Simatupang, 2013, p. 38).

This quote demonstrates Sastro's relationship with the turtledove as more than just a pet. For 10 years, the turtledove has filled Sastro's life, and when it escapes, his life is disrupted. An encounter between Sastro and the shopkeeper who keeps a turtledove named Gatut Lemu awakens Sastro to accept the loss and move on. This encounter also demonstrates an attitude in harmony with nature, as the shopkeeper cares for Gatut Lemu appropriately and not excessively.

> "...What's clear is that Gatut Lemu is truly a good friend. His

> presence beside me is a perfect match. As for his ordinary little friend, we don't pay excessive attention to him. In accepting each other's presence as they are, and without expecting anything in return, we feel we can live in harmony."
>
> (Simatupang, 2013, p. 36).

Based on the analysis above, the character of the Turtle Dove plays a significant role in the story. Iwan Simatupang, as the author, not only assigns positions and roles to non-human creatures relative to humans, but also shows that the narrative of animal exploitation influences the character's perspective on the Turtle Dove. Trisman (2007) further emphasizes that the novel's research focuses too much on human life issues. Toda (1984) even calls the Turtle Dove an antagonist. Both of study paid little attention to the development of the Turtle Dove character, leading up to her abandonment of Sastro. The novel's fragmentary format, which reveals the facets of each character, including the Turtle Dove, demonstrates that Iwan Simatupang also gives non-human characters important roles and positions.

Toda also explained the characteristics of *Kooong* compared to Iwan Simatupang's other works. According to him, *Kooong* still focuses on human alienation, like other novels. It's simply simpler, adapting to the novel's theme of being written for a competition, specifically for teenagers. However, Toda neglected to highlight the role and position of animal characters, a distinction not found in Iwan Simatupang's previous novels.

Conclusion

A structural analysis of the novel *Kooong* (1975) reveals a narrative of animal exploitation. Economic motives and excessive treatment, such as the creation of myths and the classification of animals based on physical characteristics, fuel this exploitation. The analysis also reveals trauma experienced by the animal characters due to human exploitation. Although the animal characters manage to escape exploitation, this trauma becomes a barrier when the animals attempt to find freedom.

The use of animal form theory in the analysis reinforces the findings of the structural analysis. The position of animals in human relationships is not only present in physical form, but also in conceptual and psychological forms. The analysis also shows that for humans, understanding animals as psychological beings creates a more harmonious relationship between humans and animals.

The ecocritical approach to the novel *Kooong* (1975) in this study focuses on animals. However, this study opens up the potential for further research to further examine the relationship between humans and nature, both in the novel and in other works by Iwan Simatupang. The results of the analysis can also serve as a guideline for understanding the position and role of animals to avoid excessive exploitation that threatens the natural ecosystem.

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Climate Fiction and AI Translation: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of AI in translating climate fiction (Cli-Fi) literature, focusing on key challenges such as metaphorical language, cultural references, and specialized climate terminology. By analyzing the English narrative Woodland, the research examines how AI-assisted translation handles the nuanced linguistic and cultural features critical to disseminating Cli-Fi and raising awareness of climate change issues. This study employs an error analysis framework by the American Translator Association (ATA) error parameters to evaluate the accuracy and quality of AI-generated translations compared to human efforts. The results shows that there are 26 metaphors, 23 cultural words, and 10 climate terms found in the data, while the errors mostly found in the meaning transfer. The findings highlight both the potential and limitations of AI in literary translation, especially in terms of cultural specificity and metaphor interpretation. The findings offer practical insights for translators, AI developers, and climate communicators seeking to enhance AI's effectiveness in cross-cultural and environmental literary dissemination. This research provides the view that AI can assist translators in translating and analyzing. The study also opens up opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration between linguists, translators, literary practitioners, and AI observers to create more in-depth solutions to understand climate change through a multidisciplinary approach.

Keywords: ATA framework; climate fiction; climate change; AI; translation errors

Introduction

Climate fiction (Cli-Fi) is a work of fiction that contains stories about climate change, environmental crises, and their impact on society (Manjhi, 2022). Fiction about climate is starting to be widely discussed because this topic is considered important in inviting

people to care about climate change that occurs. Dědinová (2023) mentioned that the study of this field is indeed relatively new but very important in literary works as a concern for climate change and environmental crises in general. Dědinová (2023) supports Goodbody's (2019) statement that Cli-Fi is a phenomenon of literary works that emerged in response to climate change, such as floods, droughts, sea level rise, famine, the spread of disease, and other natural damage events. Literary authors also express their concerns about phenomenon of climate change through their written works. These written works are poems, short stories, or fictional novels. With the increasing number of literary works that discuss climate, these works must be translated if the author's message is to be conveyed more broadly. Therefore, translating these works is very important to reach a wider audience (Mathur, 2017).

Meanwhile, artificial intelligence (AI) is also used in writing stories about climate change. Blythe (2023) compared writing by AI with humans and stated that AI writing results look more rigid than human writing. However, AI results can be polished again by giving more critical and detailed prompts or commands. Related to this goal, the use of AI in the field of literary translation has experienced rapid development. This technology can translate text with better quality (Gao et al., 2024). However, a major challenge arises when AI is applied to literary works that are rich in cultural contexts, idioms, language style, and author intentions (Obeidat & Jaradat, 2024). Some researchers proved that models like GPT-4o can recognize emotional patterns and writing styles in text but still struggle to capture and retain deep meaning within them. In addition to language and creativity challenges, the use of AI in literary translation raises various ethical issues. AI is trained with large datasets, but it is often biased and poorly reflects cultural diversity (Tomalin et al., 2021). AI risks highlighting certain cultural stereotypes and reducing variation in its translation results. Thus, human involvement is still needed to ensure equivalence in translation and address emerging ethical issues (Taivalkoski-Shilov, 2019).

This challenge is increasingly evident in the translation of climate fiction (CLI-FI), which not only relies on strong narratives but also conveys the profound cultural and emotional impact of environmental issues (Elkins, 2024). The AI technology used to write climate change stories still faces limitations. Blythe (2023) revealed that AI-generated stories tend to be more rigid and less expressive because of their limitations in capturing the nuances of language and the complexity of emotions that are generally found in literary works. However, he also stated that providing more critical and detailed prompts can enhance AI results. Meanwhile, Querubin and Niederer (2024) added that AI cannot only help in the writing process but also play a role as a co-author in the creation of climate-themed stories. They explained that AI can be "trained" using existing climate fiction novels to construct new, more structured stories and create illustrations that are relevant to environmental issues. On the other hand, related to cli-fi, the use of AI can expand its reach to multiple languages, thereby increasing global awareness of environmental issues. The collaboration between AI efficiency and human translator intervention offers a solution that can strike a balance

between translation efficiency and quality. Therefore, while AI has shown potential in translating climate literature, the challenge of preserving cultural meaning and nuances remains an aspect that needs attention (Mohamed et al., 2024).

Based on the above explanation, this study aims to explore how AI translates Cli-Fi metaphors, cultural words, and technical terms or terminology and evaluate whether AI can convey the same message from the source text to the target text. Therefore, this study aims to:

1. Explore the ability of AI to translate metaphors, cultural words, and technical terms or terminology found in Cli-Fi;
2. Evaluate the AI-translated messages in the Cli-Fi;
3. Analyze the contribution of AI-assisted translation to the dissemination of Cli-Fi and awareness of climate change issues.

Literature Review

a. Characteristics of the Climate Fiction

Climate fiction usually includes environmental crises, ethical dilemmas, and images of a future full of gloom, misery, oppression, and deteriorating social conditions (Manjhi, 2022). For example, Kim Stanley Robinson's novel *The Ministry for the Future* in 2020 imagines a global organization working to mitigate the effects of climate change. Another example is *Possible Solutions*, written by Hellen Phillips and published in 2017 as a collection of short stories dealing with climate change.

Climate fiction is a subgenre of speculative fiction that focuses on environmental change and its impacts. This speculative fiction allows explorations that depict future situations based on scientific scenarios or imagination about the future related to climate change (Nierste, 2024). In addition, in climate fiction or Cli-Fi, the author uses world-building to create a setting that convinces readers about future conditions affected by climate change. For example, how the world is changing because of global warming, environmental destruction, or natural disasters.

Holdsworth and Wilson (2024) explained that the use of speculative fiction and world building in Cli-Fi can serve as an early warning or solution to the environmental damage that occurs. Detailed world building will make readers feel and connect emotionally about climate change issues so that they can more easily understand the implications of climate change and environmental damage. An example of speculative fiction and world building is available in the novel *New York 2140* by Kim Stanley Robinson in 2017. This novel tells the story of New York City, which is flooded and the sea water rises to a height of 5 m.

With the development of this genre of fiction, translation is crucial to reach a wider audience. With a wider readership, it is hoped that more people will become aware of climate change and its impacts so that they can prevent or reduce its adverse effects.

However, translating a genre that combines fiction, scientific, and social elements is not easy. Several challenges are faced by translators in translating Cli-Fi.

This study has some similarities with previous studies, especially in terms of translation and issues related to climate conditions. Khafiza (2024) addressed the challenges in translating language terms and styles in science fiction, especially in the context of climate fiction. Meanwhile, Hanishaffira and Krisbiantoro (2023) analyzed the translation of texts on climate change from the NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council) website, focusing on nonfiction texts, which differs from this study, which focuses on fictional texts. Querubin and Niederer's (2024) research were also relevant because it examines how AI is used to create and translate climate change-themed stories. Nonetheless, they emphasize the role of AI as a co-author, while the study focuses on the assessment of AI translation in translating climate fiction.

However, this study offers something that has not been discussed much in previous studies. Unlike Khafiza (2024), who focuses on science fiction translation in general, this study is more specific in assessing how AI translates Cli-Fi metaphors, cultures, and terminology. In addition, the use of the ATA parameters as the scoring standards provide a more objective approach to assessing the quality of AI translations. This aspect demonstrates the novelty of this research that has not been applied in previous research. Furthermore, this study not only discusses the quality of AI translations but also examines how AI-assisted translation results can help the public disseminate and understand climate change issues. Thus, this study complements previous studies by delving deeper into AI's role in the translation of climate fiction and its impact on environmental literacy.

b. Challenges in the Translation of Climate Fiction

In general, translators face two major challenges in translating Cli-Fi (Jinfang et al., 2025). First, cultural challenges. Many Cli-Fi novels refer to cultural and local references, such as specific climate events in a region. In addition, several local terms related to the environment, agricultural practices, and natural mythology are difficult to translate while maintaining the same meaning. Another problem of cultural barriers is related to the way of storytelling in a culture and ethical values related to nature. For example, when there are characters in the novel who relate to spiritual relationships with certain environments or communities.

The second challenge in Cli-Fi translation is linguistic issues, such as terminology and metaphor and symbolism use. Some terms related to climate change, such as carbon footprint, biodiversity, greenhouse gas, ecofriendly, and ocean acidification, may not have an Indonesian equivalent. Examples related to the use of metaphors and symbolism in Cli-Fi, including weather-based metaphors such as *storm brewing*, may have different meanings in other languages and cultures.

In addition to the two translation challenges mentioned above, there is another

important aspect in Cli-Fi translation, namely, the importance of maintaining tone and message ((Mathur, 2017). Cli-Fi usually has a strong emotional tone that signifies hope to helplessness. Humor or satire is also a challenge in terms of tone. For example, the novel *The Ministry for the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson in 2020 uses satire. This novel tells the story of the humanitarian/environmental organization The Ministry for the Future, which acts as a legal service provider for future citizens so that their rights are the same as those of citizens today. Translations that maintain tone and message can help readers understand the dangers of environmental damage and climate change. If the translator fails to convey the tone and message, for example weakening the emotions conveyed by the author of the target text, then the intention of the author cannot be conveyed properly.

c. AI in the translation of literary works

The development of AI in translation is accelerating with the existence of some among the few such as ChatGPT 4o, DeepL, and Google Translate, which utilize natural language processing (NLP) technology. According to According to Amazon Web Series, NLP is "a machine learning technology that gives computers the ability to interpret, manipulate, and understand human language." This means that NLP technology can quickly and accurately analyze text and spoken data. Although AI can translate very quickly and is quite capable of maintaining the consistency of the translation of terms that often appear in Cli-Fi, it still has shortcomings in translating metaphors. Literary texts such as Cli-Fi have many metaphors and tones (Muscan, 2024). Therefore, translation by AI still requires a human translator.

In literary works, several things can be explored, one of which is metaphor. Metaphor is "a thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else, especially something abstract" (Oxford, 2025). The American Heritage Dictionary adds that metaphor is "A figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison, as in "a sea of troubles" or "All the world's a stage" (Shakespeare)." Therefore, metaphors can be considered as figurative language as they use words or phrases in a figurative sense, not the actual meaning. This metaphor embellishes language, strengthens meaning, sparks emotions, and helps the imagination (Aprilia et al., 2022).

One example of a metaphor is as follows: *You are my sunshine*. In this example, a person is associated to the sun. The sun is bright and shines with its light on the earth. By comparing a person to sunlight, the person is bringing happiness to others. Another example is that *her home was a prison*. In this sentence, the house is associated to a prison. Therefore, this sentence means that he cannot leave his house and is trapped in it. Here, the word prison is a metaphor.

Literary works also contain many cultural words. According to Abdelaal (2019), the word culture or cultural reference word, is "Extralinguistic references to items that are

tied up with a country's culture, history, or geography, and tend therefore to pose serious translation challenges". In other words, culture is a word or phrase that has an attachment or peculiarity to a region, history, or geography. The word culture is interesting to discuss in the translation of literary works, especially by AI, in terms of whether or not AI succeeds in translating the source culture word into the target language.

The word culture is generally divided into three categories based on the geographical, ethnographic, and socio-political conditions of an area (Abdelaal, 2019). Some examples of such cultural words are savanna, tornado, plaza mayor, sequoia, gringo, machete, Thanksgiving, Romeo and Juliet, inches, pound, county, and sheriff. Translating these cultural words is challenging. The same is true of the word culture found in this text titled Woodland.

d. ATA Framework

In translation studies, the evaluation or analysis of translation errors is a field of study that is often used as an object of research. Many translation experts, such as House (2014), Maurits van der Veen (2023), Moorkens et al. (2024), and Mossop (2014), have developed theories about translation quality assessment. House (2014) stated that translation quality assessment is an effort to evaluate the quality of translations against the source text and review the functional equivalence between the source and target texts. Karoubi (2025) emphasized that a decision-making process that includes the collection, synthesis, and interpretation of translation data is involved in evaluating this translation. He added that in conducting a translation evaluation, one must really understand what is being evaluated, how, and why to evaluate. Therefore, a difference exists between the definition of translation quality assessment and translation error.

Translation quality assessment is a systematic process of evaluating translations to determine how well a translation meets established quality standards, such as accuracy, acceptableness, consistency, and suitability for the target reader. Meanwhile, according to Mossop (2014), as quoted by Wahyuningsih (2021), translation errors occur in understanding the meaning of the source language to the target language and inaccuracies in translation that follow the conventions of writing in the target language. Therefore, many translation practitioners develop models for analyzing these translation errors to evaluate translations. The ATA Framework is one of the commonly used parameters to measure translation errors.

The ATA Framework is a translation quality assessment framework issued and used by the ATA. In its assessment model, the ATA classifies translation errors into three main categories: meaning transfer, target language mechanics, and writing quality. Transfer has sub-categories, namely, addition, omission, faithfulness, ambiguity, literalness, cohesion, terminology, false friend, misunderstanding of source text, indecision, and unfinished. The penalty value for the transfer ranges from 1 to 16 points.

Then, for the second category, namely target language mechanics, there are seven subcategories, namely grammar, syntax, spelling/characters, diacritical marks/accent, and punctuation. The penalties for translation errors in categories range from 1 to 4. The third category, writing quality, which includes usage, text type, register, and style, has a penalty of 1–4 points.

Methodology

a. Research Methods

The research method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive research method. According to Creswell and Creswell (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), in qualitative research, researchers try to interpret the collected data. This approach is carried out by paying more attention to individual opinions, but it can also explain the complexity that exists.

b. Data sources and research instruments used

The data source is a short story text downloaded from https://www.guernicamag.com/woodland/ and consists of 3,148 words. This English-language Cli-Fi film is titled Woodland and was written by Lidya Millet.

This short story was chosen for the following reasons:

1. Relevance to the climate fiction genre (Cli-Fi): Woodland is explicitly part of climate fiction. This short story discusses environmental degradation, resource scarcity, and adaptation to ecological change. This makes this short story particularly relevant for analyzing linguistic aspects in the context of climate narratives.
2. Contains a wealth of language: Woodland uses specific terminology related to environmental issues and metaphors or symbolism to describe the impacts of climate change. With this wealth of language, sufficient material is available for linguistic analysis, especially translation challenges in climate-related concepts.
3. Accessibility and length of the text: This short story consists of 3,148 words; therefore, this text can be analyzed and rich in metaphors, cultural words, and terminology. The availability of this text on the Guernica Magazine website ensures easy access.
4. Author reputation: Lydia Millet is the author of twelve books of literary fiction, the most recent of which is a collection of stories titled *Fight No More*. She is best known for her contributions to the environmental literature. Her work often explores complex themes related to nature and its impact on human life and the environment. This adds credibility and depth to the selected text for analysis.

This short story depicts a post-destruction world where resources are scarce, civilizations have changed drastically, and wildlife has become a commodity for the elite. In conclusion, nature has lost its meaning as something accessible to everyone

and instead becomes an exclusive item, while the public struggles to survive in harsh conditions. The character manages to reach the place of his dreams, but in the end, he still faces the inevitable limitations, loss, and degradation of the environment. Data were selected based on cultural elements, narrative complexity, and metaphor.

c. Data Collection

1. The English source text in the form of a Cli-Fi short story titled *Woodland* is translated by AI, namely ChatGPT, into Indonesian by being given the prompt "You are a professional translator who often translates fictional texts. Translate this climate fiction text into Indonesian by paying attention to the target reader and text type. Remember that this is a fictional text with a climate fiction genre. The target reader is adjusted to the text's type and content. This text will be displayed on the website".
2. Sentences containing metaphors, culture, and terminology are selected and separated.
3. The selected sentences are translated by ChatGPT, one of the AIs.
4. Compare sentences that contain metaphors, cultures, and terminology in the source text with sentences that are translated by AI.

d. Data Analysis:

1. Categorize translation errors according to the error framework of the ATA by requesting an assessment from two raters.
2. Measure readers' understanding and engagement with climate fiction translated by AI through questionnaires.
3. Analyze the assessment given by two raters of AI translation.
4. Analyze the questionnaire filled out by the raters.
5. Interpret the data analyzed.

Results and Discussion

This section sheds light on how AI, specifically Chat GPT, translates metaphors, cultural words, and technical terms or terminology related to Cli-Fi and evaluates whether AI can convey the same message from the source text to the target text.

Results

The source text entitled Woodland contains 26 metaphors. This metaphor is translated by ChatGPT and rated based on two categories of errors according to the ATA Framework (American Association of Translators), namely, meaning transfer and target language mechanics or writing in the target text. At least 23 cultural words and 10 technical terms or climate-related terminology are found within the source text. The following are the assessment results by raters A and B for the overall data.

Table 1. Scoring by Raters A and B

Category	Number of segments	*Meaning Transfer*		*TL Mechanics*	
		Rater A	Rater B	Rater A	Rater B
Metaphor	26	34	45	0	5
Cultural Words	23	15	21	0	5
Climate Terms	10	24	12	0	1
Total	**59**	**73**	**78**	**0**	**11**

As shown in Table 2, for meaning transfer, the two raters assessed that there was a translation error in each metaphor, cultural word, and climate term in the source text. Although the assessments given by the two raters differ, the raters agree that ChatGPT is still imperfect and fails to translate metaphors, cultural words, and climate terms. Nonetheless, raters have different judgments about target language mechanics. Rater A does not award or subtract points for this category, whereas rater B does. The assessment given by rater B for this category is less than that for the meaning transfer category. This indicates that Chat GPT is quite neat in translating by following the conventions of writing in the target language.

In Figures 1 and 2, it appears that rater A does not assign points to the TLM translation error. However, rater B awards points to this category. An explanation of this will be explained in the Discussion section.

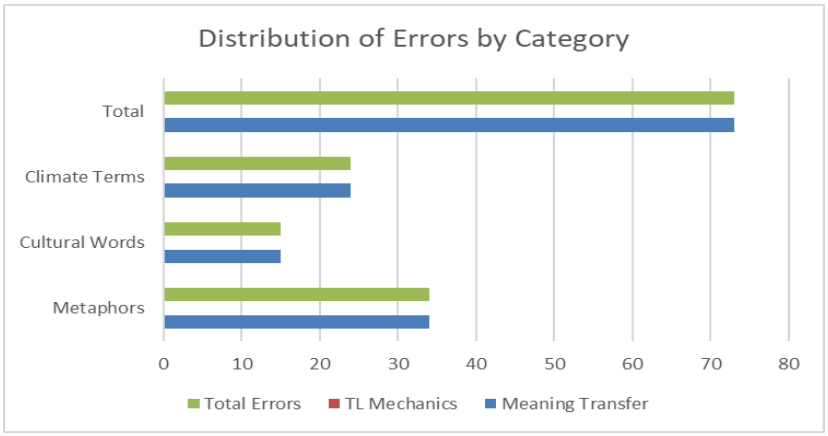

Figure 1. Distribution of Translation Errors according to Rater A

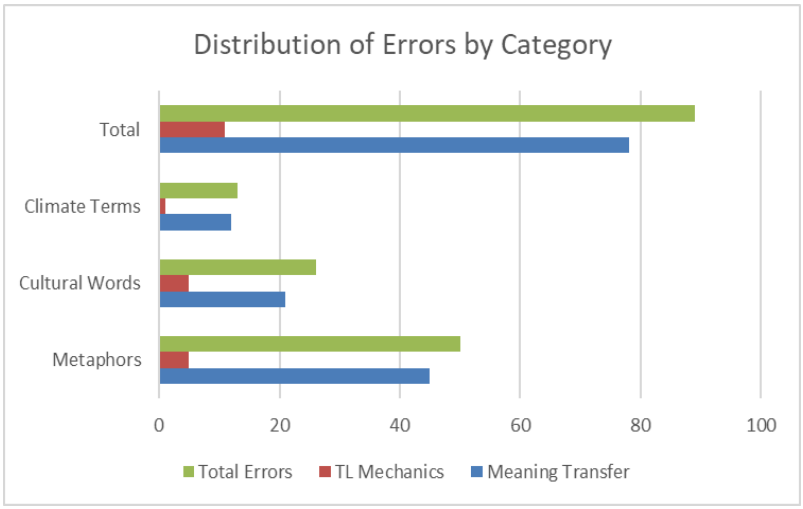

Figure 2. Distribution of Translation Errors according to Rater B

DISCUSSION

a. Metaphor translation errors

The results of the assessment of 26 items in the Climate Fiction and AI-Assisted Translation categories show that the process of transferring meaning, especially in translating metaphors related to climate issues, still has several problems. Based on the penalty scores given by both raters, many translations suffer from loss or distortion of meaning, especially when the metaphor is not contextually translated. Rater A gave a total penalty of 34 points, while Rater B gave a higher penalty of 45 points. This indicates that while AI, like Chat GPT, is capable of providing structurally correct translations, it still struggles to capture the depth of figurative or metaphorical meaning that is often inherent in climate fiction discourse.

Metaphors in climate fiction usually serve not only as a language style but also as a means to convey social criticism and the emotional impact of climate change. When AI-based machine translations literally translate these metaphors, their nuances and implicit messages are at risk of being lost or demeaning. Some items in the assessment received high penalty scores (e.g., items 5 and 12), indicating a significant failure to maintain the original metaphorical meaning contained in the source text. This is evidence that AI although sophisticated, still requires human intervention to deal with language's indirect or idiomatic elements.

In addition to meaning issues, errors in TL mechanics still appear, albeit in a more limited number. Rater B recorded a mechanical penalty of 5 points, whereas Rater A recorded no mechanical errors. This shows that in general, AI can generate neat sentence structures and be free of technical errors. However, formatting does not always guarantee the accuracy of meaning.

Thus, the use of AI, such as Chat GPT, in the translation of literary or climate fiction texts offers great opportunities in terms of efficiency but also presents serious

challenges in terms of figurative language interpretation. Advanced editing is still needed by translators, especially in dealing with complex metaphors that cannot be fully captured by data-driven systems. Therefore, the use of AI should be positioned as an aid, not a full substitute, for the practice of interpreting texts that are rich in meaning and full of interpretive layers.

b. **Translation errors in cultural words**

Based on the results of the assessment of 23 items containing the cultural words, the challenge in translating cultural elements is still quite high, especially when viewed from the penalty score in the aspect of meaning transfer. The total penalty of Rater A is 15, while Rater B gives a bigger penalty of 21. This penalty score shows that many translations have not succeeded in conveying cultural meanings appropriately, and some have distorted or lost the essential meaning of cultural terms in the source text.

High-penalty items, such as items 4 and 8 of Rater B, which each received a penalty of 2, indicate a serious error in understanding or conveying the cultural meaning of the term. Cultural words often contain local references, social values, and symbols that cannot be directly translated lexically. Therefore, the translation of cultural words requires contextual sensitivity and a deep cross-cultural understanding, which is still a major weakness in the translation results under review.

In terms of TL mechanics, Rater A did not give a penalty at all, whereas Rater B recorded a total penalty of 5. Technical or mechanical errors in the target language are not a major problem in the translation of cultural words. In contrast, errors occur more in the dimensions of meaning and interpretation than in the structure of the target language.

Overall, these results confirm that although the translations' grammatical structure tends to be good, errors in the aspect of meaning transfer—especially related to cultural terms—are still quite high. This shows the need for training or debriefing on cultural translation strategies, both for human translators and in the use of technology such as machine translation, so that the translation results are not only linguistically correct but also culturally accurate.

c. **Mistranslation of the Climate Terms**

The results of the assessment of 10 items containing the term climate showed a significant difference in the level of meaning transfer errors, with a total penalty score of 24 and 12 from Rater A and 12 from Rater B. Because this score is a penalty, the higher the score, the more fatal the translation error. This data indicates that a number of climate terms have not been accurately translated, and in some cases, serious errors of meaning have been made, such as in item 4, which was penalized 8 by Rater A.

The high penalty scores that Rater A gives to some items—for example, items 3, 4, and 9 (with scores of 4, 8, and 4 respectively)—indicate that errors occur not only at the level of word equivalent selection but also possibly in the context of the inappropriate

use of climate terms. This is important because terms in climate discourse are often technical and require a proper conceptual understanding, such as the difference between climate change, global warming, and carbon footprint, which, if not translated correctly, can lead to misconceptions.

In terms of TL mechanics, the two raters hardly found any significant errors. Rater A did not record a penalty at all, and Rater B only recorded one penalty on the mechanics aspect in item 10. This means that the translation results are relatively neat and free from technical errors such as punctuation or basic grammar in terms of the structure of the target language.

Overall, although the mechanical aspects of translating climate terms are quite good, the main challenge still lies in accurately understanding and conveying meaning. This shows the need for a deepening of climate terminology for translators, as well as special training in handling technical terms so that the translation results are not only readable but also scientifically and contextually on target.

The results of this study show strong similarities to the findings of Hanishaffira and Krisbiantoro (2023) in terms of the persistent challenges of meaning transfer. Just as the present study revealed that metaphorical and culturally loaded terms often suffer distortion or loss of nuance when translated literally by AI, Hanishaffira and Krisbiantoro (2023) also reported difficulties in choosing precise equivalences for climate change terminologies and idiomatic expressions in texts available on the National Research and Development Center website. Both studies underscore that grammatical or mechanical aspects are adequately well-handled—demonstrated by minimal penalty scores for TL mechanics—the main concern is the translator's capacity to maintain the deeper meaning, style, and cultural resonance of the source text. However, while the current research highlights the necessity of training on cultural and figurative language interpretation, Hanishaffira and Krisbiatoro (2023) concentrate more on particular challenges, such as a lack of understanding of climate idiom and technical vocabularies, which they addressed through supervisor consultation, dictionaries, and numerous revisions.

The challenges noted in this study are consistent with Khafiza's (2024) work on translating science fiction, particularly with regard to complex metaphors and specialized vocabularies. The high penalty scores for climate-related metaphors and terms in this study show how frequently AI-generated translations fail to express implied meanings. This supports Khafiza's (2024) finding that neologisms and unfamiliar terms in science fiction necessitate innovative approaches such as glossaries, footnotes, and word creation. Both studies emphasize that translation in this situation must involve complex contextual and linguistic solutions rather than relying on lexical equivalences to maintain the creative and conceptual layers of the original text. Khafiza's emphasis on collaboration with authors, editors, and experts further supports the findings of the current study, which indicate that AI outputs need human intervention. These findings provide evidence that translating creative and specialized genres effectively involves not

only language competency but also interpretive ability and teamwork.

Querubin and Niederer's (2024) Climate Future project offers a different perspective on the importance of AI's meaning-making mechanism, which differs from the findings of this study. Querubin and Niederer highlighted the significance of accepting the peculiarities of machine-generated outputs as creative measures to expand climate imaginaries. However, the current study shows the limitations of AI in accurately transferring cultural, metaphorical, and technical meanings. In addition, Querubin and Niederer's experiments with machine-assisted storytelling show that AI can make people think and use their imagination instead of merely copying how humans speak. In contrast, the current study treats errors in AI-generated translations as penalties, highlighting the importance of accuracy and fidelity in translation. However, both recognize the need for human agency, whether for curating AI-assisted artworks or for editing or improving AI translations to attain accuracy.

Another significant difference is how each study perceives cultural perspectives. This study underscores that translating culturally specific terminologies can result in meaning loss or distortion. In a similar vein, Querubin and Niederer recognized the constraints of AI that is predominantly trained on Western fiction and supported the inclusion of various imaginaries, such as solarium and ideological futurism, to enrich future narratives. While this study views culture as a challenge in translation, Querubin & Niederer regard culture as a source for creative expansion that encourages new perspective, thereby enriching climate narratives.

Conclusion

This part is used to conclude the paper. Describe concisely the answers to the research problems or the findings related to the research objectives. The author might also suggest future researcher(s) to develop the article. This research reveals that AI has great potential in analyzing climate-related issues contained in literary works. This AI can transfer the problems encountered in the translation of climate fiction. This proves the potential of AI as an effective tool in the study of climate and the translation of literary works full of implicit meanings. Even so, AI still has a weakness, namely, inaccuracies in understanding metaphors, cultural words, and climate terms contained in Woodland's novel.

The main contribution of this research is the incorporation of a multidisciplinary scientific approach that combines the sophistication of AI technology in translation with a literature review that contains many climate-related vocabulary. This research provides the view that AI can assist translators in translating and analyzing. The study also opens up opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration between linguists, translators, literary practitioners, and AI observers to create more in-depth solutions to

understand climate change through a multidisciplinary approach.

However, this study still has shortcomings. AI is still unable to shift metaphorical meanings, cultural words, and terms that contain climate. AI translation still feels rigid in terms of language and meaning. Therefore, this study confirms that humans are still superior to AI even though AI is increasingly advanced and sophisticated because AI translations still have to be edited and processed again by humans.

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Spatial Injustice and Symbolic Exclusion in Christian Surya's Bedtime Stories of Hong Kong's Helpers

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Abstract

In Hong Kong, foreign domestic workers often occupy the city's most marginalised spaces, such as kitchens, bathrooms, storage rooms, and animal cages. Bedtime Stories of Hong Kong's Helpers by Christian Surya (2024) uses visual storytelling to reveal these precarious living conditions, highlighting the exclusion of domestic workers from dignified urban spaces. This paper examines Bedtime Stories through the lenses of urban environmental justice, arguing that the marginalisation of foreign domestic workers is not only a labour or housing issue but also an environmental one. Their living conditions reflect how labour policy and classed domestic arrangements contribute to broader patterns of spatial and environmental injustice in the city.

By analysing the project's visual and narrative elements, the study traces how everyday household objects become symbols of exclusion and how these symbolic forms relate to broader spatial injustices shaped by urban housing crisis and labour domestic regulation.

Keywords: *environmental justice*; *spatial injustice*; *foreign domestic workers*; *visual storytelling*

Introduction

In Hong Kong, foreign domestic workers (FDWs) often live and sleep in some of the city's most hidden and marginal household spaces, such as kitchens, bathrooms, storage rooms, an animal cage, or cramped corners never intended for rest. *Bedtime Stories of Hong Kong's Helpers* (Christian Surya, 2024) is an interactive visual storytelling project by the *South China Morning Post* that extrapolates these sleeping spaces through minimal yet impactful illustrations paired with brief, poetic text. The story gives a nod to the classic children's book *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown (1947) in terms of structure, mirroring bedtime farewells to household objects like a

light, a red balloon, clocks, socks and mittens. Through this repetition and calm visual tone, Christian Surya highlights the quiet irony: domestic workers end their days by saying “goodnight” to the sanitary utilities and labour tools of other people’s homes instead of comforting and familiar items as used in Brown’s story. The irony contrasts with Brown’s comforting bedtime ritual reveals a stark inversion of rest and labour.

This paper examines Christian Surya’s *Bedtime Stories* to explore how these unusual sleeping spaces expose deeper patterns of spatial and environmental injustice. These sleeping spaces reduce rest to corners never intended for it, depriving workers of comfort, personal space, and the possibility of complete rest. In this sense, the exclusion of FDWs from bedrooms shows how spatial injustice intersects with environmental inequality within the everyday environment of the home. This exclusion is intensified by the fact that Hong Kong is consistently ranked among the most unaffordable housing markets in the world, where high property prices make spatial dignity unattainable for both employers and workers. Drawing on Edward Soja’s theory of spatial justice, this research argues that the inadequate and improvised rest areas of FDWs are more than signs of a housing crisis or labour regulation but manifestations of socially produced geographies of exclusion that reflect how Hong Kong’s labour governance fosters domestic spaces of inequality.

The conditions mentioned earlier are systematically reinforced by regulation and policy. Nicole Constable (2014) describes how migrant mothers and domestic workers inhabit “zones of social abandonment,” where legal ambiguity, stigma, and poor conditions intersect. Similarly, Dela Rosa (2019) argues that the city’s live-in policy, intended as protection, in fact legitimises the relegation of workers to marginal spaces like bathrooms and closets. Masuda (2019) compares Hong Kong and Singapore, showing how live-in rules perpetuate spatial hierarchies and deepen inequality. As scholars such as Parreñas (2001) and Lan (2006) have shown, domestic workers often face systemic inequalities tied to migration, gendered labour, and spatial exclusion across Asia. Soja’s (2009) analysis of spatial justice helps explain how these conditions are not incidental but produced through planning, policy, and economic pressure.

Building on this literature, this study turns to *Bedtime Stories* to show how the marginal corners and makeshift bedrooms assigned to FDWs, while confined to the household, are also signs of broader urban conditions. They reflect housing inequality, reinforce social hierarchies of labour, and expose the often invisible care work that sustains both family life and the wider city. It positions *Bedtime Stories* not only as a creative work but also as a cultural text that allows academic debates on domestic space, spatial justice, and environmental inequality.

Although previous studies have addressed foreign domestic workers through policy analysis, ethnography, and critical theory, few have examined how illustrated narratives like this one reveal the exclusion of workers from dignified rest, reframe everyday household objects as symbols of inequality, and connect household arrangements to

wider urban conditions. This paper addresses the illustrations from the visual storytelling of Christian Surya's *Bedtime Stories,* drawing attention to the lived inequalities within domestic spaces in Hong Kong, while also relating them to the environmental context of urban life.

Methodology

This study is grounded in Edward Soja's theory of spatial justice, which provides the primary framework for analysing *Bedtime Stories of Hong Kong's Helpers* (Christian Surya, 2024). The data consist of Christian Surya's storytelling project published by the South China Morning Post, accessed in April 2025. Soja's approach emphasises that space is not neutral but socially produced, and that questions of justice must be examined through the geographies that structure everyday life (Soja, 1996; Soja, 2010). His concepts of Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace are used to analyse how the physical environments of foreign domestic workers, the ideological rationalisations of cramped housing, and the lived contradictions of labour and rest intersect to produce spatial injustice.

Barthes' semiotic theory is employed as a working method for image analysis, particularly his assertions on denotation, connotation, and myth (Barthes, 1977), particularly his assertions on denotation, connotation, and myth (Barthes, 1977). Barthes's semiotic approach is valuable in this context because it allows us to see how visual representations not only reflect reality but also naturalise inequalities. His notion of myth reveals how the meanings of everyday objects can obscure their ideological functions.

These tools are utilised to decode how everyday domestic objects acquire symbolic and ideological nuance, which are then interpreted through Soja's critical spatial lens. The combined method begins with Barthes for close visual analysis but is followed by Soja's spatial framework, allowing the study to move from visual analysis to a broader critique of how labour, housing crisis, and policy produce unjust geographies in Hong Kong.

Lastly, this study contributes to the broader discussion on environmental justice by exposing how environmental inequalities are inseparable from spatial exclusions and how the everyday environment of domestic life reflects wider urban conditions. Through the visual storytelling analysis of *Bedtime Stories*, the study demonstrates how the marginalised resting spaces of FDWs are not only symbolic and spatial injustices but also forms of environmental inequality embedded in Hong Kong's domestic and urban environments.

Results and Discussion

1. Functionality to Symbolism

Based on the live-in policy in Hong Kong, FDWs are required to reside in their employers' homes. As a result, sleeping arrangements often take place in kitchens, storage rooms, corridors, an animal cage or next to toilets and laundry areas, where space is carved out of functional or transitional zones. This is also due to the housing prices in the city, which make it unaffordable for most families to give their FDW a proper sleeping arrangement. The situation facing FDWs in Hong Kong is visualised in Christian Surya's *Bedtime Stories*, which also recontextualises everyday domestic objects surrounding the sleeping areas of foreign domestic workers through the repetitive "goodnight" refrain. This echoes the structure of Brown's classic children's book *Goodnight Moon*, but here the bedtime ritual unfolds in cramped, makeshift and functional spaces.

In Barthesian semiotics, the objects depicted in Christian Surya's illustrations, such as toilets, sinks, ironing boards, laundry, and storage boxes, denote ordinary household functions. Yet when paired with the repetitive "goodnight" refrain, echoing Brown's children's story, they acquire a symbolic dimension. Functional tools of domestic life are recontextualised as signs of exclusion from dignified spaces of rest, while also hinting at the loss of privacy, the inseparability of rest and labour, and the devaluation of the worker's body. The illustrated scenes reveal how each of these objects, though mundane in function, becomes a marker of spatial injustice through Christian Surya's ironic bedtime ritual.

One scene illustrates the exclusion of FDWs from dignified resting spaces by showing a toilet bowl as the object of a bedtime farewell. Instead of a bedroom, the worker's sleeping area is the bathroom, symbolically tied to a sanitary appliance, a place never intended for rest. This ironic farewell highlights how domestic workers are denied access to clean, private and proper spaces of comfort, relegated instead to the margins of the home. The toilet bowl, in Barthesian semiotics, can be inferred from a neutral object of sanitation into a sign of spatial exclusion, exposing how FDWs' rest is displaced to inappropriate and degrading areas of the household. These exclusions are not only symbolic but environmental, since they show how the most basic human need for rest is pushed to spaces of waste and sanitation.

Meanwhile, another scene, in which a sink with a toilet brush and a cupboard is paired with the same "goodnight" refrain, reveals the spatial inseparability of rest and domestic service. Cleaning tools occupy the sleeping areas, hence the worker's body remains symbolically tied to household labour even during rest. While the illustration and structure still allude to Brown's classic, it evokes a totally different symbol of rest. The soft and friendly illustration that has captured children's hearts failed to create the same nuance. Instead, stark irony emerges, and the sink, a functional object, transforms into a reminder that the boundary between bedroom and workspace has collapsed, leaving the worker without a space of her own to rest.

In another illustration, a makeshift bedroom composed of toilet appliances is accompanied by laundry hanging overhead, connoting a constant cycle of work. The presence of wet clothes shows that the space is never free from domestic labour. Rest and work merge entirely, making the worker's sleeping area a continual reminder of labour. An ironing board leaning against the wall illustrates a similar point. Denotatively, it is a tool for household chores. Connotatively, it compresses two incompatible functions, work and rest, into the same space. This arrangement demonstrates that complete rest is unachievable for FDWs.

In another frame, a fuller illustration shows an FDW sleeping surrounded by those household items, where stacked storage boxes tower over a thin sleeping mat, marking a sleeping area where rest is confined to the least valued and most hidden parts of the home. The scene shows that the arrangement, called *my little bedroom*, is not in fact a bedroom but is assigned as one for her. The image of an FDW curled on the thin mat under the hanged laundry fully illustrated. It fosters a connotation that implies storage as a symbolic hierarchy in which the worker's body is given less importance than or equal to household possessions. When read critically, the illustration presents the devaluation of the FDW's physical being because she is not assigned a space that allows her to pause and take a break, where the rest of the family within the household does. Instead, she is given a space laden with domestic working tools.

Barthes also explains how connotative meanings can crystallise into what he calls "myth": dominant cultural narratives that make social arrangements appear natural or inevitable (Barthes, 1977). In the context of Hong Kong, the cramped and unusual sleeping spaces of FDWs are often rationalised as an unavoidable consequence of expensive housing and the state's regulation. Christian Surya's *Bedtime Stories* challenges this myth by exposing how such arrangements are presented through the ironic structure of a children's bedtime story, thereby exposing their situation beyond just illustration and visual storytelling.

While Barthes' semiotics reveals how everyday objects such as toilets, sinks, an ironing board, laundry and storage boxes acquire connotative meanings of exclusion, inseparability, and hierarchy that crystallise into cultural myths, these symbolic findings alone cannot explain why such conditions persist. To move beyond the level of signification, Edward Soja's framework of spatial justice situates these illustrations within broader material and ideological geographies. In this way, the semiotic exclusions identified by Barthes become the evidence of Soja's *Firstspace* deprivation, *Secondspace* rationalisation, and *Thirdspace* contradiction. As Fraile-Marcos (2014) notes, representational spaces are where symbolic resistance can emerge. These are spaces that allow counter-discourses to challenge dominant spatial arrangements. In *Bedtime Stories*, these improvised sleeping areas are not just signs of marginalisation but become spaces where inequality is made visible and contested.

2. Symbolism to Spatial Injustice

Christian Surya's *Bedtime Stories* visualises the spatial marginalisation of foreign domestic workers (FDWs) in Hong Kong. Using Barthes' semiotics, everyday domestic objects such as sinks, toilets, wet laundry, an ironing board, and storage boxes first denote household function but gain connotative meaning through the repeated "goodnight" refrain. This transforms them into signs of deprivation masked as common practice. However, to move beyond symbolic reading and understand how such inequality is materially produced and ideologically justified, Soja's spatial theory becomes essential. His framework of *Firstspace* (material), *Secondspace* (ideological), and *Thirdspace* (lived contradiction) allows us to situate these illustrations within broader structures of housing policy, labour regulation, and urban exclusion (Soja, 1996).

Soja's *Firstspace* refers to measurable, physical arrangements (Soja, 1996). In *Bedtime Stories*, cramped bathrooms, corridors, and laundry corners serve as sleeping areas for FDWs, demonstrating how the home's area arrangements denied them private rest. These are not neutral spaces but spatial indicators of hierarchy. Barthes would argue that these illustrations transform domestic appliances into symbols of domestic labour. Soja extends this reading by positioning these arrangements as evidence of systemic injustice, where the spatial design of homes reflects the undervaluing of foreign domestic labour. The home, presented as intimate and nurturing, becomes a mechanism of control and containment for live-in workers, where the employers assign the sleeping arrangements for them based on their socio-economic status in housing.

Secondspace, for Soja (1996), is the ideological frame that legitimises spatial injustice. In Hong Kong, the live-in policy and the city's unaffordable housing market are invoked to normalise substandard living arrangements for FDWs. Employers claim they have no alternative, framing the use of kitchens or toilets as sleeping quarters as unavoidable. This rationale constitutes a dominant spatial imaginary that makes exploitation common, acceptable practices. As Barthes suggests, this logic functions as myth. It depoliticises inequality by presenting it as common sense. Secondspace in this context masks exploitation by naturalising it within economic and legal discourse. The illustrations do more than depict a lack of space. They invite viewers to experience the contradiction between comfort and discomfort, between bedtime rituals and labour realities, between migrant body and household utilities. This dissonance opens up what Soja calls *Thirdspace*.

Soja's *Thirdspace* (1996) captures the lived tension between material deprivation and ideological justification. Christian Surya's ironic goodnight phrases expose the emotional violence of assigning rest to spaces of labour and hygiene. The bedtime ritual, borrowed from *Goodnight Moon*, collides with the reality of makeshift beds beside laundry, sink and toilets. This contradiction reveals *Thirdspace*, where the lived experiences of domestic workers expose the gap between everyday realities and the dominant ideologies that justify their marginalisation. Christian Surya's illustrations do not merely represent injustice; they disrupt it by creating a space of critical awareness. Through visual critical visual storytelling, they expose how labour, regulation, and

domesticity merge to deny FDWs basic spatial dignity.

By linking Barthes' visual myth with Soja's spatial theory, *Bedtime Stories* reveals how injustice is embedded in both the arrangements and practices of domestic space within the home. Christian Surya's work confronts not only the physical marginalisation of FDWs but also the regulatory and economic frameworks that make such arrangements seem acceptable. Soja's concept of spatial justice insists that any ethical urban future must dismantle both unjust geographies and the ideologies that support them. In Hong Kong, this means rethinking the legal obligation to live-in and the social acceptance of assigning workers to subhuman spaces. Christian Surya's *Thirdspace* invites recognition of injustice not as abstract, but as present in the intimate routines of domestic life. Finally, Soja's framework demonstrates how the marginalised sleeping spaces of Hong Kong's domestic workers are not simply symbolic or unfortunate, but socially produced geographies of injustice that demand structural transformation.

Conclusion

Christian Surya's *Bedtime Stories of Hong Kong's Helpers* reveals how the most hidden corners of the home become markers of inequality. Through Barthes' semiotics, household objects such as toilets, sinks, an iron board, and storage boxes transform into symbols of exclusion, the collapse of the work-rest distinction, and the devaluation of FDWs' bodies. Meanwhile, Soja's spatial justice framework situates these symbolic meanings within the material and ideological conditions of Hong Kong's housing crisis and live-in policy. The analysis demonstrates that the marginalisation of foreign domestic workers is not incidental but socially produced, legitimised by labour policy and housing price crisis in the city that presents inadequate living arrangements as unavoidable.

When read critically, these exclusions are not only spatial but also environmental. A basic human need, rest, is relegated to spaces of sanitation, waste and labour, unjustly arranging the domestic spaces and reinforcing inequality. By linking symbolic, spatial, and environmental perspectives, this study positions Christian Surys' *Bedtime Stories* as a cultural text that challenges accepted myths of necessity and common practices, and questions domestic space arrangement, justice, and environmental inequality. In doing so, it probes the question of where individuals' rest is not just personal or spatial, but within the context of FDWs, it's deeply political and environmental.

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Solarpunk Texts: Exploring Students' Ecocritical Thinking Through Critical Inquiry

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Abstract

The study explored how solarpunk texts may be used to foster students' ecocritical thinking through critical inquiry. Specifically, it investigated how students engaged with and responded to solarpunk narratives and how these texts facilitated their ability to analyze ecological issues critically. Students engaged with three stories through guided recitation, group collaborative activities, and a focus group discussion. The students shared their thoughts and connected the stories to real-life environmental, societal, and technological issues. The researchers then analyzed the students' responses using thematic analysis. The findings affirm that solarpunk literature can be a powerful pedagogical tool anchored with critical inquiry for cultivating ecocritical thinking among learners. By engaging with imaginative but socially grounded narratives, students developed the capacity to analyze and examine ecological issues critically and deepened their understanding of the interconnectedness of environmental and social structures. Likewise, students were prompted to imagine new but reasonably attainable solutions to environmental issues. The study recommends that solarpunk literature be integrated into the secondary English curriculum to foster ecocritical thinking and environmental awareness among students. By using reflective journaling, group discussions, and creative outputs, students' deepen their understanding and decision making. It is also imperative to localize solarpunk themes to students' immediate environments and socio-ecological issues for better engagement and advocate deeper discussions.

Keywords: solarpunk literature; ecocritical thinking; critical inquiry; environmental education; ecological issues

Introduction

Over the past few decades, advancements have been evident in various areas, such as technology, medicine, education, and communication. However, despite these remarkable strides, environmental challenges continue to escalate, with climate change,

biodiversity loss, and resource depletion threatening the well-being of both present and future generations. As humanity advances, its relationship with the environment becomes increasingly strained. Many individuals remain passive observers rather than active participants in addressing environmental concerns. This passivity often stems from a lack of critical engagement with ecological issues, highlighting the core problem: how people perceive and respond to environmental crises. In this context, the role of education in shaping environmentally responsible individuals has never been more crucial.

Education is a core strategy to support the implementation of various approaches to enhance ecological awareness (Saifulloh & Anam, 2022). Therefore, educational systems worldwide have been integrating environmental education to cultivate environmental awareness and preparedness among students. The K to 12 curriculum in the Philippines integrates environmental education to develop ecological awareness and preparedness for climate-related challenges. Such is evident in subjects such as Science, Health, and Araling Panlipunan, as well as specialized subjects like Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) offered in the STEM strand for senior high school students (Department of Education, 2020).

Even though these programs are important initiatives, they fall short of addressing the alarming awareness deficit in the general public with regard to the ongoing ecological crises, primarily the actions being taken to mitigate climate change among young individuals. Research by Rogayan and Nebrida (2019) found that environmental awareness positively correlated with high school students in Zambales engaging in environmental issues; however, the Southeast Asia Climate Outlook Survey 2022 stated that in the Philippines, while 97.6% agree climate change is a substantial threat, many Filipinos seem disengaged in taking actions to confront it. The gap in public awareness, particularly for youth who are fundamentally part of the solution to climate change, speaks volumes about the gaps in their environmental education. As such, it is important to investigate students' ecocritical thinking since the ability to engage critically with environmental issues and consider solutions towards sustainable approaches (de la Peña et al., 2018) is crucial.

Ecocritical thinking is an intellectual approach that integrates ecological principles with critical thinking skills to allow people to consider environmental concerns from a broader context (Thanya & Suganthan, 2024). It requires the critical analysis and inquiry of environmental issues, narratives, and representations in literature, media, or society at large. As such, ecocritical thinking should be at the forefront of education and allow learners to explore the connections that human beings have with literature and the environment and how these constructs operate within social contexts that shape environmental problems. Moreover, Thanya and Suganthan (2024) highlighted the significance of critical thinking to ecocritical thinking, as critical thinking helps individuals process information, assess claims, and combine various perspectives. More than anything, critical thinking gives individuals ways to think about issues and strive to

address larger environmental issues. It provides students the intellectual flexibility and resilience to accommodate uncertainty and complexity and not to be afraid of learning processes that can cause difficulties as opportunities for intellectual development. Smith (2020) emphasizes the importance of creating a learning environment that fosters questioning, analysis, and reflection, allowing students to build interpretive/analytical skills for tackling complex concepts and preparing for real-world problem-solving. However, given that the Philippines scored nearly at the very bottom of 79 countries for reading comprehension in the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (San Juan, 2019), developing this student awareness can be more than just making students aware of local environmental facts, it takes critical inquiry and critical reading, as required means of learning.

Critical inquiry helps students think about the world surrounding them reflectively and makes them grapple with it. Students who engage in critical inquiry do not just take in beliefs and ideas, they learn to interrogate a problem in different ways, to examine the structures behind the problem, and to envision transformations (Spires et al., 2021). Critical inquiry allows self-questioning and pushes the student to question and evaluate the environmental narratives rather than simply accepting them. Likewise, critical reading allows students to interrogate texts that present assumptions and biases as well as deeper ecological questions. Together, education can create awareness and agency through both of these ways, which gives the student a set of skills to analyze issues situated within an ecosystem and work genuinely to address environmental issues and imagine new solutions.

Literature, as a material for critical reading, is also fundamental to developing these skills. As Widiastuti and Syamsi (2023) claim, literature has long been an integral component of English classrooms due to its numerous benefits, including the provision of authentic materials, enhancement of linguistic knowledge, development of interpretative skills, promotion of cultural understanding, facilitation of critical thinking, and stimulation of social development. Teaching literature, especially when students are actively engaged, helps develop critical and ecocritical thinking. This empowers students to address environmental issues in a deeper and more analytical mindset, encouraging sustainable practices and thoughtful problem-solving.

Multiple genres of literature have focused on raising awareness about issues pertaining to the environment and promoting sustainable practices. Dystopian and cyberpunk literature, for example, depicts the consequences of environmental neglect and societal collapse and encourages critical consciousness and thinking in the classroom. These genres engage students in envisioning and thinking through various potential realities they may encounter and their flight or survival strategies in an apocalyptic future. They also allow students to critically analyze and explore pressing issues they encounter as young adults (Berbano & Tanda, 2024).

While these genres provide critical insights into potential futures shaped by

technological advancements and societal decay, they often emphasize adverse outcomes. The overwhelming prevalence of these pessimistic visions has stifled the collective imagination of readers, leading many to accept them as inevitable outcomes (Scott, 2023). Moreover, such representations contribute to a sense of environmental fatalism, which suggests that humanity's efforts to combat environmental issues, such as climate change, may be futile. Therefore, how these issues are translated into fiction is important, as it influences readers' understanding of the crisis and shapes their responses, whether they feel compelled to act or resign to inaction (Więckowska, 2022). Hence, there is a growing need for more optimistic narratives that focus on positive future perceptions. Solarpunk literature, which envisions a sustainable future where technology and nature coexist harmoniously, offers such an optimistic outlook.

Johnson (2020) discusses the pedagogical value of solarpunk, a genre that encourages critical examination of one's environmental impact and promotes proactive action by overcoming widespread cynicism about the future. It serves as a valuable tool for sustainability educators. Furthermore, solarpunk is rooted in an ostensibly optimistic response to climate change and environmental degradation, attributing these issues to capitalism (Pethokoukis, 2023). Schuller (2019) added that "solarpunk optimistically explores questions of gender and sexuality, race and colonialism, environmental and ecological concerns, in the value of capitalism as a societal system, alongside a focus on social ecology." Solarpunk, as a developing genre, envisions a sustainable future focused on ecological awareness and positive technological implementations (Piechota, 2022; Lynall, 2022). It can be seen as a hopeful narrative and context for investigating sustainable futures that encourages readers to imagine and enact change. Solarpunk is also considered a space for environmental sustainability education and ecocriticism (Johnson, 2020). There are engaging opportunities within this space to create environmental awareness in students with the added dimensions of combining sustainability, understanding the educational possibilities of studying ecological and social issues, and a critical lens of literature and the environment, with students developing their critical thinking. Forni (2023) shows that, especially when moving toward a concrete utopia and away from dominant catastrophic narratives, science fiction can play a restorative role and turn into a creative and oblique educational force in the community.

For these reasons, the researchers aimed to use solarpunk literature's current and unique position to explore students' ecocritical thinking through critical inquiry in the classroom. Solarpunk's hopeful vision of the potential for sustainable futures facilitates critical responses to social and environmental issues. Thus, exploring students' engagement when they are introduced to solarpunk texts is noteworthy. As Forni (2023) argues, "solarpunk can promote constructive change such as from an early age, especially when targeted at young audiences from early childhood to young adulthood." Despite the limited presence of youth fiction with strong solarpunk themes in educational settings, this genre has demonstrated its capacity to boost ecocritical awareness and critical thinking skills. It can develop an optimistic view of the future and

respect for nature from a young age, contributing to eco-literacy. It can also help challenge current negotiated frameworks and reframe how to view society and the planet (Forni, 2023).

This qualitative research aimed to investigate the ecocritical thinking of Grade 10 students as they engaged with solarpunk texts using critical inquiry. This study aimed to discover how students received, engaged, and critically responded to these texts with an emphasis on their behaviors and interpretive processes. The study sought to understand how solarpunk narratives, emphasizing sustainability, optimism, and proactive environmental engagement, could influence students' ability to think critically about pressing ecological issues. This research also examined how solarpunk texts could assist students in developing their ecocritical thinking since solarpunk invites readers to contemplate environmental issues through hope and action rather than fear and hopelessness.

Methodology

Research Design

This descriptive-qualitative action research study utilized observations, journals, field notes, and focus group discussions to investigate the ecocritical thinking of the Grade 10 students at Sinait National High School as they engaged with solarpunk texts using critical inquiry. The observed engagement and student responses were recorded and analyzed through the various outputs including interactive discussions, and direct observations. These data provided insights into their ecocritical thinking and interpretive processes when interacting with the solarpunk texts.

Data Gathering Procedure

This study included a number of steps to explore students' ecocritical thinking through their involvement with solarpunk texts.

First, the researchers secured permission from the cooperating teacher, head teacher, and the principal of the school to conduct the study. The planned study was to conduct lessons once a week for four consecutive weeks, with a focus group discussion at the final week.

To orient the students to the concept of solarpunk literature, the researcher provided some information on the genre and then showed the students some images of solarpunk cities so that they could visualize a solarpunk future. The images connected the students to the future sustainable environment depicted in the readings. Then the researcher developed detailed lesson plans for the discussions on the selected

solarpunk text. The lessons were designed to provoke critical inquiry and leave the students engaged with the text.

The researchers then facilitated reading sessions using the solarpunk texts through critical inquiry. Throughout these sessions, students shared their interpretations, feelings, and thoughts concerning the texts. The researchers facilitated interactive discussions and prompted students to interrogate the environmental issues in the stories.

Just as students were asked to write reflection papers after each of the sessions to help them think critically about their readings, these papers were an opportunity for students to tell their experience and observations. The researchers also kept detailed field notes outlining the progress of the study and some of the important or notable events or observations throughout the sessions.

The last data collection method was focus group discussion and it was done in the last week of the study. Researchers developed questions to promote discussion and asked students to share their experiences with the solarpunk texts, which points they found to be compelling, and which themes stood out to them. The emphasis of key questions was to identify which solarpunk stories resonated most with the students, what they got out the texts, and how their environmental awareness changed as a result of engaging with the solarpunk genre. Nine students were the participants.

As part of the sessions, students explored three solarpunk stories highlighting various environmental themes and speculative solutions. The first story, “Pop and the CFT” by Brandon Crilly, depicted a future society where human actions toward the environment have direct consequences. It introduced the concept of a carbon footprint tax and presented environmental responsibility through an economic lens. The second story, “Fighting Fire with Fire” by Gemini Pond, portrayed a community united in collaborative efforts to confront environmental challenges and emphasized the power of collective action. Lastly, “Watch Out, Red Crusher!” by Shel Graves examined the use of biotechnology to address energy concerns while cautioning against such technological advancements' potential risks and unintended consequences. These stories served as focal points for critical inquiry and discussion.

The researchers analyzed data from various sources, including field notes, transcribed student responses to discussion questions, reflection papers, and responses from the focus group discussion. These multiple data sources contributed to triangulation.

Data Analysis

The researchers began by organizing the gathered data, including observations, journals, and field notes. Next, they coded the data, identifying recurring themes,

patterns, and concepts. They conducted a thematic analysis to group similar codes into broader themes and sub-themes (Peel, 2020). To ensure the validity of the findings, they used triangulation by comparing data from different sources. They then interpreted these themes in the context of the research objective. A narrative was constructed to describe the students' experiences, using quotes and excerpts from the data. Finally, the researchers reflected on the implications of the results for further analysis and interpretation.

Results and Discussion

1. Perceptions of the Genre

The researchers utilized critical inquiry through strategies, including guided recitation and collaborative groups. From the reflection papers and focus group discussion as methods discussed earlier, students' written and verbal responses revealed three key subthemes that illustrate their perceptions of solarpunk:

a. Hopeful Futures

The researchers observed that many students perceived the genre as a symbol of progress and optimism during their first encounter with solarpunk, particularly during the introductory session before the stories were read. This first session involved a presentation of solarpunk concepts alongside images that depict solarpunk-inspired futures. These visuals and explanations prompted students to form expectations about the stories, many centered on technology, sustainability, and harmony. Their responses reflected the enthusiasm and a strong hope for solarpunk's possibilities.

> *"I expect solarpunk to help us preserve the environment for our future."*
>
> Student 3

> *"It gives the idea of a promising future, ma'am, a future that is a more organized and better world."*
>
> Student 5

> *"I expect that solarpunk will present a greener future, with less pollution and a more joyful way of life. "*
>
> Student 7

> *"Solarpunk made me curious. I expect it to show a better world and inspire us through technology and environmental ideas."*
>
> Student 9

> *"I expect that solarpunk stories will show us how technology can improve our lives without harming nature."*
>
> Student 1

These responses reflect how students initially perceived solarpunk as an inherently optimistic genre that offers imaginative blueprints for a better future. Even though the students had limited exposure during the first session, they were quick to grasp the core ideas of solarpunk and envisioned it as a genre that not only presents positive technological and environmental possibilities but also encourages proactive thinking about how such futures might be achieved. As Stokka (2021) explains, fiction holds powerful potential inside the classroom as it allows students to explore environmental challenges and possible solutions through imagined realities. This narrative serves as a platform for inspiring action, challenges readers' worldviews, and broadens their understanding of alternative perspectives. In this case, solarpunk texts began to serve that very function: to spark early ecocritical awareness and future-oriented thinking among students, even before engaging deeper with the material.

After being exposed to the stories, the focus group discussion revealed that many students maintained their initial perceptions of solarpunk, although now more informed. Their responses showed that the stories reinforced the idea of solarpunk as a mode for a future shaped by both innovation and care for the environment.

> *"I still believe solarpunk can help preserve the environment and lead us to a better future, ma'am."*
>
> Student 4

> *"Ma'am, I think solarpunk can improve our community. It can make things more advanced and less complicated.* Kasi *based* kadagidiay nabasami, *ma'am, while* agad-*advance*-tayo *technologically*, dapat agad-*advance* met diay ways-tayo *towards sustainability, and aware* tay' dapat no ania dagidiay *consequences* na dagitoy *advancement* iti *nature*."
> [Ma'am, I think solarpunk can improve our community. It can make things more advanced and less complicated. Because based on what we read, ma'am, while we advance technologically, we should also advance our ways toward sustainability, and we should be aware of the consequences of these advancements on nature.]
>
> Student 9

> "Na-*inspire*-nak kadagidiay *stories* a binasatayo, *ma'am*, ken naikkannak iti pag-asa nga baka mabalin agpayso nga agbalinto nga *solarpunk* ti *future*-tayo. Ket innikannakami dagitoy nga *stories* iti *idea* no kasano agbiag ti *solarpunk world, ma'am."*
> [I was inspired by the stories we read, ma'am, and they gave me hope that

maybe our future can truly become solarpunk. These stories also gave us the idea of what it is like to live in a solarpunk world, ma'am.]

Student 3

Others noted how the stories encouraged them to rethink what progress and the future could look like, not just in terms of technological advancement but also in terms of the environment.

"It shows a future where technology helps save agriculture and protect the environment, ma'am."

Student 1

"Innikkannakami iti *courage* dagidiay *stories* nga binasatayo, *ma'am*, *to imagine our world a more advanced*, nga addanto dagidiay *new technologies* nga agke-*care* iti *nature, unlike today* nga *although* agad-*advance*-tayo ti *technology*, adda met dagidiay madi a maidulot-na iti *environment*."
[The stories we read, ma'am, gave us the courage to imagine our world as more advanced, with new technologies that care for nature, unlike today when, although our technology advances, there are still harmful effects on the environment.]

Student 2

From these responses, spanning the initial expectations to the focus group discussion, students consistently expressed an optimistic view of the solarpunk narrative. Their insights suggest a growing appreciation for the genre's potential to serve as a tool for reimagining the future in ways that integrate technological growth with ecological responsibility.

b. Social Awareness

The researchers observed a noticeable shift in how the students perceived the solarpunk genre through their responses to guided questions on the stories. As they explored the narratives, students began to recognize themes not just of environmental sustainability but also of social inequality, privilege, and justice. Several noted how the sustainability efforts presented in the stories often excluded or negatively impacted marginalized communities.

"It might be good for the environment, but what about the poor people who can't pay?"

Student 12

"Solarpunk also talks about problems like discrimination, not just the environment."

Student 1

"*Ma'am, I thought that solarpunk was only about environmental issues, technology* kasdiay, ngem *when I read 'Watch out, Red Crusher!', ma'am, it also shows how people are classified and how those who do not fit in their standard will be like exiled in [from] their community. For example, ma'am*, ket, ni Irwin, gapu nga *red* kulayna ket kasla dida kaykayat 'suna a kadua ken kasla adda ti madi nga panagkitada kanianan uray awan met ar-aramidenna a madi, *ma'am*."
[Ma'am, I thought that solarpunk was only about environmental issues and technology, but when I read "Watch out, Red Crusher!", ma'am, it also shows how people are classified, and how those who do not fit into the standard seem to be exiled from their community. For example, ma'am, Irwin, because his color was red—it was as if they did not want him to be with them, and they looked at him negatively even though he was not doing anything wrong, ma'am.]

Student 20

"Although they have this almost perfect community, it does not change the fact that they trade their sustainability with humanity, ma'am. "

Student 2

"It also shows the sad reality of racism, ma'am, aside from the environmental issues we have right now. Like in Aberdonia, people are treated based on their colors. And it is the same thing with racism, ma'am, that we have today; people are mistreated just because of their color."

Student 10

These responses suggest that students began to develop an expanded perception of solarpunk as they recognized it not only as a genre rooted in ecological themes but also as one that engages with socio-political issues. This evolving understanding among students mirrors what Guner (2022) describes as one of solarpunk's essential goals: to increase the visibility and hearing of marginalized voices that have long been silenced by dominant white, patriarchal discourse. Solarpunk, Guner argues, functions as a powerful tool for disrupting hierarchical and discriminatory worldviews. The fact that students could identify and respond to these deeper themes in the narratives reveals that solarpunk's critical and transformative potential, beyond the environment, is becoming visible and meaningful to them.

Aside from these, some of the focus group discussion responses revealed that students could articulate additional perceptions related to social awareness. When asked which story and theme stood out to them most among all the solarpunk narratives they read, several students referred to "Watch Out, Red Crusher!" and its portrayal of physical appearance expectations and societal conformity.

"*Ma'am, I think the theme that stood out to me the most is the theme of physical appearance expectations* idiay *story*-na, *'Watch out, Red Crusher!', ma'am. For me, ma'am*, diay POV ni Andee *is like a POV of [an] insecure woman* nga madi pasok diay *beauty standard* or madi a pasok diay *standard* diay *community*-da, *ma'am. That is why, now and then, ma'am, she wants to manipulate her color to be accepted. And it is also evident in some of the scenes from the story, ma'am, that she often compare[s] herself to her friends too, ma'am.*"
[Ma'am, I think the theme that stood out to me the most is the theme of physical appearance expectations in the story, "Watch out, Red Crusher!". For me, ma'am, Andee's POV is like that of an insecure woman who does not fit into beauty standards or into the standards of her community, ma'am. That is why, from time to time, she wants to manipulate her color to be accepted. And it is also evident in some scenes of the story, ma'am, that she often compares herself to her friends too.]

Student 2

"'*Watch out Red Crusher!', the last one,* kase kasla naka-*connect* iti *real life situation, ma'am*. Di ba nagpatudokkan ti *solar nanites* tas no ana diay *color* naka-*based* diay *future*-mo *and then* kasla isunto mang-*control* toy bagim tapno maka-fit-ka toy *society*, ken naka-*base* pay diay *color*-mo, *ma'am*, no ana ti *future*-mo."
["Watch out, Red Crusher," the last one, because it seems connected to a real-life situation, ma'am. Didn't you get injected with solar nanites, and then your future depends on your color, and it's like that is what controls your body so you can fit into society, and your future also depends on your color, ma'am.]

Student 5

"*The story, 'Watch out Red Crusher!', resonates with me the most because, just like what Student 2 said*, diay *color*-mo no kua ket naka-*base* diay *work*, *like* tatta makitada lang nga na-*dark* diay *color*-mo, ibagada a mannalon kasdiay."
[The story, "Watch out, Red Crusher," resonates with me the most because, just like what Student 2 said, your color is the basis of your work. For example, if they see that your color is dark, they would say you are a farmer, like that.]

Student 3

Through their interaction with "Watch Out, Red Crusher!" students could identify how solarpunk can reflect issues of social conformity, beauty standards, and color-based discrimination that are deeply embedded in many real-life social structures. The narrative offered a lens through which students could see how technologies, even in seemingly utopian futures, can be weaponized to uphold rigid societal norms about

identity, appearance, and worth.

c. Ethical Tensions

Several students reflected on the ethical dilemmas presented in “Watch Out, Red Crusher!” by Shel Graves, particularly concerning the intersection of technological innovation and human autonomy. During the focus group discussion, students began to grapple with questions about the ethics of using advanced technologies such as solar nanites to alter human bodies, mainly when such modifications occur without individual consent. These reflections point to a growing awareness among students that technological progress, even when environmentally beneficial, can raise critical issues related to agency, identity, and bodily autonomy.

> *“It’s good for the environment, but it might be risky for people.”*
>
> Student 1

> *“Working with nature is good, but there are consequences for how people live.”*
>
> Student 9

> “Diay kua *solar nanites*, ket kua apay nga nagikuada kasdiayen ket uhm awan pake-da diay mabalin nga *outcomes* na diay kuan diay *glow* kadagidiay tao.” [As for the solar nanites, why did they make them that way when they did not consider the possible outcomes of the glow in people?]
>
> Student 8

> *“It is not the right thing to do since, for example, in the case of Andee, their generation was [was] injected with solar nanites without their consent, and the color that glows on her skin due to that solar nanite made her insecure her whole life.“*
>
> Student 4

These responses reflect students’ critical perceptions with the ethical tensions in solarpunk’s technological optimism. While the genre often imagines harmonious futures where innovation and ecology co-exist, the students questioned the human cost behind such ideals. They recognized that in the case of Andee, the involuntary alteration of her body through solar nanites not only stripped her of agency but also reinforced feelings of exclusion and self-doubt within a society that valued certain physical traits over others.

Through these responses, the researchers discovered that the students are absorbing the hopeful narratives of solarpunk and interrogating them. Their insights mirror real-world bioethical debates about consent, bodily modification, and the societal pressures that come with technological advancements. In this way, solarpunk literature

became a platform for students to reflect on contemporary concerns such as data privacy, surveillance, and cosmetic technologies that may shape future societies.

d. Genre Skepticism

While many students found solarpunk stories thought-provoking and engaging, several expressed skepticism about the plausibility of some narrative elements, particularly those that blended science fiction with fantastical or overly utopian scenarios. A prominent example was the inclusion of dragons in "Fighting Fire with Fire" by Gemini Pond, which some students felt disrupted the realistic tone they expected from a genre associated with environmental and technological futures.

> *"Some stories felt too idealistic, ma'am, like the one with dragons… that's impossible."*
>
> Student 1

> *"I think that there will be no chance of our future to have that."*
>
> Student 4

These responses reveal a tension between students' initial expectations of solarpunk as a genre grounded in real-world sustainability challenges and the more speculative, sometimes fantastical, elements that some stories include. Their skepticism reflects a desire for narratives that align more closely with tangible, achievable futures—stories that present environmental and technological change in actionable ways rather than mythical. This reaction aligns with Guner's (2022) observation that solarpunk does not prioritize strict scientific or technological accuracy. Instead, the genre embraces imagination and speculative possibility to envision alternative futures. However, for some students, elements like mythical creatures challenge their ability to fully relate to or believe in the feasibility of solarpunk visions.

Still, as Klata (2022) notes, solarpunk is not solely defined by idealism. While hope is central to the genre, solarpunk accommodates uncertainty, contradictions, and limitations. Many solarpunk stories are not set in post-apocalyptic worlds with sudden, miraculous recoveries. Instead, they often depict a slow, ongoing adaptation to ecological decline, emphasizing community-based solutions and resilience. These imagined societies may showcase tolerance and eco-friendly technologies, but they also acknowledge persistent systemic issues and the unintended consequences of innovation. The students' doubts do not indicate a rejection of the genre. Their skepticism suggests a critical reading practice.

2. Engagement as a Result of Critical Inquiry

Drawing from classroom field notes, student reflection papers, and recorded focus group discussions, the researchers categorized student engagement with solarpunk literature into three interrelated subthemes: emotional, critical, and structural. These

categories reflect the varied ways in which students connected with, interpreted, and responded to the solarpunk stories during and after the reading sessions.

a. Emotional Attachment

Students exhibited spontaneous emotional reactions throughout the reading sessions, particularly when engaging with character-driven moments and dramatized readings of solarpunk texts. Although some students were not typically enthusiastic readers, their emotional responses indicated a different form of engagement: affective and participatory.

During the peer-read performance of "Pop and the CFT" by Brandon Crilly, moments of romantic or intimate dialogue triggered audible reactions such as laughter, light teasing, and comments expressing amusement or affection (e.g., "nakakakilig"). These moments became entry points for students who otherwise would not actively participate in a conventional reading task.

"I felt sorry for Cameron."

Student 23

"Nakakakilig yung interaction nila." [Their interaction was thrilling/swoon-worthy.]

Student 36

In discussing "Watch Out, Red Crusher!" by Shel Graves, students expressed empathy toward the protagonist, Andee, especially about her struggle with self-worth and social acceptance. This emotional resonance allowed students to reflect on their own insecurities and experiences:

"I know, me and Andee are the same, the way she always tries her best to fit in."

Student 17

"Kaasi ni Irwin." [Poor Irwin.]

Student 9

"Oh no, I feel you, Andee!"

Student 28

One student insightfully noted:

"Andee's situation reminds me of our insecurities as people. Even when we have good things, we don't enjoy them fully because we keep chasing the things we don't have—and sometimes, we even force ourselves to have them."

Student 3

These responses reveal that emotional engagement was not just about entertainment or amusement but also an avenue for personal reflection and identification. The students were not merely reading the stories; they were using them to process their own emotional and social realities.

In the focus group discussion, when asked about their reading experience, some students responded positively:

> *"Reading the stories was fun… it gave me more ideas on literature and solarpunk. It's interesting, ma'am, because the more you read, the more knowledge you gather."*
>
> Student 10

The student responses indicate that even students without previous exposure to Solarpunk or an interest in speculative fiction found the overall tenor of these stories to be enjoyable and intellectually grounded. The students could view these stories' roots in science-fiction and environmental sustainability, but they also amplified significant human experiences. Students could relate to the character Andee in "Watch Out, Red Crusher!" and recognize fragments of their own struggles with identity, belonging, and the expectations of society. This emotional and cognitive resonance suggests that solarpunk texts invited students in a multitude of ways. This phenomenon shows not just stories that raised awareness toward environmental stewardship and showcased innovations towards sustainable ways of being, but it also allowed students to find themselves in the characters. They could understand the protagonists as feeling excluded or calling for belonging, or feeling pressure to conform to societal values or issues that situated themselves as real today, as well as imagined futures. This type of engagement reveals possibilities for solarpunk to serve as both a mechanism for ecological engagement, and as space to foster empathy, reflection, and social understanding. It also demonstrates that solarpunk assisted students in anchoring imagined futures with realities, and provided young readers opportunities to reflect on their own values, identities, and roles within their communities.

b. Critical Understanding of Real-World Issues

During the focus group discussion, when students were asked to reflect on their realizations after reading the solarpunk short stories, many demonstrated a growing capacity for critical thinking and social analysis. Their responses revealed an ability to connect some scenarios from the stories to real-world issues such as environmental degradation, systemic inequality, ethical dilemmas, and social justice.

> *"I realized that we should be careful with our actions because everything has consequences."*

Student 2

This response from the student suggests an emerging awareness of ecological ethics, where actions, even seemingly small ones, have long-term impacts. Through stories like “Pop and the CFT” and “Watch Out, Red Crusher!” students began questioning systems of accountability and the fairness of solutions like the carbon footprint tax. The idea that even death does not exempt one from environmental responsibility struck many as controversial.

“After reading the text, I felt encouraged to take environmental action.”

Student 1

The researchers identified this as indicating how the solarpunk stories moved students from passive reflection to a call for environmental engagement. The stories inspired students to reflect and consider change an essential outcome in eco-pedagogy and the broader goals of solarpunk literature. When asked if they would recommend the solarpunk stories to others, the majority of students expressed affirmative responses, and they overwhelmingly said yes:

“Yes, of course! Why not, di ba*? We should recommend these stories to others so they can become aware of environmental issues and social problems that need resolving.”*

Student 8

“I would recommend these stories to others because they spread awareness about environmental issues we are experiencing right now, and help us consider how to solve them in the future.”

Student 4

“These stories made me realize the importance of being eco-aware and socially responsible.”

Student 5

“I recommend these stories to others because they spread awareness about the environmental issues we are experiencing and help us consider how to solve them in the future.”

Student 3

“It made me want to act, to be more connected with others, and to contribute to solutions for the environment and society.”

Student 2

These responses showed that students were not passively absorbing information but were critically engaging with the texts. They identified moral dilemmas, questioned

institutional structures, and explored sustainability ethics in a world increasingly driven by technology. It demonstrates that solarpunk literature, when introduced thoughtfully, can develop critical thinking in young readers. It empowers them to imagine alternative futures while also equipping them with the analytical tools to evaluate the world they currently live in.

c. Making Sense of the Text Structure

In examining the structural engagement of students with the solarpunk texts, the researchers focused on how narrative elements such as pacing, clarity, plot construction, and speculative components affected the students' reading experience and interpretation. This theme was developed through responses in the focus group discussion and reinforced by observational data gathered through field notes during the reading sessions.

When asked how the structure of the solarpunk stories influenced their engagement, student responses revealed mixed reactions. Some students expressed curiosity and appreciation for the genre's conceptual elements.

> *"It was my first time encountering the concept of Carbon Footprint Tax."*
>
> Student 8

> *"What is carbon footprint tax, ma'am?"*
>
> Student 21

This response, along with others that indicated increased exposure to new ideas, demonstrated that solarpunk introduced unfamiliar and thought-provoking concepts that enriched the students' literary understanding.

> "Mayat, *ma'am, reading all those stories was fun for me because it gave me more ideas about literature and solarpunk*." [It was good, ma'am. Reading all those stories was fun for me because it gave me more ideas about literature and solarpunk.]
>
> Student 2

This comment suggests that the story structures supported an enjoyable and educational engagement for some learners. However, not all responses were uniformly positive. Several students commented on structural challenges within the narratives.

> *"I feel confused about the story."*
>
> Student 25

> *"The structure of the solarpunk stories is entertaining and engaging, ma'am… but I think the pacing is kind of slow."*

Student 18

Another remarked on a specific misunderstanding caused by character interactions:

> *"It is not reader-friendly because… I misunderstood the first story… I thought the characters were dating when they were not."*
>
> Student 12

These observations indicate that certain narrative elements, particularly pacing and ambiguity in character relationships, posed difficulties for some readers. Such confusion may stem from limited prior experience with speculative genres or unfamiliarity with the conventions of solarpunk storytelling.

These verbal reflections were consistent with field note observations. The researchers noted a drop in active participation during discussions of the second and third stories. Some students disengaged entirely from group activities and reading sessions. It suggests that structural features such as complex worldbuilding or slow narrative development have contributed to declining interest. Students' confusion and occasional misinterpretations also highlighted the need for scaffolding strategies when introducing unfamiliar genres. As observed, students struggled to contextualize speculative elements within solarpunk and sometimes reverted to literal interpretations, which disrupted their narrative comprehension. Despite these challenges, the structural elements of solarpunk also served a generative function for engagement among some students. The conceptual novelty, such as imagined policies or technologies (e.g., carbon footprint tax), provided the foundation for further inquiry, discussion, and personal reflection. These features, while not universally accessible to all students, contributed to solarpunk's potential as a pedagogical tool for interdisciplinary learning.

3. Critical and Adaptive Thinking

Initially, the students had a narrow, and superficial view of environmental issues, often paying to much attention to idealized version of sustainability, while neglecting the complexities and real life challenges that would have to be addressed to achieve those means and although students started from limited thinking, once they engaged with the solarpunk stories and developed rich discussions about them, students improved their awareness, and thinking skills. By course of the study, students were able to assess the social, economic, ethical, and practical outcomes of environmental action, and they showed improved ecocritical awareness.

Before engaging with the solarpunk narratives, students generally had a positive viewpoint of environmental sustainability, and they visualized future realities where technology and nature coexist. Their responses were often focused on immediate benefits, with a tendency to idealize the potential outcomes of a solarpunk future without

critically analyzing the challenges involved.

Table 1. Thoughts on Solarpunk

Theme/s	***Pre-Exposure***	***Post-Exposure***
Thoughts on Solarpunk	"I expect solarpunk to be greener, less polluted, and more fun to live with."	"I am more motivated to take environmental action because I see our future is better and greener."
	"I expect that solarpunk will help us preserve the environment for our future."	"The story made me doubt if solarpunk is for the good of all because it might be good for the environment, but the CFT [carbon footprint tax] makes it hard. Like, what about the poor people who can't afford to pay?"
	"I expect a better future and helpful technologies."	"I realize we should be careful with our actions because they will always have consequences."
	"My expectation is that it will happen soon and everything we do will be easier."	"I have realized that everything we do today has an impact on what tomorrow we will have."
	"My expectation sa mga babasahin namin ay upang malaman ang kahalagahan ng solaprunk at kung paano ito magagamit." ["My expectation of the readings is to understand the importance of solarpunk and how it can be applied."]	"I'm confused as to why she said beef is bad. After reading or hearing the story [Pop and the CFT], I feel more motivated to take environmental action because I heard that my actions can have a bad effect. I also realize that my actions now can affect my family after I die."

Theme/s	*Pre-Exposure*	*Post-Exposure*
	“After giving us some background information about solarpunk literature, it provides us with the idea or courage to make our world more advanced and ceremonial technologies.”	“After reading the story [Fighting Fire with Fire], it made me think how it is significant for us to have a unity to combat a single problem. For example, in fighting environmental problems, we could work hand-in-hand and through this resilience we will soon achieve a safer and greener world.

At this stage, hope and optimism primarily shaped students' ecocritical thinking. They viewed solarpunk narratives as a solution to environmental problems, focusing on the positive outcomes of technological advancements and ecological sustainability. There was little consideration of the complexities or trade-offs involved in such a future, and critical thinking regarding the feasibility of these outcomes was limited.

In their interaction with solarpunk narratives, students' engagement evolved dramatically. The narratives caused them to consider the environmental aspects of solarpunk along with its social, economic, and ethical implications, and their reflections illustrated their awareness of the complexities involved in sustainability which weight technology and technique against equity, accessibility, and implications for the future.

What students' reflections illustrated was a transformational shift in their thinking. They were no longer in a place to just consider the environmental consequences of solarpunk, they began to move toward engaging with its social and ethical aspects. As they noted in their reflections about carbon footprint tax (CFT) in the story "Pop and the CFT" and its effects on lower income people, they started to consider the intersection of environmentalism and socio-economic inequities. Students began to consider the possibility of a universal application of solarpunk solutions, recognizing a move to sustainable future requires an intentional consideration of issues of equity and accessibility.

Students also began to acknowledge the long-term consequences of individual actions on the environment and future generations. It reflects an increased capacity for critical thinking as students moved beyond surface-level environmentalism towards a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of ecological issues.

Across the reflections, a strong pattern emerged: students felt more motivated to take environmental action after engaging with the stories—particularly “Pop and the CFT.” Many responses highlight a realization of personal and generational responsibility

for environmental damage.

Table 2. Realizing Environmental Responsibility

Theme/s	***Pre-Exposure***	***Post-Exposure***
Realizing Environmental Responsibility	"Solarpunk will serve as our guide to have a better future."	"I realized that we should be careful about our actions because they will always have consequences."
	"My expectations about solarpunk are that our lives would be much better and advanced. Technology and nature would work together for the greater good. I hope that in the near future; we can actually achieve this."	"My actions now can affect my family after I die." "Taking environmental action helps us improve our mistakes in the past."
	"Everything about solarpunk is interesting for me, so I expect more interesting topics that can inspire me more in terms of technology and environmental work. Moreover, I'd love to be "worried" about the topics."	"The story [Watch out Red Crusher], motivated me to conserve energy. As the story talks about injecting solar nanites to the citizens of Aberdonia, like it made me realize to not waste energy sources. The citizens of Aberdonia have to go through this process as for them to produce energies they can use in their communities and even if that only happen in the story, I do not want to experience that in the future.

These reflections suggest that students began to deeply analyze and internalize the cause-and-effect nature of human impact on the environment. Several responses also questioned systems of accountability: "Why do we need to repay the taxes, and what are the possible things that could happen if we didn't pay?", referring to the first story, Pop and the CFT. Others pointed out injustice in the tax system, asking: "How about the poor people who can't afford to pay? It kind of made me think that solarpunk is for the rich only." Through critical inquiry, students could formulate questions

demonstrating their eco-awareness and essential thinking skills—indicating that they were invested in the story they were reading.

Also, in "Watch Out, Red Crusher!" students reflected on how technology (solar nanites) reshapes identity and inclusion—raising concerns about surveillance, conformity, and bodily autonomy.

> "*The characters do not pick their fate; the government gives it to them. After the characters experience discrimination, the government gives them their fate. What do you think about that? Is that even fair?"*

> "'*Watch out Red Crusher!', the last one ma'am,* kase kasla lang nakaconnect ti *real life situation, ma'am.* Di ba nagpatudokkan tas no ana diay *color* naka-*based* diay *future*-mo *and then* kasla lang *icon-control*-mo la toy bagim tapno kasla lang makuam diay, tapno maka-*fit*-ka toy *society*, ken nakabased pay diay *color*-mo, *ma'am*, no ana ti *future*-mo kasla lang… nagkua la gamin…"
> ["Watch out, Red Crusher," the last one, ma'am, because it seems connected to real life, ma'am. Didn't you get injected and then your color determined your future? And then it's like you just control your body so that you can somehow fit into society, and your future is also based on your color, ma'am, as if… well, that's how it is…]

One student insightfully connected Andee's struggle to real-world environmental challenges:

> "*Andee's struggle symbolizes how people experience environmental challenges differently—some adapt easily, while others struggle*."

In the story "Fighting Fire with Fire," the students connected deeply with community resilience, collective action, and sustainability. Taneen's character fostered an emotional connection to nature as both an ally and responsibility, reinforcing the idea that humans must work with nature to survive and thrive. The following are their responses when asked which characters they resonated with the most, realizations, and what significant symbols they identified in the story.

> "*Even if there is a sea of unfamiliar people, the only thing that matters is how to stop the fire."*

> "Daydiay *dragon*, *ma'am*. Isuna nangpuor ngem isuna met lang timmulong nga nagkua, diay *dragon*. Adda agillemeng *cellphone, ma'am*, tas isuda met la tumulong nga agsapul, kasla kasdiay."
> [The dragon, ma'am. It was the one who attacked, but it also helped in the end, that dragon. For instance, someone had hidden a cellphone, ma'am, and they also helped in searching for it, something like that..]

> "Tapos nabuo diay *green wall through– through the villagers, through unity. Like* dagidiay tattao nagtitinnulongda tapno ma-*build* diay *wall*." [Then the green wall was built through the villagers, through unity. Like, the people helped each other to build the wall.]
>
> "*The fire actually symbolizes the environmental issues we have nowadays. Because… people, like* isuda met laeng ti mangkua diay inkuada nga inobrada nga mang-fix." [The fire actually symbolizes the environmental issues we have nowadays. Because… people are also the ones who caused the problems they are now trying to fix.]
>
> *"There are moments in the stories where I felt a sense of resilience and optimism that we people will have a bright future…, and that, with resilience, we can fix everything."*

This shows emotional resonance and an understanding of solarpunk as a communal, rather than individual, vision of change.

The development of students' ecocritical awareness and critical thinking is evident in their responses before and after exposure to the solarpunk narratives. Prior to reading the solarpunk narratives, students exhibited an idealized perception of environmental sustainability. Their motivation stemmed from the vision of a greener, cleaner world; however, they had not yet engaged in a critical examination of the socio-political, economic, and technological complexities inherent in achieving such a transformation.

Following their engagement with the solarpunk texts, students demonstrated notable growth in their ecocritical thinking. They began to interrogate the complexities of the solarpunk solutions presented in the stories, they raised questions about the inclusivity and long-term viability of such proposed technological advancements. The concerns regarding on equity, particularly the potential burden of the carbon footprint tax on poorer communities, which is reflected in the story, Pop and the CFT, mirrors a deeper realization in their thinking. Instead of passively accepting the solarpunk vision, students started to consider the social, economic, and political challenges that must be addressed to truly attain a sustainable future. Furthermore, their reflections revealed an evolving understanding of the consequences of individual actions and increased awareness on the interconnectedness of environmental issues and equality in society. This shift displays the development in their ecocritical perspective. As shown in their responses, it shows the growing acceptance of the notion that sustainability is not just about technological innovation but also about how these innovations can be integrated into society fairly and advocate inclusivity.

Thus, the continuous progression of students' ecocritical awareness and thinking in the course of the study highlights their evolving ability to not only engage with

environmental issues deeply but also to formulate assumptions and possible solutions to it. Their awareness transitioned from a simplistic, idealized understanding of sustainability to a more profound and critical approach in dealing with challenges in building a more sustainable future. This massively reflects the pedagogical potential of solarpunk narratives, which not only inspire future-oriented thinking but also prompt students to think about the future and critically analyze the ethical, social, and practical solutions as environmental action.

Conclusion

The results of this research indicate that solarpunk literature can serve as a powerful pedagogic tool for promoting ecocritical engagement with Junior High School students. Students who engaged with stories that were imaginative but also socially-situated were able to consider ecological issues and, in doing so, were able to demonstrate a more critical understanding of the interconnectedness of relations within environmental and social systems. With the support of guided critical inquiry, students moved beyond passively reading stories, and toward actively engaging with the processes of constructing ecological meaning, exploring ethical dilemmas and imagining the potential for envisioning a more sustainable future.

The solarpunk texts created a space for hope and criticality, and a space for students to imagine sustainable futures while remaining connected to the socio-political contexts posing environmental challenges today. When in a scaffolded classroom inquiry context, the speculative potential of the genre allowed students to mobilize both creative imagination and the reasoning that is required for complex decision making and responding to the ecological crisis of the 21st century.

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Necessity for Inclusion of Environmental Ethics Curriculum in Engineering Education

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Abstract

In the current tech savvy world, scientific and technological education has gained prominence among students. Engineering has become one of the prominent disciplines with various avenues of inquiry. The need for understanding ethical frameworks that extends from various professional to the personal life of an individual has gained momentum due to the shortcoming of science to provide a viable solution for the problems of the modern age. Even though various interventions in the engineering curriculum have been made, there is still a need to effectively embed ethical standards that should be followed in our daily life to the engineering curriculum. Given this backdrop paper aims to understand the need for integrating environmental ethics framework in the engineering education to create ecological, social, and ethical standards in the life of the students. Keeping this in view the paper also attempts to create a model curriculum for the engineering students.

Keywords: environmental ethics; engineering curriculum; ethical standards

Introduction

The ecological imbalance that we are currently confronted within various aspects of social and personal life underscores the necessity of integrating a holistic approach in addressing the ethical frameworks that guide an individual. The Cartesian way of thinking that is dominating the current perception of existence limits ourselves from understanding the interconnectedness that sustains the natural world. Fritjof Capra avers, “Our culture takes pride in being scientific; our time is referred to as the Scientific Age. It is dominated by rational thought, and scientific knowledge is often considered the only accepted kind of knowledge. That there can be intuitive knowledge, or awareness, which is just as valid and reliable, is generally not recognized. This attitude, known as scientism, is widespread, pervading our educational system and all other social and political institutions.” The rational understanding of existence has integrated

into all the distinct social institutions viz., economic, health, and educational. Due to the predominance of scientific thinking, society often overlooks the spiritual connections that exist between humans and the environment, treating the environments as merely tools for their end goals that are temporal in its nature. Fritjof Capra avers: "We have favored self-assertion over integration, analysis over synthesis, rational knowledge over intuitive wisdom, science over religion, competition over cooperation, expansion over conservation, and so on. This one-sided development has now reached a highly alarming stage, a crisis of social, ecological, moral and spiritual dimensions."

The traditional practice of seeking solutions from the academics for the global crisis has been replaced by the Tech companies which resulted in disharmony among the government, academicians, and the policy makers. This has altered the entire education system and its very purpose giving space for temporary priorities in life eventually, fragmenting the essence of moral obligation that human beings have towards their environment to a mere transactional entity viz., job-oriented, sustenance in profit- driven economy. This profit-driven economy has brought a shift in the entire thought-process of Man, the species within and without giving scope for anthropocentric view of the entire universe disrupting the ecological balance. This is evidential from the very emergence of the term 'ecocriticism' that aims to address the environmental concerns that are often over-shadowed due to the linear human centric perspective, the extension of which is emanated in the themes discussed in global academic platforms viz., environmental justice, ecophobia, posthuman directions, animal studies, postcolonial ecologies, deep ecology, social ecology, environmental ethics, new materialisms, green/ blue humanities, place studies, bioregionalism and Anthropocene studies etc. Given this backdrop the onus lies on the educators to bring a shift in the thought- process of the future nation builders which could bring about huge impact in the ongoing global environmental crisis. Keeping this in view the paper aims to bring changes in the higher education curriculum more so in the engineering studies that focusses much on science and technology. Marshall McLuhan rightly said that, "We become what we behold. We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us." reflections of which are evident in the current AI driven techno-capitalistic world. To bring a major shift in the thought process of the prospective engineers there lies a necessity to educate them of the limitations of science and the repercussions of living in a mere scientific world. The authors put a humble effort to design and develop a teaching module and curriculum that highlights on the ecological imbalance and the role of science and beyond it.

Ethics and the discussions on what constitute good and bad virtue have been a topic of discussion since the evolution of human civilization. The idea of morals has branched out to various dimensions throughout history as humans began to explore and create more diversified fields for their social structures. The plethora of social institutions and the subsequent fields of inquiry that it created has eventually led to the development of various kinds of virtue frameworks viz., professional ethics, normative ethics, virtue ethics, societal ethics, applied ethics, meta ethics, digital ethics, deontology, utilitarianism and so on. All these varieties of ethical standards were based

on anthropocentric outlook that governed the greater part of the world in the recent human history and owes its origin to the western philosophical inquiries that was rooted in scientism. In the process of ecological destruction caused by humanity during the periods of world wars, cold wars, and creation of nuclear armaments, several philosophers and thinkers began to raise their concerns over the resultant environmental devastations. This realization led to the development of environmental ethics that aims to create a moral obligation towards the surrounding environment. The field of environmental ethics aims to highlight the fact that the natural world has an intrinsic value of its own, independent of the purpose it serves to humanity. The 20th century saw a significant shift in the religious and mythological explanations of human existence with the emergence of the field of ecology that understood the biological evolution of human beings and its interdependence with the other life forms through a logical lens thereby causing a major perspective shift towards understanding the natural world and the crisis that humans endowed upon it through empirical evidences.

Several indigenous and global environmental concerns mounted the development of the field of environmental ethics. Specifically, the anti-nuclear movement, consumerism movement, population explosion, London smog, the Chernobyl, and Bhopal disasters etc. Environmental ethics emerged in the 1970's especially as a response to these growing environmental concerns and the need for a theoretical framework to evaluate human relationships with the non-human world (Udoudom et al. 2019). From 1970's on most newspapers and journals have reported on the environment on a systemic, day-by-day basis in a manner increasingly comparable to that in which they handle social and economic issues (L. Hens & C. Susanne, 1998). This represents the extensive anxiety and environmental awareness that spread across the western world thereby drawing al spheres of inquiry in an effort to address the rising environmental concerns. Several environmental writers, thinkers, and philosophers like Racheal Carson, Aldo Lepold, Arnae Naess, and Richard Routley began to address the mounting issue of environmental anxiety and laid the foundation for the development of the field of environmental ethics. While Holmes Rolston became widely known as the "father of environmental ethics" as he published, "Is there an Ecological Ethics?" in the leading philosophy journal Ethics in 1975 marking the birth of the field of environmental ethics (Preston CJ, 2013). Homles Rolston proposed "environmental ethics must be more biologically objective – nonanthropocentric. It challenges the separation of science and ethics, trying to reform a science that finds nature value free and an ethics that assumes that only humans count morally." This paper attempts to highlight the necessity of integrating environmental ethics in engineering curriculum through critical thinking that shall bring a paradigm shift in the thought process of prospective engineers towards engineering education for better environmental sustainability development goals. Additionally, designs a training module and model curriculum tailoring to the needs of environmental ethics course and preparing readiness in the teachers concerned for imparting the same.

Research on environmental ethics from a critical thinking and holistic perspective

in education is relatively new and consequently any studies on the integration of the same especially in engineering education has been hardly were carried out. Given this background and the need to understand the significance of integration of environmental ethics in engineering curriculum, the present study was carried out.

The purpose of the study is to critically examine and related concepts of environmental ethics and its applications in the present system of education and to highlight its application for developing environmental awareness and understand better sustainable practices aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Further, to understand the impact of the integration of environmental ethics in engineering education and develop a model course for engineering studies.

Keeping in view the vast scope of the topic and its implications to wider perspectives, the study is focused only on the aspect of environmental ethics and its implications on environmental education with particular reference to engineering studies. For the purpose of the study, secondary data was drawn from journals, relevant books, and research articles related to environmental ethics and environmental education are taken for analysis and interpretation.

Methodology

The present study examined the necessity for implementing environmental ethics in engineering education. An extensive review of literature on environmental ethics was done further analyzing the ideas proposed by scientist cum philosophers from various professional backgrounds and the its implications on education was done highlighting its relevance in the engineering curriculum for developing a holistic educational setup. Further, a model curriculum for engineering studies based on the concepts of environmental ethics has been designed accordingly.

Results and Discussion

1. Essence and principles of Environmental ethics for Engineering studies

Environmental ethics has been dealt only from the scientific view point in engineering education and more so under the course titled environmental sciences. Hardly this has been imparted from a critical thinking and holistic perspective. The scriptural texts of all religions especially Hinduism. Sanatana Dharma has embedded both critical thinking and holistic perspective in the Upanishads which are dialogues between the guru and the shishya about the enquiry of the Self, the relationship of Self with the Nature, Self with the Universe etc. Upanishads are considered as the treatises on the afore-mentioned topics.

While this is so the Western approach to Environmental ethics has been showing certain rays of hope with respect to critical thinking skills and holistic perspective in

education, very recently from the teachings of scientist cum philosophers such as Fritjof Capra, Dravid Frawley, Martin Heidegger etc. Beyond the barriers of the current institutionalized religion of Hinduism lies a profound understanding of the environmental ethics principles. The Sanatana Dharma or the eternal ethics forms the undercurrents of the Hindu culture where each element is respected with divine reverence.

प्रकृते: क्रियमाणानि गुणै: कर्माणि सर्वश: |
अहङ्कारविमूढात्मा कर्ताहमिति मन्यते || 27|| (Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 3, Verse 27)

Which meant, “All activities are carried out by the three modes of material nature. But in ignorance, the soul, deluded by false identification with the body, thinks of itself as the doer.”
This verse delves into the profound idea that sans the boundaries of human centered thinking and the binaries of mind and soul. It could help broaden the minds of the students and make them understand the concepts of binaries, which is the fundamental problem behind all human problems,

भूमिरापोऽनलो वायु: खं मनो बुद्धिरेव च |
अहङ्कार इतीयं मे भिन्ना प्रकृतिरष्टधा || 4|| (Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 7, Verse 4)

Which meant, “Earth, water, fire, air, space, mind, intellect, and ego—these are eight components of My material energy.”

The manifestation of nature and the basic elements that constitute it are described here. For the students engaged in the daily discourse of machine learning and technical classes, such verses can effectively guide them to the understanding of the natural world they exist in. It can further provide a holistic perspective to their critical thinking skills.

मत्त: परतरं नान्यत्किञ्चिदस्ति धनञ्जय |
मयि सर्वमिदं प्रोतं सूत्रे मणिगणा इव || 7|| (Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 7, Verse 7)

Which meant, “There is nothing higher than Myself, O Arjun. Everything rests in Me, as beads strung on a thread.”

The character of Krishna personifies the ultimate environmental consciousness and his advices to Arjun on his ethical dilemma showcases the nature’s eternal way of dealing with unethical practices. Krishna’s advice showcases man’s role in the natural world and can open up deeper discussions in the classrooms about topics of life, death, ethics etc.

प्रकृतिं पुरुषं चैव विद्ध्यनादी उभावपि |

विकारांश्च गुणांश्चैव विद्धि प्रकृतिसम्भवान् || 20|| (Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 13, Verse 20)

Which translates to, “Know that prakṛiti (material nature) and puruṣh (the individual souls) are both beginningless. Also know that all transformations of the body and the three modes of nature are produced by material energy.”

The concepts of purusha and prakriti can guide the students understanding of the essence of all the elements around them and make them view the world as an interconnected web of existences. These thoughts have other parallels in western philosophy as well like “substance” and “accidents” further underlining similarities in the inquiry of the Self in various parts of the planet.

कार्यकारणकर्तृत्वे हेतु: प्रकृतिरुच्यते |
पुरुष: सुखदु:खानां भोक्तृत्वे हेतुरुच्यते || 21|| (Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 13, Verse 21)

Which means, “In the matter of creation, the material energy is responsible for cause and effect; in the matter of experiencing happiness and distress, the individual soul is declared responsible.”
This verse points towards the origin of human crisis that lies within each individual psyche. Such discussions can make the students contemplate and reflect on the issues like anxiety and depression that is currently consuming the modern society. Group discussions on the immediate issues that the current generation is encountering can make the students more interested in the debates and can enhance their critical thinking skills.

रसोऽहमप्सु कौन्तेय प्रभास्मि शशिसूर्ययो: |
प्रणव: सर्ववेदेषु शब्द: खे पौरुषं नृषु || 8|| (Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 7, Verse 8)

I am the taste in water, O son of Kunti, and the radiance of the sun and the moon. I am the sacred syllable Om in the Vedic mantras; I am the sound in ether, and the ability in humans.

Krishna’s expression of him in every natural element in the universe draws upon the idea of interrelatedness that goes along with modern ideas of “systems view of life” discussed earlier in the paper. This verse can initiate discussions on how humans are connected to their environment and whether the current scientific education is making them aware of this affinity.
The environmental ethics principles that are dealt in these verses and in several other religious texts of various belief systems along with the scientific approach in developing an ethical environmental framework when implemented in the engineering classroom can initiate deep philosophical debates and reflections that can help us develop an environmentally conscious modern society that rejects these principles based on their inability to comprehend this understanding through their rational perspective. But with

the evolution and growing relevance of environmental ethics, it becomes clear that the concept of environmental ethics cannot be confined to or fragmented into multiple theories but should be based on the realization that environment and our interaction with it lies beyond human conception.

An environmental ethics that transcends the boundaries of anthropocentricism and ecocentrism moves towards an understanding that creates an emotional and spiritual connection between the natural environmental should be taught through our channels of education along with the current scientific and technological education. The exposure to various contrasting avenues of enquiry forms the essence of true education. To understand the essence of true education there lies a necessity to integrate critical thinking skills that fosters holistic education. Moreso in this scientific world where arts and humanities are kept at the backstage it is high time for the educators in the engineering studies to integrate critical thinking skills that nurtures holistic tendency towards environmental awareness that could achieve the sustainable development goals (SDG). A model curriculum has been designed to integrate critical thinking skills into engineering education that fosters SDG's that assimilates holisticity into its very system.

Table 1. Model curriculum for engineering students

	Listening	**Speaking**	**Reading**	**Writing**
1	Videos of Scientists cum philosophers can be given Fritjof Capra, David Frawley, Subash Kak, Ray Kurtzweil, Marshal McLuhan, Martin Heidegger, Dr. Abdul J Kalam, Mohammed Mustafa, Oswald Spengler, Thomas Fuchs.	Group Discussion A Case study can be given and ask them to speak on that	Critical Reading of the works of Heidegger, Fritjof Capra, Gerd Leonard	Students can be asked to create a case study after the listening session on the videos
2	The systemic view of life by Fritjof Capra https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=If2Fw0z6uxY	Group Discussion One-minute talk Debate	Paragraphs from Fritjof Capra's Turning point can be given	Students can be asked analytical questions from those they listened to Capra's video on what does exactly systemic view of life mean, how is relevant to the current age etc.
3	The Age of Spiritual Machines - The Future of The 21st Century By Ray Kurtzweil	Group Discussion One-minute talk	Ray Kurzweil's Essay titled, "Theory of Accelerating returns" can be given.	A Case study can be given to students ask them to analyse it from ray

	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-inK0esaIgk			Kurtzweil's, 'the theory of accelerating returns 'perspective
4	AI and Humanity at the Crossroads: A Vision for Tomorrow by Gerd Leonard https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tSZI8AFbL4	Group Discussion One-minute talk Debate	The Good, Bad and the Future by Gerd Leonard	Students can be asked to write on What exactly Gerd Leonard meant by 'Future'. How does he interpret the future from the present's perspective
5	The end of polite society by Marshal McLuhan https://marshall-mcluhan-speaks.com/lectures-panels/the-end-of-polite-society	Group Discussion One-minute talk Debate	Laws of media – The four effects: A McLuhan contribution to social epistemology, Gregory Sandstrom	Students can be asked to integrate the same in their life and do a SWOT analysis of themselves based on McLuhan's Tetrad
6	J. Krishnamurti - Ojai 1982 - Discussion with Scientists 1 - Roots of psychological disorder https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AoMS5b2MLRc	Group Discussion One-minute talk Debate	Chapter titled, 'The implicate order and the super implicate order' by David Bohm can be given to read from the book titled Dialogues with scientists and sages (Renee Weber)	Students can be asked to write a paragraph on what exactly David Bohm meant by the terms implicate order and super implicate order.
7	The End of Social Science as We Know it | Brian Epstein | TEDxStanford https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLbEKpL-5Z0	Group Discussion One-minute talk Debate	Essays on the limitations of Science and Technology and the essence of Technology can be given The Question concerning Technology by Heidegger, and relevant essays from his book 'What is called thinking'.	Students can be asked relevant analytical questions. What did Heidegger mean by questioning, What are the benefits of knowing how to question. What exactly does he mean by 'essence of technology'
8	ALS - John Bickle - Heterodox scientists: A sliver of hope for our	Group Discussion One-minute talk Debate	Read the article by Looren de Jong, H., & Schouten, M. K. D.	Students can be asked on exactly what is

	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
	increasingly conformist times? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p52-gGmKpHs		(2005) titled, "Ruthless reductionism: A review essay of John Bickle's *Philosophy and neuroscience: A ruthlessly reductive account* from the journal *Philosophical Psychology*, *18*(4), 473–486. https://doi.org/10.1080/09515080500229928	reductionism and its repercussions in the thought-process of an individual and society.
9	Electrochemistry: The Philosophy & Science by UL space club https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLC9-cZ7SoQ	Group Discussion One-minute talk Debate	Essays related to philosophy of science by various scientists cum philosophers can be given to read.	Students can be asked to write an analytical essay on 'are philosophy and science separate entities and not interconnected
10	Mieszko Talasiewicz - Imagery in Science and Religion https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KrHQIiuOprA	Group Discussion One-minute talk Debate	Essays can be given on understanding science from holistic perspective from various religious studies	Students can be asked an analytical essay on the limitations of science and the necessity of integrating holistic perspective.

Table 2. Model curriculum for engineering studies

Course Title: ENGINEERING STUDIES AND CRITICAL THINKING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY	
Aims and Objectives	Aims to provide students with: • What is Thinking? What is critical thinking? • Being familiar with the evolution of the concept and the eminent thinkers. • To understand the life and influences behind the philosophers • To foster critical thinking skills among students that extends to all aspects of their life • To develop a holistic educational setup • Introduce and promote interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches and worldviews among students.
Expected Outcome	After successfully completing this course, the students will be able to: **1** To understand the importance and limitations of scientific inquiry

Course Title: ENGINEERING STUDIES AND CRITICAL THINKING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY	
	2 To foster environmental awareness among the students **3** Align with the UN Environmental Sustainability Development Goals
Unit No.	**Topics**
1	• **Origin, Background and Introduction to Critical Thinking skills** • What is Critical Thinking? • Definitions, Role of critical thinking in education, Lives and contributions of various critical thinkers. Role of critical thinking in various disciplines • Scientist cum philosophers of the contemporary times. • Fritjof Capra, David Frawley, Subash Kak, Ray Kurtzweil, Marshal McLuhan, Martin Heidegger, Dr. Abdul J Kalam, Mohammed Mustafa, Oswald Spengler, Thomas Fuchs.
2	**Critical Thinking- Western approaches: Theory and Practices** • Socrates way of questioning, Plato, Aristotle, Charles Darwin, Rene Descartes, Albert Einstein, Martin Heidegger, Aldo Leopold, Arnae Naess, Richard Routley. • "As We May Think"—Vanevvar Bush • "Medium is the Message"—Marshall McLuhan.
3	**Critical thinking- Eastern approaches: Theory and Practices** • Selected verses from the Bhagavath Gita that emphasizes on the environment • Selected verses from Bhagavatham • Verses from selected Upanishads
4.	**Theories, trends and movements** • Land ethics • Deep ecology • Environmental justice • Ecophobia • Ecosophy • Econarratives
5.	**Eco-pedagogical practices** • Field study • Retreat centres • Dialogues with scientists cum eminent philosophers • Dialogues with educators cum spiritual leaders

2. Analysis and Interpretation

Environmental ethics aims at developing a moral obligation in the way human beings treat their environment and all the forms of life that constitute within it. This virtue framework focuses on breaking away the human superiority by making them aware of

the part they play within the broader spectrum of the universe. This realization would eventually help them understand that every element in our environment have an intrinsic value of their own. Engineering education is historically dominated by the anthropocentric worldview and environmental ethics could play a fundamental role in bringing about a paradigm shift in this perspective. Even though the rational and reductionist approaches help in yielding technological advancements, the Cartesian outlook contributes to more ecological devastations. Holmes Rolston's claim that environmental ethics must be "biologically objective- nonanthropocentric" counters the traditional engineering curriculum that confines ethical considerations to professional and economic aspects. Through the analysis of the prevailing engineering curriculums a clear gap in addressing the issues of environmental sustainability from an ethical standpoint in the classroom can be observed. Even though the field of environmental ethics have gained momentum since 1970's, a lack of its proper implementation is still visible in engineering education. This omission becomes particularly problematic given the engineers direct impact on environmental systems through infrastructural development, resource extraction, industrial processes, and technological advancements.

By integrating the ethical principles of approaching the environment that was proposed by the western and eastern philosophers throughout history. The model curriculum proposed in the research could help broaden the environmental awareness of the students. By engaging in the discussions of ides like the "systems view of life" proposed by scientist cum philosopher Fritjof Capra, the students could gain a better understanding about the aspects of environmental ethics in a more comprehensive way, thereby enhancing their critical thinking skills as well. By incorporating the works of philosophers from various fields of inquiry the teacher could create a more vibrant classroom atmosphere. Additionally, by engaging the students in meaningful discussion about the lives, works and ideas proposed by the selected philosophers could help foster a sense of awareness, curiosity, and respect towards other fields of inquiry that is otherwise stereotyped as something that stands in contrast with science namely, religion, intuitive thought and wisdom, spirituality etc.

The paper further highlights the importance of digital media and how its regulated usage in the classroom could assist the teachers in enhancing their engagement with the students. Technological gadgets like smartphones, and laptops have become an integral part of the modern-day classrooms and its unregulated usage have majorly affected the environmental awareness of the students. By engaging the students through videos, talks, interviews of eminent personalities in the field of environmental ethics the curriculum provided aims to pave a digital pathway that could guide the students in the further explorations as well as in developing a sense of awareness. Furthermore, by conducting debates, group discussions, and individual presentations on the topics related to environmental ethics as discussed by eminent thinkers fosters critical thinking skills among the students, that is necessary for the development of ecological awareness. The implementation of such a holistic educational environment is

necessary to promote interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches and worldview among the engineering students.

Conclusion

The paper primarily suggests that the implementation of such a holistic curriculum can foster a proper understanding of the importance and limitations of science, thereby making the engineering students aware of the fact that science and technology constitute one among the several paths of understanding the universe. Secondly the integration of environmental ethics can play a crucial aspect in engineering curriculum as it could open up further scope for the balanced development of intuitive wisdom and emotions which have witnessed a great decline in the recent human history. Finally, the implementation of the curriculum that focuses on the aspects of environmental ethics could help align the engineering education further towards the sustainable development goals mentioned by the United Nations and the multidisciplinary perspectives it engages with. In essence the proposed model curriculum focuses on interdisciplinary engagements with scientist cum philosophers whose work bridges technical and humanistic inquiry. By incorporating thinkers like Martin Heidegger, Marshall McLuhan, Fritjof Capra and many others the proposed curriculum cultivates the capacity to examine one's own disciplinary assumptions and recognize its limitations. This cognitive development proves essential for engineering students who will shape the humanity's material relations with the planet through their professional decisions and technological innovations.

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Eco-Trauma and Eco-Recovery in Contemporary Vietnamese Narratives of Extinction and [Post-]Apocalypse

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Abstract

Ecological trauma, although it has always been an underlying and pervasive issue in all environmental creation and criticism, has been an experience that is not easily identified and acknowledged from the very first works of criticism. However, the impacts from the environment, whether direct (such as the effects of natural disasters and climate change) on each individual, or indirect (through news, documentaries, movies) that people receive through the process of participating in communication networks and interacting with mass media, are undeniable. It is also for this reason that the effects of ecological problems on human psychology are increasingly being paid attention to and recognized; among which, eco-anxiety must be mentioned first. In addition, other negative psychological effects can be mentioned such as, eco-melancholia and eco-trauma – a psychological phenomenon will be discussed in more detail here. However, since ecological trauma is a psychological injury, it is necessary to pay adequate attention to how people cope with it and to propose ways to heal such traumas. The article, therefore, analyses these problems in Vietnamese contemporary narratives, especially focuses on extinction and [post-] apocalypse discourses as these are all shocking events that may have happened or are happening, or may not have happened yet, but are associated with our ecological obsession today. The artistic texts examined here are documentaries *The Silence of Summer* (2014) and *On the Body of Four seasons* (2017) by Mai Dinh Khoi, the short film *Who is Alive, Hands Up!* (2015) by Nguyen Hoang Diep, and short story "Post-Apocalyptic Fiction" (2022) by Nguyen Ngoc Tu.

Keywords: Climate change, apocalyptic obsession, ecological grief, species extinction, Vietnamese literature and cinema.

Introduction

Ecological trauma, it can be argued, though an issue that has always been subtly and continuously present in all creative and critical works concerning the environment, remains an experience that was not easily named or acknowledged from the earliest currents of ecocriticism. Nevertheless, the impacts originating from the environment, whether direct (such as the effects of natural disasters, catastrophes, and climate change) on individual human beings, or indirect (via news and media) and received through involvement in communication networks and interaction with mass media, are undeniable. It is for this reason that the influence of ecological issues on human psychology is receiving increasing attention and recognition. Foremost among these psychological effects is eco-anxiety, which is acknowledged as a phenomenon growing significantly, particularly among the youth. A major cause stems from the daily consumption and exposure to news, newspapers, books, and various media outlets. Simply turning on the television or reading an article can expose people to a barrage of "bad news" about the environment. As this source put it, "climate change is damaging more than just the planet's health, it is affecting human health, too" (BBC, 2023). More specifically, eco-anxiety encompasses feelings of "grief, guilt, fear, or hopelessness about the future of the planet due to climate change." According to psychological experts, the direct victims of climate change will naturally be those who "suffer most." For instance, "flood survivors experience depression and anxiety, and people breathing polluted air are at a higher risk of dementia" (BBC, 2023). However, according to psychologists, the psychological impacts on individuals who indirectly receive information about disasters and climate change news should not be understated: "just reading about the state of the planet in the news is causing stress and anxiety," simply because "with so much bad news, it sometimes hard to feel optimistic about the future" (BBC, 2023). Furthermore, other negative psychological effects can be cited, which may be said to be driven or pushed to a more severe extreme, such as eco-melancholia and its accompanying eco-trauma—psychological phenomena that will be discussed in more detail here.

In the introduction to the subgenre of eco-trauma cinema, Anil Narine immediately draws attention to the two aforementioned types of trauma experience (direct and indirect). This is because while the psychological burdens on those who directly suffer a catastrophe are readily apparent, indirect traumas seem to take significantly longer for psychology itself to acknowledge. According to Narine, whether we confront ecological disasters directly as our own personal experiences, or indirectly, such as through images circulating in the media, these horrific events tend to "confound us, stifle us and even paralyze us politically and psychologically" (Narine, 2015, p. 1). Narine further contends that the sheer grandeur of nature, coupled with the nearly overwhelming sublimity of natural degradation events, is the core reason leading to a sense of both awe and a paralysis of human will and action in the face of the ecological crisis. In other words, nature—whether it threatens us, we become a threat to it, or we view ourselves as a part of it—remains "sublime in this way: something too vast in its beauty and power to comprehend" (Narine, 2015, p. 1). This incomprehensibility, as Narine (2015) notes, can evoke a sense of awe, but it can also hinder practical human responses to ecological crises. Specifically, contemporary media is saturated with news reports and

documentaries on glacial decline, oil spills, and the severe impacts of deforestation. Paradoxically, however, these very accounts often "elicit tentative responses from the viewer" (Narine, 2015, p. 1), resulting in a backlash effect that prevents people from making necessary adjustments or taking required action. In ọther words, now more than ever, with the global popularization of mass media in the age of communication, we are living moment by moment amidst news and narratives concerning the environment. Furthermore, as Narine (2015) suggests, all these channels and media company series are fiercely competing for viewers and revenue by generating the most sensational and even shocking footage of human-induced ecological crises and of people facing precarious survival situations that filmmakers can find. The hypertrophy of all these stories and realities has, inadvertently, stimulated reactions that are both fiercely activist and, paradoxically, can lead to response paralysis. While they may propel our attention toward change, their sheer intensity can also blind, overwhelm, and inhibit us from undertaking any concrete action. This very experience, according to Anil Narine (2015), constitutes an aspect of eco-trauma.

Eco-trauma, as Narine argues, emerges from the “a paradox that characterizes our age of anxiety”: “We know our ecosystem is imperilled, but we respond in contradictory ways. On the one hand, we want to take action to protect the natural world”; but on the other, it cannot be denied that we simultaneously “disavow our knowledge of climate change and dwindling natural resources in order to function more happily in a global economic context replete with unsustainable practices” (Narine, 2015, p. 2). This paradox of ecological trauma (or the refusal to accept ecological knowledge and act to change), according to Narine, can be summarized under the dilemma posed by Jacques Lacan (Lacan, cited in Narine, 2015, p. 2): “Je sais bien mais quand même”. Furthermore, sensory overload is both a manifestation and a cause of trauma. In his essay, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud (1920, cited in Narine, 2015, p. 2) defined trauma as a consequence of “any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield of the ego”. Starting with his studies on melancholy, Freud essentially proposed a foundational definition of trauma: it occurs when the psychological shields or coping strategies that individuals (or even communities/collectives) erect to protect themselves collapse, forcing them to confront their pain directly. Ecological narratives, therefore, often expose these traumas by presenting undeniable realities through a mode of expression that compels witness, acknowledgment, and consequently, makes the resolution of the trauma possible.

In the work Trauma and Recovery, Judith Herman (1992, cited in Narine, 2015, p. 3) also provides another pertinent definition of trauma, viewing it as “threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death.” These events are “beyond the realm of everyday experience” because “they overwhelm our faculties”; and it is for this reason that they are capable of calling “into question basic human relationships” while simultaneously shattering “the construction of self that is formed and sustained in relation to others” (Narine, 2015, p. 3). More specifically, in the case of ecological trauma, these are events the experience of which compels us to rethink our

very existence, to question the illusory power of the human subject as well as the inherent incompleteness of humanity, and furthermore, to re-examine not only social relationships but also our own relationship with the natural world.

Regardless, the pivotal question posed by psychologists is whether trauma (including ecological trauma) can be viewed as a psychological impact at the communal level. Stated differently, "whether trauma as a primarily individual experience can describe a society-wide experience" (Narine, 2015, p. 2). This has been a long-standing controversial issue within the field of psychology, and it must be reiterated that, from the outset, experiences of collective trauma have not been adequately recognized, if not outright minimized. Judith Herman (1992, as cited in Narine, 2015, p.3) once asserted that "only a victim who directly experienced the original event would qualify as traumatized". Furthermore, the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV), published by the American Psychiatric Association (2014, as cited in Narine, 2015, p.3), clearly specified that "natural disasters are a common cause of psychological trauma, but only for those victimized first hand." Evidently, these definitions themselves have excluded onlookers, viewers, and other witnesses from the psychological impact of traumatic events, as if they do not undergo distressing effects from these occurrences. However, as Narine (2015) points out, many scholars challenge the aforementioned definitions by arguing that various types of trauma exist, and we are not allowed to turn a blind eye as if they did not exist. One of the clearest pieces of evidence presented is: "Witnesses and even media viewers report feeling traumatized after seeing catastrophes unfold in their midst or on screen" (Narine, 2015, p.3). Building upon this line of reasoning, E. Ann Kaplan (2008, as cited in Narine, 2015, p.4) proposes five distinct types of trauma: 1. Directly experienced trauma (the trauma victim); 2. A close relative or friend of the trauma victim or a medical professional brought in to assist the victim (closest to the subject's trauma, but one step removed from direct experience); 3. A bystander who directly witnesses and observes the trauma of another person (also one step removed from direct experience); 4. The clinician who hears the patient's trauma story—this is a complex position involving both visual and semantic channels, associated with a face-to-face meeting with the survivor or witness in, for instance, the intimate space of a consultation session (also one step removed from direct experience); and finally 5. Trauma mediated through images and words, which means viewing/seeing trauma in film, print media, or other forms of communication, or reading a trauma narrative and visualizing/imagining the images through that linguistic data (two steps removed from direct experience). This article will focus on the intermediate trauma phenotype described above, a form of trauma conveyed to the reader/viewer through verbal and visual narratives. The collective nature (the recipient community, a community that is constantly expanding) of this trauma phenotype is also particularly pronounced. And this, of course, as Narine (2015) asserts, must be a distinctly different form of trauma that also has its own specific psychological effects:

"When we see traumatic events represented in the mass media, including

> fictionalized accounts or re-creations, we are not true "witnesses" but rather viewers of visually mediated trauma. We are two or more steps removed from the "event" and thus cannot claim to be traumatized in the same way a victim or physically present witness may be. Still, as anyone who has wanted to "unsee" a photograph from the Holocaust or a news report of the recent genocide in Sudan can attest, viewing images of "distant suffering" can be traumatic" (p. 4).

Last but not least, the final typical reactions to trauma (including eco-trauma), as summarized by Narine, are: "First, we want to combat the trauma but relent because we feel overwhelmed by its magnitude; second, we want to disavow the trauma; and third, we want to make meaning from traumatic events, primarily as a coping strategy" (Narine, 2015, p. 5). Beyond the first two reactions, Žižek (2009, as cited in Narine, 2015, p. 5) terms this third reaction the "temptation of meaning" - a psychological response to the cosmic chaos unveiled by ecological catastrophe: "As a way of coping, we impose meaning and even narrative formations onto chaotic events". For instance, persistent phenomena like storms and droughts are continuously interpreted as punishments for certain sins that humans have committed (though occasionally, they are not particularly interpreted as the ecological sins they ought to be understood as). Although the temptation of meaning is nowhere more evident than in contemporary mass media products, or specifically, in Narine's (2015) words, in attributing ecological events and trauma to narrative motifs and interpretations such as cause-and-effect relationships, "God's law", or the stark opposition between greedy corporations and communal well-being, along with familiar story endings (immoral villains are punished, polluters are brought to justice, the collective recovery of ecological trauma victims, the world regaining equilibrium, etc.); the shortcoming is that this complete narrative model causes the violations to appear merely as isolated incidents or as something already resolved by environmental activists. Consequently, many different nuances of ecological trauma are too frequently lost in the age of news media (Narine, 2015, p. 5).

The challenge for creative narratives lies precisely there. Though they are contemporary narratives, works of art must reach deeper levels to "engage us seriously, and unnervingly, in the work of mapping real ecological crises and their unpredictable effects on us as social and ethical beings" (Narine, 2015, p.9). In other words, a successful narrative is one that transcends hackneyed story frameworks to "prompt us to consider our quickly evolving subject positions, characterized by oscillating feelings of agency and helplessness in the face of contemporary ecological traumas" (Narine, 2015, p.9). Consequently, the examination and analysis of contemporary Vietnamese narratives in this article (creative genres spanning literature, cinema, and documentaries) will focus on exploring both the damage that we, as a species, inflict upon the non-human natural world, and conversely, the injuries that we are compelled to endure from nature in its endless and unforgiving reciprocation. This trauma, as can be seen, is always two-sided because, as Narine (2015) states, our relationship with ecology is perpetually a "symbiotic" one. The narratives we have chosen to survey, therefore, revolve around: (1) narratives concerning individuals harmed by the natural

world, (2) narratives recounting people or social processes that inflict damage upon the environment and/or other species, and (3) narratives describing the aftermath of ecological disaster, often focusing on human trauma and survival efforts. Literary and cinematic works that address extinction and envision (post-)apocalyptic scenarios will consequently be prioritized for analysis as narratives that profoundly express the trauma of non-human species in particular and the natural environment in general, human reflection and anguish over their own culpability, and finally, the efforts to survive and the ecological wounds that persist even in post-apocalyptic imaginings. The works to be analyzed in depth include Mai Dinh Khoi's documentaries *(The Silence of Summer, On the Body of Four Seasons)*, Nguyen Hoang Diep's short film *Who is Alive, Hands Up!*, and Nguyen Ngoc Tu's prose work "Post-Apocalyptic Fiction".

Results and Discussion

1. Documentary Film and the Narrative of Nature's Disappearance: An Approach from the Perspective of Eco-trauma

One of the typical narrative patterns associated with ecological loss and trauma is the narrative concerning the fragile survival of planet Earth and the disappearance (extinction) of natural species. In the final chapter on the future of the Earth, Greg Garrard cites Wallace Stevens' poem "The Planet on the Table" (2000, as cited in Garrard, 2004, p.160) as a means of reminding the reader of a familiar, lyrical vision of the Earth. This poem is conveyed by Wallace Stevens (2000, as cited in Garrard, 2004) alongside an earnest plea to the readership:

> "As you read the poem, hold in your mind's eye a photograph of the Earth taken from space: green and blue, smudged with the motion of clouds… so small in the surrounding darkness that you could imagine cupping it with your hands. A planet that is fragile, a planet of which we are a part but which we do not possess" (p.160)

This image of Earth taken from a spacecraft has become so ubiquitous that it is reproduced across nearly every medium, simultaneously evoking a sense of mysterious beauty and the finite solitude of our living planet. As John Hannigan (1995, as cited in Garrard, 2004, p.160) observes, this photograph, while undeniable, implicitly suggests a "God's-eye view" looking down on Earth as a transcendental power uniquely held by humanity. In a completely contingent manner, it has consequently become the most effective environmental message of the twentieth century. A different, more haunting conceptualization of Earth, as summarized by Andrew Ross (1994, as cited in Garrard,

2004, p.161), is increasingly cited by ecologists to remind us of a "dying planet" marked by "belching smokestacks, seabirds mire in petrochemical sludge, fish floating belly-up, traffic jam (...) and clear-cut forest…" These 'wounds' or 'scars', in Narine's terminology, on the Earth's surface and in the survival of the planet's organisms become a central theme in ecological narratives, imbuing these narratives with a profound sense of elegy, loss, and lamentation.

That is why narratives of ecological trauma are perhaps most closely associated with what Ursula Heise (2017) terms the tragic sensibility or elegy. However, Heise (2017) emphasizes that mourning must first be viewed as a political act. As she points out, over the past half-century, the heightened awareness of species loss has been transformed into countless popular science books, travel writing, novels, poetry, films, documentaries, photography, paintings, murals, musical compositions, and websites. These are narratives of the trauma/injury the environment is enduring, and simultaneously, the trauma experienced by humans who are at once witnesses to these traumas and the perpetrators inflicting these injuries upon nature, yet who are also victims—victims of themselves—in their capacity as a living part of nature. Moreover, the lamentation within these narratives is also a mourning for relational ruptures, for permanent losses that can never be recovered. This is perhaps why Heise (2017) observes that stories of decline commonly seek to affect readers' emotions through mournful and somber laments—a characteristic of the elegy (traditionally a type of poem commemorating a deceased lover) and, in a different way, of tragedy. While Freud (cited in Heise, 2017, p. 34) considered melancholy a pathological state to be overcome, contemporary thinkers seek to rehabilitate it. Mourning for people or things often deemed unworthy of such suffering and publicly expressing sorrow can serve as a form of political response.

In this section, the article selects Mai Dinh Khoi's documentary film as a prime example illustrating how the tragic paradigm governs Vietnamese cultural narratives concerning nature's continuous confrontation with the threat of disappearance. In *The Silence of Summer* (2012), Mai Dinh Khoi begins with footage capturing the suffocating confinement of contemporary Hanoi's summer: images of hustling, traffic-laden roads, overcrowded public buses with people pressed together, unfinished construction sites, and the exhaust pipes of vehicles relentlessly spewing thick plumes of black smoke. This fast-paced cinematography both recreates the hectic rhythm of modern urban life and serves as a metaphor for the dizzying transformation of the living space to which these organisms are compelled to adapt. The pervasive presence of humanity is overwhelming, virtually strangling any other form of natural life. In this environment, the very first shot is dominated by the overpowering sound of running engines, car horns, and operating traffic. Subsequent shots are slower-paced, focusing on individual entities seemingly attempting to isolate themselves from the noise and heat, seeking a private, verdant space beneath the city's sparse tree canopies. The image of a bird standing bewildered on a power line, a tiny insect slowly traversing a tree trunk, a snail lying motionless on a branch, a black butterfly perched on a rough, patchy wall—these

are all images that convey solitude and alienation, suggesting they do not belong to this city at all. Natural life gradually comes into view, but if not isolated and alienated, it is cramped and confined: birds in cages, fish swimming aimlessly within plastic bags containing water.

Although other species are visibly present in the frame (birds, a beetle climbing up a trunk, a few ants circling a cicada shell left on a tree), the authentic sound of nature is almost entirely absent. Dominating the soundscape are anthropogenic noises, such as the whirring of a lawnmower and the clamor of traffic. Even the single instance of birdsong that emerges is produced by birds confined to large cages at a streetside shop. The individuals choosing a 'slow life' in this setting are those who, in one way or another, are attempting to reconnect with nature. These include a motorcycle-taxi driver taking a midday rest under the cool canopy of an old tree, an elderly person seated at a sidewalk barbershop (also catering to the elderly), and a young boy wandering beneath the trees and collecting a discarded cicada shell. The film segment depicting the boy collecting the shed cicada exoskeleton and presenting it to his grandfather seems to subtly imply a rupture in the perception and experience of nature for subsequent generations, as elements of the natural world progressively vanish. In Mai Dinh Khoi's film (2012), the young male character can visualize the form of the insect whose discarded outer shell he holds, but he is completely unable to experience its sound—the cry that was once a characteristic herald of summer. This is because, as the narrator of this documentary says, "the cicada larvae have emerged from the earth, but then quickly vanished into the tree canopy. The cicada's cry—the first and most familiar sign of summer—seems to have disappeared into a chaotic jumble of street noise." The person who possesses these complete experiences is the grandfather, but it is precisely for this reason that he is now undergoing a different, less pleasant emotion: a feeling of nostalgia and regret, which is quite successfully conveyed by the close-up shot of his anxious gaze directed towards the canopy.

The camera angles in Mai (2012) increasingly elevate, yet they persistently depict a landscape belonging exclusively to humanity—a space fully occupied by people with no intention of sharing it with other creatures. This is represented by densely packed rooftops and the adjacent security bars of old collective housing units, where the lives of urban dwellers seem little different from that of birds confined to cages, utterly ignorant of the taste of freedom. The panorama also includes ongoing large-scale urban development projects and unfinished towering high-rise apartment complexes. Viewed from above, the city conveys no sense other than the "disorder of perpetual construction sites". This condition is, indisputably, the consequence of a gradual process of suffocating the city's green spaces. Consequently, nostalgia, as specifically characterized by Mai (2012), becomes a defining feature of the urban residents' narrative:

> "The apartment complex where I live had many trees around it ten years ago. I could easily hear the birds singing in the morning and every afternoon when I returned from school. However, in the last five years, I no longer hear those

seemingly simple things. Now, every time I open the window, all I see are walls."

For immigrants arriving from other areas, this sentiment is echoed: "The countryside is still much cooler than it is here. It's hot here, often steaming; the gust of wind that hits your face is both stinging and hot". For the immigrant population, a marginalized group within the city, the urban space is often viewed as the antithesis of the fresh, cool air of the countryside. Hanoi, in this sense, constantly becomes a point of reference for people to dream of a contrasting space—whether it is the city's own past or a distant rural area. Mai Dinh Khoi's film functions similarly to a sound project, recording the city's various sonic environments at different times of the day, across different areas, and under varying weather conditions. Yet, a monotonous, disheartening uniformity pervades: almost the entire initial segment of the film bombards the listener with the clamor of motor engines, car horns, and the drilling and cutting sounds from aluminum and glass shops. In Mai's film, a close-up shot of a misting system pointed directly into the air portrays a desperate attempt to salvage a city's stifling heat, a city that has lost an excessive amount of its greenery. However, all this imagery evokes a sense of futility and temporariness. Despite the mist being sprayed at full capacity into the atmosphere, it seems incapable of counterbalancing the fiery hot exhaust pipes under the intense summer sun. The seasonal auditory experience is almost completely eradicated: "now, in this city, the sign of summer is recognized first by the heat, by the crowds at sidewalk iced-tea stalls, rather than by the sounds of crickets, cicadas, or the calls of birds in the cool, green canopy". Elderly figures repeatedly appear in Mai''s film as the custodians of memory for a bygone Hanoi, when the urban area was still a space of co-existence where people shared their habitat with numerous other species. The clearest sound of flapping wings throughout the entire film is that of a plastic bird. The scarce green spaces remaining in the heart of the city are now parks. However, "even in the city's most expansive parks now, only a few sparrows remain, flitting among the branches or on stone edges, seeking insects, grasshoppers, and locusts within the neatly manicured lawns, their calls ultimately lost in the city's din". The original text discusses how urban parks, despite being green spaces, often fail to provide a true respite from the city's noise, and how human activities within them make them unsuitable for wildlife. Although parks stand out as prominent green spaces within the city, they are nevertheless sites where the sounds of nature are suppressed and obscured. Rejecting the very space they inhabit, people seek out these parks to spend their rare moments of daily rest. Furthermore, as depicted in Mai's 2012 film, this artificial "green space", filled with the clamor of human conversation and loudspeakers, is not a viable habitat for other natural organisms: "The city's parks are crowded with people, preventing birds from congregating. Even sparrows are absent, and birds like the red-whiskered bulbul or others do not dare to fly there, because the people are so numerous."

The gradual disappearance of insects from urban centers renders the insects of the Tam Dao region seemingly exotic and unique in the eyes of city-dwelling tourists. Paradoxically, this very perception is the root cause of the loss of these species within

their native habitat, as locals engage in mass-scale hunting of the insects, often using neon lights as a method of capture. This resulting scarcity elevates the search for the familiar, natural sounds of summer into a poetic endeavor: "What remains for the sound of summer, where do we find a moment of tranquility amidst the summer city?" The imagery of a bustling, noisy Hanoi, day and night, recurs throughout the film like a refrain, sometimes juxtaposed with the serene, lush landscapes of rural villages—places featuring beggar-ticks (hoa cỏ may), leisurely grazing cows, pristine lotus ponds, and children flying kites or catching crickets in vast rice fields. Mai Dinh Khoi's 2012 film appears to re-enact the familiar narrative pattern of the pastoral genre by invoking a picturesque countryside of "spacious fields, barefoot children running on the grass mixed with the staccato sounds of crickets and grasshoppers". However, his film quickly transcends these romantic "traps" to confront a much harsher reality of the countryside: the present sound over those fields is the creaking of a manual pesticide pump, ushering in another kind of deadly silence. These details make it difficult for viewers not to recall Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). Carson's work also begins with a pastoral fable about a land where seemingly all forms of life coexist harmoniously with everything around it—a rural scene featuring fertile farms, green fields, foxes calling on the hills, silent deer, ferns and wild flowers, and schools of fish quietly swimming beneath cool, clear streams. However, a deadly silence then descends upon the entire region. The cause of this terrifying quiet is not a supernatural force but the hand of man—specifically, the widespread and long-term use of pesticides. This, too, is a key message that *The Silence of Summer* aims to convey to its audience. While Carson (1962) was most concerned with the sound of birds greeting spring, Mai (2012) reminds people of the absence of the sounds of the small insects that once bustled across the fields in summer.

The Body of the Four Seasons (2016) is another documentary by Mai Dinh Khoi. Ursula often highlights a characteristic feature of this century's environmental activists' approach: the public expression of grief for non-human existences—species, places, and even operational processes (certain weather patterns, the changing of the seasons, animal migration)—that are typically considered inappropriate subjects for mourning. Mai Dinh Khoi's film, although largely resembling a poem about the beauty and wonder of the annual seasonal transitions across the land, harbors a vague anxiety regarding the potential disappearance and disruption of this perennial law. The body of the four seasons bears within it this lamentation against the foreseen dangers, suggesting that the beautiful, poetic, and vibrant cinematic depictions, following the seasonal rhythm, may very well become merely an attempt to record the memory of a past that has been, and is currently, vanishing. And the pervasive obsession throughout Mai Dinh Khoi's (2016) film is also the trauma and haunting of wounds and injuries:

> "But I want to tell you about another season: About how the birds that herald the season are trapped in the fields, about the rivers whose waters rise and fall to a different rhythm, about the lands where the four seasons no longer appear, where the scenery has nothing left to change. And spring, summer, autumn, winter—all are

exposed like a wound".

The work, to use Narine's (2015) formulation, serves as a testimony to the scars, and also to the gaping wounds that have yet to heal and still ache on the "body" of nature, on the body of the homeland, of the very cherished land to which we are connected; in it, we witness the pain of the traumatized subject, of the witness—who is simultaneously a sharer of the enduring trauma. Coupled with the desire to expose the 'truths' of pain, documentaries such as those by Mai Dinh Khoi compel people to reflect upon their own ways of thinking, their acceptance, and their everyday life practices.

2. Eco-Trauma and Eco-Recovery in Vietnamese Contemporary Fictional and Cinematic Narratives

In this section, the article proceeds to analyze the more fictional narratives that touch upon ecotrauma, specifically selecting narratives that present visions of the apocalypse (or post-apocalypse). This choice is based on the argument by Barbara Creed (2015) that such visions represent one of the main concerns in cinema and art regarding ecotrauma. These anti-utopian conceptions of the apocalypse and post-apocalyptic life do not stem from a root of nihilism or pure mythical fantasy. On the contrary, they are intimately tied to an awareness of contemporary destruction and the bleak premonitions for the future, not only of humanity but of the entire Earth.

One particularly striking contemporary narrative on this theme is the prose work "Post-Apocalyptic Fiction", published in the collection *Hong tay khói lạnh (Warming hands on cold smoke)* by writer Nguyen Ngoc Tu. Right from the opening lines, Nguyen Ngoc Tu (2021, p.7) paints a scene of a future Earth surface that is utterly damaged and exhausted, to the point that it has become a dead organism itself. It can no longer sustain life for any living creature, including humans: "the earth's surface had no life, no green, only leaden grey dust coating the soil, pale as baked salt. And the sun, a fiery sun that annihilated any creature directly confronting it, with its destructive heat." It can be argued that this vision of Earth's future does not merely arise from daily news reports concerning climate change and global warming, the ever-enlarging ozone hole, and the ongoing, seemingly irreversible process of glacial melt. Instead, it also serves as the fundamental source of our increasingly pronounced anxiety and psychological trauma when confronting the question of the future of the Earth, our own future, and the future of succeeding generations. Consequently, post-apocalyptic visions and projections are not distant concepts; rather, they exist perpetually in our minds, lying at the heart of our anxiety and psychological trauma when contemplating the environment and life.

In this post-apocalyptic world, the shared experience of trauma between humanity and the Earth and all life/organisms on the planet is vividly depicted. In the imagery presented by Nguyen Ngoc Tu (2021, p. 9), both humans and other organisms, under the scorching heat of the sun and the planet's surface, must confront extinction and the most visceral physical suffering and destruction: "Your hair will burst into flames first,

smelling exactly like burning plastic." This is the father's warning to his son, who is over forty years old, as they evacuate the Earth's surface to escape the incinerating sun and winds in an extreme state of climate change. This is because the father himself had once undergone that very trauma, that pain and destruction of the body, when he was unfortunately exposed to that fierce sunlight; his own hair and skin had been incinerated by the sun, scorching patches of his scalp. "Two long scars draped across his shoulders: Back then, they opened the door at the Sublevel 27 to reinforce the dome, and the old man, completely drunk, wandered outside. The moment lasted only a few minutes but was enough to create those deep, cooked burns on his skin and flesh" (Nguyen, 2021, p. 10). Humanity, at this juncture, is arguably no longer just the witness who self-reflects on its own ecological culpability, but one that shares a common fate and a collective trauma with all living species, even the smallest.

Nguyen Ngoc Tu's work presents a speculative world (one entirely plausible to become reality) where human actions have resulted in catastrophic climate change, leading to the destruction of all life on the planet. Yet, humanity is simultaneously desperate in its failed quest to find a destination for inter-planetary migration (directly paralleling the current, unsuccessful efforts of present-day humanity, which is already exploring every possibility for a new extra-terrestrial habitat). Ultimately, Earth remains humanity's refuge, though no longer on the surface, but underground. The Great Migration that all characters in the narrative undergo is a descent into this subterranean realm, a world named "The Underworld" (Ngầm). This world is designed and constructed with every convenience and is sustained by virtual reality technology, which replicates and reconstructs every image that once existed on the surface of the Earth (with oceans, green trees, and even sophisticated sunlight and artificial "'sun-lamps" that are raised and lowered daily). All individuals within this Underworld are, in effect, in a state of post-traumatic stress. This trauma is not merely the aftermath of a catastrophic event where survival hung in a delicate balance; it is a protracted trauma resulting from the permanent severance from their homeland and the eternal separation from everything they were once connected to. And if, as Amorok (2007) posits, trauma originates from the rupture of relationships, then in the work of Nguyễn Ngọc Tư (2021, p. 11), this rupture manifests as a break with the native land's surface and the loss of a harmonious relationship with nature. This relationship is exemplified by sunlight, which remains the fundamental source that nurtures life, offering warmth, beauty, and splendor, thereby granting people scenes of peaceful and concordant life: "The old man knew it was difficult to prevent the nostalgic memories of someone who had once bathed in the September sun, a sun that, once encountered, would never be forgotten until death." Furthermore, if the term "nostalgia" originated as a designation for a psycho-physiological illness affecting Swiss mercenary soldiers fighting far from home—an illness complete with distressing symptoms (fatigue, insomnia, abnormal heart rate, high fever) arising from their intense longing to return to their homeland; then the people in the Underground (Ngầm) settlement described by Nguyễn Ngọc Tư (2021, pp. 12-13) are undergoing precisely this ailment, in a powerful yearning for their original home on the Surface: "every September, a group of people in the Underground would

become so intensely nostalgic for the old sun that they would feel faint, losing all desire to work, climbing onto the dome to look back at the former sky." Amidst a harsh world with dwindling oxygen, where humans must continue to employ the most pragmatic thinking to sustain and prolong life, and where all existing inter-strata social injustices are meticulously replicated; each small human life embraces its own trauma of nostalgia. For instance, this is the sorrowful longing for the Surface experienced by a housewife whose time and energy are utterly depleted by domestic care work:

> "I recall the markets on "the Surface" were characterized by an absolute lack of structure. One could observe microbial life proliferating between bowls of crab vermicelli, sugar, eggs, and sweet red bean dessert. A single stop afforded the procurement of all necessities, for instance, one might acquire sausages, yogurt, flashlight batteries, and an ancestral herbal cure for rhinitis from a vendor specializing in pianos". (Nguyen, 2021, pp. 21-22).

The overly perfect and highly structured and organized reconstruction in the new place, therefore, only served to further highlight the discrepancies with the old homeland to which return is impossible. Yet, this nostalgia does not merely dwell on a yearning for an old order; rather, it is a longing for a former symbiosis, not only in human relationships but also with other life forms (like bacteria crackling in the air). Nguyễn Ngọc Tư, arguably, has written brilliantly about how such mundane things become invaluable when they are forever lost and irrecoverable. It is not just that woman; many individuals in the Underworld have been and continue to attend psychological therapy sessions. Nguyễn (2021, pp. 40-41) directly names them as "sullen invalids" or "melancholy sufferers". And this sorrow, as described, haunted them even before the Great Exodus, as they faced, day by day, hour by hour, a dying world, and simultaneously, the physical and psychological distress caused by the throes of climate change:

> "Then the symptoms re-occupied the sullen invalid, fueled by the scorching sun, by a planetary surface in its death throes [...] Xuyến Chi sobbed incessantly, her sparse hair matted to her neck, dripping wet; the towel she carried under her arm to wipe herself was now running with water. Cumbersome in her build, the old woman had but one sole desire: to be dry for just a moment. Believing that only in death would her sweat glands stop over-functioning, she had, on multiple occasions, wanted to throw herself from a height to end it all" (Nguyễn, 2021, p. 40).

Despair and a tragic sensibility concerning the Earth's future and one's continued survival are vividly depicted. Yet, the most representative manifestation of the post-traumatic state following the Great Evacuation is the "paralysis" of emotion and response, an outcome of a massive, overwhelming event (Narine (2015) and Amorok (2017) both consider this a defensive reaction, a coping strategy for continued survival): "The entire group sat inert, silent like dark pieces of furniture. Their faces were clearly darkened by depression, yet no one complained even a single word. It seemed they

were too exhausted to speak, or they were adrift in the thought that there was nothing left worth complaining about after this apocalypse. There is a certain threshold, and once crossed, people suddenly become numb…" (Nguyen, 2021, p. 44). Nguyen Ngoc Tu, though writing about post-apocalyptic fantasy, appears to touch upon the very psychological reaction/strategy that contemporary humanity is undergoing in the face of ecological trauma, as eco-anxieties have profoundly permeated our very cells, and as overwhelming crisis news about catastrophes, disseminated through mass media, leaves us psychologically paralyzed and stripped of the motivation to act.

However, in the final analysis, the ultimate direction of Nguyen Ngoc Tu's work remains the possibility of healing. Fleeing the surface world for the "Ngầm" (The Underworld/ Underground) world to preserve survival, accepting a separation that may never afford a return to the homeland of 'the Surface', Nguyen Ngoc Tu's anti-utopian work seems to echo 1984 (George Orwell, 1949). It depicts an Underground world structured not only upon pre-existing social injustice but one where, despite being profoundly intervened by technological advancements, human life becomes increasingly constrained and suffocating—due to the depletion of oxygen and the tyranny of those in power. The Ngầm (Underworld) is a world that prohibits the existence of multilingualism; everyone is only permitted to speak a single language, the Common Tongue (tiếng-Chung). By rejecting all native languages, the Common Tongue serves as a powerful instrument of control. Such a replacement language is also the quickest way to erase all attachments or links to former relationships. Nevertheless, the young mother in the work's final chapter makes the decision to escape, carrying her unborn child to a secluded corner of the Underground. This is an act of resistance against the community's scorn and the state's punishment. It is a way for her to speak the ancient language, to sing lullabies to her child with fervent words, and to transmit to her little one an image of the Surface of the past. This act reconnects the succeeding generation with relationships that seemed destined to be lost forever, offering the child a dream and a love for the Surface—a promise of potential return and healing in the future.

Ultimately, this essay seeks to explore one further work of art that also addresses the dystopian counter-futures of Earth—a world where humanity is driven to despair by the scarcity of food, water, and clean air, pushing the brutal relationship between people, and between humanity and nature, to its absolute extreme: the short film Ai còn sống, Giơ tay lên! (Who is Alive, Hands Up!) by director Nguyễn Hoàng Điệp (2015). The undeniable, disheartening information concerning current environmental crises and climate change has provided the fertile ground for these somber imaginings and the pervasive anxiety about apocalyptic threats, about the seemingly inevitable confrontation of Earth and humankind with the precipice of annihilation. The work opens with a scene of a hunt on arid, barren land, where the hunter must accept even the smallest, toughest insects as sustenance within a strictly limited timeframe. All relationships surrounding humanity in this epoch are steeped in violence: the relentless pursuit of any trace of life in nature, the desperate search for anything edible to sustain existence. They are perpetually besieged by the "Vultures"—cannibalistic predators who

hunt down the frail and sick within families, forcing them to surrender the weak to alleviate the "burden on society." (Once taken, this sick person ceases to be a useless consumer of food, drink, and clean air; instead, they 'contribute' to society by becoming food for the famished, dehumanized masses.) As one of the film's female protagonists states, in this savage, inhumane society, people are left with only three choices: to become the hunter, to become the hunted but possess the strength to flee, or to become the food. And in the context of the slaughterous pursuit of supreme power and dominion over all species, a bleak prospect unfolds before humanity itself: humankind becomes the solitary species, and thus, the absolutely isolated one. The darker side of human nature and the anxiety surrounding the dormant seeds of violence inherent in individuals and their relationships become a profound obsession for the film. For Amorok, violence (directed at the self, the other, and nature) is also presented as a reaction to debilitation and trauma, propelling humanity from one injury to the next, into a perpetual extension of breakdowns and ruptures in all connective relationships. Amidst this backdrop where violence reigns, the two sisters in the film resolutely cling to their mother, who has been bedridden for two years, refusing to surrender her to the vultures. In the eyes of a savage and tyrannical society, this is an unacceptable act. Yet, keeping her alive (a mother in a two-year coma, unable to move or communicate) is perhaps precisely the way the two daughters soothe their own traumas, following the violent interactions with nature and society they face daily. In Nguyễn Hoàng Điệp's 2016 short film, the encounter with the girl from the future's future—a "witness" to utter decline and exhaustion, yet also a bearer of hope for continued survival and ecological restoration of humanity itself (through re-establishing connection with natural organisms, beginning with the grafting of human tissue cells onto plant cells, creating human-plant organisms):

> "Having consumed every species, Earth became uninhabitable. Prolonged saline rains forced us to attempt an alteration of our destiny by grafting plant spores onto our bodies. We named this the seed of life, for without it, we could not draw breath in the wild."

The girl from "the future of future" in this film, therefore, offers not just a narrative of dark and fraught survival but also a promising possibility. When broken relationships are sought to be reconnected, when symbiosis returns, and when humanity is composed enough to confront its own ecological guilt, the promise of life, though still exceedingly fragile, is not impossible. This, in essence, is the open potentiality of recovery from ecological trauma that Vietnamese fictional narratives seem to be embracing and in which they are sowing hope.

Conclusion

In essence, the article analyzes the conception of ecological trauma and recovery as expressed through contemporary Vietnamese fictional and non-fictional narratives. Beginning with documentary films and then expanding to more imaginative, artistic

narratives, the paper aims to demonstrate an increasingly pronounced ecological sensibility in contemporary cultural life. Operating in parallel with daily environmental news updates, these narratives offer a more profound, ecological depth perspective, simultaneously introducing possibilities intimately tied to the psychological anxieties of contemporary individuals. The political dimension and the impetus for action are, therefore, particularly evident in these narratives (especially within the documentary genre), yet they also open up deep-seated hopes concerning alternative possibilities of healing, reconnection, restoration, and repair.

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Ecocritical Analysis of Environmental Destruction and Climate Change in Jostein Gaarder's *The World of Anna*

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Abstract

This research examines the ecological themes in Jostein Gaarder's *The World of Anna*, emphasizing the novel's significance in portraying environmental destruction and climate change. As a work of environmental literature, the novel serves as a vital cultural artifact that illustrates the devastating impact of human activity on nature and underscores the urgency of ecological preservation. Despite the growing body of research exploring climate change in literature, there is limited academic focus on how "The World of Anna" specifically addresses the nuances of environmental destruction. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the research question: How does the novel depict environmental destruction and climate change, and what is its significance in the broader discourse on ecological crises?. The research employs a qualitative design. Data collection involves a close reading of the novel to identify descriptions, themes, and narrative devices related to environmental degradation. The data analysis integrates an ecocritical framework, categorizing findings into key themes such as deforestation, biodiversity loss and animal extinct, pollution, the disappearance of oil and drought. The findings highlight that Gaarder's "The World of Anna" effectively portrays the irreversible consequences of environmental degradation, offering vivid examples of ecological collapse while provoking readers to confront these pressing dilemmas. By integrating storytelling with critical reflections on climate change, study affirms that climate-themed fiction can serve not only as a mirror to ecological realities but also as a pedagogical tool to foster environmental awareness among student

Keywords: ecocriticism; climate change; environmental destruction

Introduction

Climate change has become a central topic of global discourse, driven by the increasingly severe rise in Earth's surface and atmospheric temperatures. Recent data reveals that global greenhouse gas emissions reached a record high in 2023. The Antarctic ice sheet experienced a dramatic loss—nearly 75% more between 2011 and 2020 compared to the previous decade (2001–2010). Furthermore, the extinction rates of animal and plant species are projected to increase by two to five times in the coming decade, accompanied by a significant decline in genetic diversity and a weakening of global ecosystems (Fletcher et al., 2024). The widespread environmental degradation caused by climate change has compelled policymakers—both nationally and globally—to develop mitigation strategies to address its escalating impacts. One prominent initiative is the Paris Climate Accord, which seeks to limit global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, with a more ambitious target of 1.5°C. Complementing this effort, the European Environment Agency has outlined mitigation plans aimed at reducing the release of heat-trapping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere (European Environment Agency, 2023).

Environmental degradation caused by climate change has elicited responses not only through policy-based mitigation efforts at both local and global levels, but also through literary works that foreground climate change as a central theme. One of the most influential texts in this regard is Silent Spring by Rachel Carson, published in 1962, which remains a seminal work in the contemporary environmental movement. Carson's narrative exposes the dangers of indiscriminate chemical biocide use, highlighting the ecological consequences of human intervention (Love, 2003). A similar concern is articulated by Keith Thomas in Man and the Natural World , who explores the tension between environmental preservation and the adverse transformations brought about by technological advancement and urbanization (Thomas, 1984). Expanding on this literary engagement, (Johns-Putra, 2016) defines "climate change fiction" as a genre concerned with anthropogenic climate change and global warming. This definition implicitly traces the origins of the genre to Arthur Herzog's Heat (2003), which is often cited as one of the earliest examples of climate change fiction, marking a foundational moment in its literary history.

The growing number of literary works emerging with climate change as their central theme and genre has been accompanied by the rise of ecocriticism—a theoretical approach that examines the dynamic interactions between humans, literature, and the environment across global contexts. Ecocriticism, as defined by (Greg Garrard, 2004), is a branch of literary theory grounded in the premise that "human beings, literature, and the environment interact." Idrus & Mukahal (2021) further elaborates that ecocriticism serves as a methodological framework within literary studies to investigate ecological hazards and functions as a multidisciplinary call to scientific engagement in mitigating the effects of climate change. Love describes

ecocriticism as an explicit response to a previously neglected dialogue between literature and the environment, aiming to elevate this discourse to a higher level of human consciousness (2003). He also emphasizes that ecocriticism represents the participation of the field of English literature and pedagogy in addressing the environmental realities of our time. Interest in ecocritical inquiry has continued to grow. At the 1992 Western Literature Association meeting, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was established. Within a year, ASLE had attracted over 300 members, and by 1995, membership had surpassed 750, culminating in the organization's first official conference. This development reflects the expanding role of literary studies in contributing to human awareness of environmental degradation and underscores the relevance of literature as a medium for ecological consciousness.

The World of Anna is a novel written by Jostein Gaarder and published in 2013. Set in 2012, the narrative follows a young girl named Anna who possesses visions of the Earth's future in the year 2082. With a central theme of environmental degradation and climate change, the novel portrays the consequences of human exploitation of nature, including the extinction of animal and plant species and the depletion of fossil fuels due to excessive extraction. Through this work, Gaarder—also renowned for his philosophical bestseller *Sophie's World* novel—which conveys a message of environmental awareness and the importance of nurturing a sense of care and responsibility toward the planet (Azizah, 2018). Several studies have employed ecocritical perspectives to analyze literary representations of nature and ecological crises. For instance, (Muhlisin & Rahayu, 2024) examined the portrayal of nature in John Lanchester's *The Wall*, while (Thiyagarajan, 2021) explored the intersection of animals, caste, gender, and the environment in the novels of *Perumal Murugan*. (Hutama & Titis Setyabudi, 2020) also conducted an ecocritical study of The World of Anna, focusing on Anna's visionary ability to perceive the future state of the Earth. The present study differs from previous research by specifically examining the depiction of environmental destruction and climate change in Jostein Gaarder's *The World of Anna*, and assessing its significance within the broader discourse on ecological crises. This analysis will be conducted through the lens of ecocriticism, aiming to deepen our understanding of the effects of climate change and its representation in literature, as illustrated in Gaarder's novel.

Literature offers a distinctive prism through which to explore the complex relationship between humans and the natural world. Analyzing environmental issues and ecological degradation in literary texts is essential for fostering ecological awareness and promoting ethical reflection (Tajane, 2024; Karmakar, 2024). Ecocritical readings of literature encourage readers to reconsider their perspectives on environmental deterioration and to engage more critically with the ecological implications of human behavior. As Radhakrishnan asserts, environmental literature not only enhances public understanding of ecological issues but also plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and motivating sustainable action (2025). Literature thus

functions both as a mirror and a catalyst—reflecting the realities of environmental crises while inspiring transformative change (Dasht Peyma, 2025).

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative design. The qualitative method is a research approach that generates descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words derived from observed behaviors and experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997). The study applies an ecocritical framework based on the theoretical model developed by Greg Garrard, which emphasizes the relationship between human and non-human entities within their environmental contexts. Garrard's ecocriticism is structured around six central tropes that reflect how literature and culture engage with ecological concerns: pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animal, and earth (Greg Garrard, 2004). Pollution explores the moral and ethical dimensions of environmental contamination, particularly its impact on marginalized communities. Wilderness examines human responsibility toward the preservation of wild or human-inhabited landscapes. Apocalypse refers to ecological disaster narratives that dramatize environmental collapse and provoke ethical reflection. Dwelling highlights creative adaptation and ecological resilience in the face of environmental challenges. Animal focuses on the representation of non-human creatures and their symbolic or ethical roles in literature. Earth encompasses a holistic view of the planet, engaging with concepts such as deep ecology and global environmental justice. This ecocritical lens provides a nuanced framework for analyzing how *The World of Anna* by Jostein Gaarder represents environmental destruction and climate change, and how these representations contribute to broader ecological discourse.

The primary data for this research consist of quotations and narrative excerpts from Jostein Gaarder's *The World of Anna* (2013). Data collection began with a comprehensive reading of the novel, followed by close attention to words, sentences, and discursive elements that pertain to environmental destruction and climate change. Relevant textual evidence was systematically identified and categorized according to thematic concerns such as deforestation, biodiversity loss, pollution, and global warming. These categories were annotated using sticky notes to facilitate thematic organization and analytical clarity. Upon completing the data collection process, the analysis was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach. Each selected quotation was examined individually and interpreted through the lens of Greg Garrard's ecocritical framework. This involved mapping the textual representations onto Garrard's six tropes—pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animal, and earth—to uncover the ecological dimensions embedded in the narrative. To strengthen the analysis and ensure contextual relevance, recent scholarly publications on climate change and global environmental degradation were consulted. This integration of literary analysis with contemporary climate research provided a deeper understanding of how The World of

Anna reflects and contributes to the broader discourse on ecological crises.

Results and Discussion

Jostein Gaarder is a Norwegian author born on August 8, 1952. He studied the history of ideas, religion, and Nordic literature at the University of Oslo. In 1991, Gaarder published Sophie's World, a philosophical novel that became an international bestseller and introduced readers worldwide to the history of Western thought. Beyond his literary achievements, Gaarder has been actively involved in promoting sustainable development for nearly three decades. In 1997, he established the Sophie Prize, an international award granted to organizations dedicated to environmental advocacy. Through this initiative, Gaarder contributed millions of dollars to support environmental causes, reflecting his deep commitment to ecological issues. Drawing from his background as an environmental activist, Gaarder wrote *The World of Anna*, a novel that addresses the ecological crisis and aims to raise global awareness about climate change through fiction. The narrative centers on Anna, a sixteen-year-old girl with a vivid imagination that allows her to envision the future of Earth and its deterioration due to human actions. In her visions, Anna sees herself as her future granddaughter, Nova, living in the year 2082. Through Nova's perspective, Anna witnesses the devastating consequences of climate change and is confronted with criticism from her descendant for failing to protect the planet for future generations. These dreamlike encounters inspire Anna to commit herself to environmental stewardship. Through this novel, Gaarder conveys powerful messages about the importance of preserving the Earth for posterity, using fiction as a medium to cultivate ecological awareness and ethical reflection.

This section presents the results of the analysis of *The World of Anna*, structured in accordance with the research questions. The discussion is divided into two parts. The first section is finding which explores the theme of environmental destruction as depicted in the novel, while the second is discussion which examines the significance of *The World of Anna* novel in contributing to contemporary ecological discourse.

Environmental destruction is vividly portrayed in *The World of Anna*, particularly through the depiction of Earth's future as seen by Anna's great-granddaughter, Nova, in the year 2082. On her sixteenth birthday in 2012, Anna dreams of becoming Nova and, through a tablet device in her hands, gains a glimpse into the future state of the planet.

1. Deforestation

Deforestation refers to the clearing or thinning of forests by human activities, often for agriculture, urban development, or resource extraction (Balboni, Berman, Burgess, & Olken, 2023). Moreover, (de Oca et al., 2021) describes it as the removal of forest cover for human use, including wood products and croplands, while (Agrawal, Nepstad, &

Chhatre, 2011) emphasizes its role as a process driven by economic interests that leads to the destruction or degradation of forest ecosystems. Currently, the world faces an alarming rate of forest loss—about 10 million hectares annually—with 2024 witnessing over 26 million hectares of natural forest disappearance (Heino et al., 2015). Tropical primary forests, crucial for biodiversity and carbon sequestration, are vanishing at a rate of 18 football fields per minute. This loss is exacerbated by climate-induced wildfires, agricultural expansion, and illegal logging. The consequences are profound: increased greenhouse gas emissions, disrupted water cycles, soil erosion, and the displacement of forest-dependent communities. As deforestation accelerates, it intensifies global climate change and undermines ecological resilience, demanding urgent international cooperation and sustainable land-use policies (Brockhaus et al., 2021).

Gaarder's *The World of Anna* vividly portrays environmental destruction, particularly through its depiction of Earth's future as envisioned by Anna's great-granddaughter, Nova, in the year 2082. On her sixteenth birthday in 2012, Anna dreams of becoming Nova and, through a tablet device she holds, glimpses the deteriorating condition of the planet decades ahead.

> As this destruction took place, man became the most populous mammal on earth. Of course there was a connection – mankind had threatened its closest relatives with extinction, not only by cutting down forest and destroying habitats but also by trapping and hunting illegally (Gaarder, 2013, p. 66).

Deforestation is one of the key forms of environmental destruction depicted by Jostein Gaarder in T*he World of Anna*, with a strong emphasis on the relationship between humans and nature. Anna expresses the idea that humans and nature form an inseparable unity and must care for one another like neighbors sharing the same planet. She argues that humans should not cut down forests, as doing so destroys habitats and threatens the survival of countless species.

Forests play a vital ecological role in sustaining life on Earth. They regulate the climate, maintain the water cycle, and preserve biodiversity. As natural carbon sinks, forests absorb vast amounts of carbon dioxide, helping to mitigate global warming and stabilize atmospheric conditions. Through transpiration, they influence rainfall patterns and replenish groundwater, ensuring the availability of fresh water. Moreover, forests provide habitats for innumerable species, fostering ecological balance and resilience. Without them, the planet's environmental equilibrium would be severely compromised, endangering both human survival and the health of all living organisms.

Despite their importance, deforestation continues at an alarming rate. Large-scale land clearing persists in various regions, driven by housing development and the conversion of forested areas into agricultural land. Globally, deforestation remains a pressing issue, with approximately 10 million hectares of forest lost each year. In 2024 alone, a staggering 26.8 million hectares of natural forest were destroyed, resulting in

an estimated 10 gigatonnes of CO_2 emissions (Bodo, Gimah, & Seomoni, 2021). The most alarming trend was the record-breaking loss of tropical primary forests—6.7 million hectares—primarily due to wildfires intensified by climate change and El Niño conditions. These forests, crucial for biodiversity, carbon storage, and water regulation, are vanishing at a rate equivalent to 18 football fields per minute. As global population growth and land demand increase, pressure on forests intensifies, threatening ecological balance and accelerating climate change.

2. Biodiversity loss and animal extinction

Another form of environmental destruction depicted by Gaarder in *The World of Anna* is biodiversity loss and animal extinction. The novel highlights Anna's deep concern for climate change and global warming. Together with her boyfriend, Jonas, she expresses a desire to initiate programs aimed at mitigating the effects of climate change. Motivated by her environmental awareness, Anna possesses a strong understanding of various forms of biodiversity, including flora and fauna. She regularly monitors the conservation status of animals through her favorite website, www.arkive.org. Through this platform, Anna observes changes in the planet over time and across different regions. For instance, in Africa, plants and animals that once flourished across the continent are now confined to scattered remnants of primordial forest. In Europe, however, the breakdown of biodiversity began much earlier than in other continents, reflecting a longer history of ecological degradation.

> It has been declared extinct, this very second, by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), for generation, no living soul has seen a heard of antelopes, gnu or giraffes in what used to be called the African Savannah. Now the herbivores are gone, the beast of Prey have gone too. Some of the species have survived in zoos, but now they are dying out too (Gaarder, 2015, p. 28).

Drawing from *The World of Anna*, Gaarder illustrates the accelerating decline in animal populations and the growing threat of extinction. The narrative warns that in the coming years, the number of endangered species may increase significantly, depriving future generations of the opportunity to witness the beauty and diversity of Earth's flora and fauna. As Nova recounts in the year 2082, zoos of the future are populated not by living animals, but by artificial replicas—faithful imitations of species that have already vanished. This depiction underscores biodiversity loss and species extinction as critical consequences of climate change. Climate change now acts as a third major driver of biodiversity loss, alongside habitat destruction and overexploitation. Rising global temperatures, extreme weather events, and shifting ecosystems are pushing thousands of species toward extinction. A recent study published in BioScience reveals that at least 3,500 animal species are directly threatened by climate-related stresses, with marine invertebrates—such as mollusks, corals, and hydrozoans—particularly vulnerable due to their limited mobility and sensitivity to warming waters (Defara Dhanya, 2025). One striking example is the Bramble Cay melomys, a small rodent native to the Great Barrier Reef, which has been officially recognized as the first

mammal to go extinct due to climate change—its habitat lost to rising sea levels. According to the IUCN Red List, over 14,000 species are currently threatened by climate change. If global temperatures rise by 2°C by the year 2100, up to 18% of terrestrial species could face a high risk of extinction ("Which Animals Were Most Impacted by Climate Change in 2024?," 2025).

> But Nova is painfully aware that everything she is watching on the screen above her bed has gone for ever. Now there are no coral reefs and no shoals of brightly coloured fish. The sea is too acidic – for more than a hundred years it was forced to swallow millions and millions of tonnes of C02. It as though a demon had been released and had decided, right, that's it. That's enough! All these beautiful species must suffocate (Gaarder, 2015, p. 32).

The excerpt from Gaarder's *The World of Anna* presents Nova in the year 2082, saddened by the stark contrast in the beauty of the ocean floor across generations. In the present day, we can still witness the vibrant marine landscape—colorful shells, dazzling fish, and thriving coral reefs. Diving remains a popular activity among tourists in regions renowned for their underwater beauty. However, in Gaarder's imagined future, Nova can only experience the ocean's splendor through archived video clips on the internet, as the actual beauty of the marine world has vanished. By 2082, coral reefs have disappeared, and the once-vivid fish species are extinct, largely due to the increasing acidity of seawater. As Wenjing Gao notes in her study on heavy metal mobility under seawater acidification, the ocean has absorbed billions of tons of CO_2 over more than a century, severely altering its chemical balance. In addition to acidification, marine environments are heavily polluted by plastic waste—either directly discarded by humans or carried downstream from rivers. As (Chandrappa & Sagar, 2023) observes that ocean has effectively become a repository for vast amounts of terrestrial waste. Garbage dumping and other forms of pollution now rank among the most destructive activities affecting marine ecosystems, biodiversity, and public health. These factors contribute to the degradation of the ocean floor and threaten the survival of marine life. Through this portrayal, Gaarder warns readers that the beauty of the ocean and its ecosystems will gradually disappear unless humanity takes immediate action to protect and restore them.

3. The Disappearance of Oil

As depicted in Gaarder's *The World of Anna*, the future holds a grim reality where oil has become a scarce resource, depleted after centuries of exploitation by previous generations. In the year 2082, Anna encounters a boy from the Middle East who has become a climate refugee, traveling with a group displaced from his homeland. Once a wealthy nation due to its abundant oil reserves, his country has vanished beneath encroaching desert sands. With no oil left, its people are forced to migrate to Norway—ironically, not by modern transport, but by camel, symbolizing a regression in mobility and technological access. This narrative starkly illustrates the long-term consequences of fossil fuel dependency and environmental neglect. Gaarder's portrayal serves as a cautionary tale, urging readers to reflect on the unsustainable nature of

resource exploitation and the socio-political upheaval it may cause. The image of oil-rich nations reduced to barren wastelands and their citizens becoming nomads underscores the urgency of transitioning to sustainable energy and addressing climate-induced displacement.

> Oil was a disaster for my country. We became rich overnight, but now we're poor. How can we be rich when we can no longer live in our own country? (Gaarder, 2015, p. 63).

In the United States, the extraction and use of petroleum from beneath the earth's surface was first introduced around the same time as the abolition of slavery. Factory machines began using oil as fuel to replace enslaved labor, which had become economically and morally untenable. Oil quickly became a preferred energy source—easily pumped and widely accessible. Although the use of petroleum ushered in a new era of modernity, enabling the operation of cars, airplanes, and other machines that allowed humans to travel rapidly across vast distances, it came with long-term consequences. Fossil fuels, including oil, coal, and gas, are non-renewable resources. If humanity continues to consume them without regard for future generations, these resources will inevitably be exhausted. Today, the concentration of CO_2 in the atmosphere is approximately 40% higher than it was before humans began burning fossil fuels. This dramatic increase in greenhouse gases has accelerated climate change and intensified environmental degradation.

> 'All the carbon stored in fossil fuels – oil, coal and gas – has been "parked" and withdrawn from the cycle for millions of years. but this delicate balance ...'Anna plucked the words from his mouth: '... this delicate balance has been upset by burning oil, coal and gas, which pumps carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.' ... 'The greenhouse effect could get out of control and, worst-case scenario, the world's temperature could increase by six to eight degrees (Gaarder, 2015, pp. 21 – 22).

The disappearance of oil in the future is not merely a result of natural resource depletion, but a stark manifestation of human greed—driven by short-term political agendas and economic self-interest. Global powers continue to prioritize fossil fuel exploitation to preserve geopolitical dominance, often subsidizing oil industries while neglecting investment in sustainable energy alternatives. This relentless consumption, propelled by corporate lobbying and energy nationalism, intensifies the climate crisis and widens global economic disparities. Oil-rich nations wield disproportionate influence, while vulnerable economies suffer the consequences of environmental degradation and resource scarcity. As reserves dwindle, the global scramble for control escalates, threatening international stability and exposing the fragile, unsustainable foundations of modern economic systems. Although the dilemma is complex, the use of petroleum must be strictly regulated. Only through decisive and ethical intervention can

humanity avoid the dystopian future envisioned by Gaarder in T*he World of Anna*, where ecological collapse and resource exhaustion become irreversible realities.

4. Drought

Another form of environmental destruction portrayed in Gaarder's *The World of Anna* is the widespread drought that afflicts various regions of the world in the future, as global temperatures continue to rise. Through her "terminal," Anna witnesses a planet that has lost its natural beauty. Tropical forests have vanished due to rampant deforestation, fertile lands have become barren, biodiversity has collapsed, and the vibrant life of the ocean floor has disappeared. In place of these once-thriving ecosystems, drought spreads relentlessly across continents, turning lush landscapes into arid wastelands. Gaarder's depiction serves as a stark warning about the cascading effects of climate change—where the loss of forests, marine ecosystems, and biodiversity are not isolated events, but interconnected symptoms of a deeper ecological crisis. The novel invites readers to reflect on the urgency of environmental stewardship and the moral responsibility to prevent such a future from becoming reality.

> The planet is under surveillance: the terminal shows glaciers advancing and drought spreading across Africa, America, Australia, and the Middle East (Gaarder, 2013, p. 79).

Beyond drought, Gaarder's *The World of Anna* envisions a future marked by escalating environmental disasters—storms, hurricanes, and floods—that render Earth increasingly inhospitable for human life. Both Anna in 2012 and Nova in 2082 experience deep anxiety and fear as they confront the consequences of climate change, a crisis driven not by nature alone but by human actions and negligence. Gaarder's narrative underscores the emotional and existential toll of ecological collapse, portraying climate anxiety as a shared intergenerational burden. According to the 2025 data from the World Population Review (2025), drought is defined as a prolonged period of below-average precipitation that disrupts water and food supply. It is a natural hazard with far-reaching consequences, including the loss of livelihoods, biodiversity, and economic stability. Droughts can also trigger national security threats, forced migration, and even loss of human life. Some persist for months or years, compounding their impact. Currently, Ethiopia is identified as the most drought-stricken country in the world. It is experiencing the longest and most severe drought ever recorded, leading to widespread harvest failures and the death of livestock. Over ten million people are in urgent need of assistance, relying heavily on humanitarian aid for survival. This crisis is exacerbated by climate phenomena such as the 2023 El Niño, which has intensified the region's vulnerability. Gaarder's depiction of a desolate future aligns with these real-world patterns, urging readers to recognize the urgency of climate action. The novel becomes not just a work of fiction, but a prophetic call to safeguard the planet before its beauty and habitability are lost.

> "The Famine in the horn of Africa has proved devastating after last year's catastrophic drought. Thousands have died of starvation, and a large number of

> refugees have tried to escape the region... The political situation has undoubtedly contributed to the suffering, but climate researchers can no longer rule out the possibility that natural disasters such as these are caused by global warming (Gaarder, 2015, p. 71).

The ongoing drought in Africa is poignantly reflected in The World of Anna through the character of Ester Estonsen. Ester is portrayed as an environmental activist who is detained in Kenya while delivering food aid to drought victims in Nairobi. Her commitment to climate justice mirrors that of Anna, who shares a deep concern for the ecological crisis and its human toll. Motivated by this shared vision, Ester joins the World Food Programme to assist communities suffering from hunger due to prolonged drought conditions across the region. Both Ester and Anna embody a spirit of climate solidarity, transcending geographical boundaries to confront global environmental challenges. Their alliance symbolizes intergenerational and transnational activism, emphasizing the moral imperative to protect the Earth for future generations. Through their collaboration, Gaarder illustrates the power of collective action and ethical responsibility in the face of ecological collapse. The novel thus becomes a call to awaken human consciousness and inspire meaningful efforts to safeguard the planet.

Discussion

Based on an analysis of Jostein Gaarder's *The World of Anna*, the novel portrays various forms of environmental destruction, including deforestation, biodiversity loss, species extinction, the disappearance of oil, and widespread drought. Gaarder illustrates these environmental crises through Anna's future vision as Nova in the year 2082. He brilliantly connects future ecological collapse with present-day conditions, clearly highlighting the causal effects of environmental degradation. For instance, Gaarder's depiction of deforestation in the future shows that tropical forests—such as the Amazon—are no longer what they once were, due to massive illegal logging for residential expansion and land conversion. The portrayal of "climate settlers" from the Middle East also reflects the consequences of excessive oil extraction driven by human greed. Oil reserves are exploited on a large scale by major corporations seeking maximum profit. As Garrard warns environmental destruction is caused systematically by systems of domination or exploitation of humans by other humans, and mostly for the sake of economic gain (Gregory Garrard, 2010).

Furthermore, as an environmentalist, Gaarder uses his novel to raise readers' awareness of ecological issues by depicting the future consequences of environmental neglect. Through the characters Anna and Nova, readers encounter young individuals with strong ecological awareness and a deep concern for biodiversity conservation and environmental issues. As (Johns-Putra, 2016) states, climate change fiction is a reflection of the contemporary response to climate change. Moreover, she notes that novels about ecological issues provide lessons for readers on how to cope with, adapt

to, or mitigate climate change. This approach is echoed by (Sharrock, 2025), who analyzes deforestation in Ovid's Metamorphoses. Her study concludes that trees in Ovid's poem are victims of human exploitation. Like Gaarder's *The World of Anna*, both authors use literature to raise ecological awareness among readers.

Additionally, Gaarder's *The World of Anna* functions as a form of ecological pedagogy, guiding readers—especially students—toward ethical engagement with nature through a narrative that blends philosophical inquiry with vivid depictions of environmental destruction. Anna's growing awareness of climate change is not abstract; it is grounded in tangible imagery of melting glaciers, deforestation, and species extinction, which serve as emotional and moral catalysts for both the protagonist and the reader. In educational settings, this novel can foster interdisciplinary learning by combining literary analysis with ethical reflection and environmental science. The use of literature to cultivate environmental awareness is also demonstrated by (Wiyatmi, Suryaman, Sari, & Dewi, 2023), where she instills ecofeminist values in students across three universities in Indonesia. From this perspective, novels can serve as effective media for teaching ecological care and awareness. Furthermore, environmental issues can be integrated into school curricula, as argued by (Nur, Anas, & Pilu, 2022) who supports the idea that environmental issues should be integrated into English Language Teaching (ELT) to build English teachers' and students' metacognitive awareness and skills about environmental care.

Conclusion

Jostein Gaarder's *The World of Anna* demonstrates the power of literature to illuminate the urgency of ecological crises. Through Anna's reflections on deforestation, species extinction, resource depletion and drought, the novel offers a compelling narrative of environmental degradation and human responsibility. This study affirms that climate-themed fiction can serve not only as a mirror to ecological realities but also as a pedagogical tool to foster environmental awareness among students.

Furthermore, integrating such climate- themed fiction into English literature classrooms can also enrich students' understanding of global ecological challenges while cultivating ethical and reflective engagement. However, the scope of this study is limited to a single novel. Future research should consider comparative analyses across multiple climate fiction texts and explore works rooted in local wisdom to provide culturally nuanced perspectives on ecological issues. Such expansions would deepen the discourse on literature's role in shaping ecological consciousness and ethical responsibility.

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ANTHROPOCENE CHARACTER BUILDING OF "KITAB AMBYO" READING IN BEDINGIN PONOROGO

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Abstract

Every nation has various innovation steps to shape the character of its nation. The character of a nation is reflected in the way they treat others, especially in times of need. This "anthropocene character building" research is an effort to understand humans as the focus of cultural events and ecosystems, allowing individuals to internalize feelings and differences with others. This paradigm is important for creating a harmonious and inclusive society. The urgency of this research is how good and strong identity and character become manifestations of three universal human traits, namely honesty, integrity, and generosity. People in Bedingin Ponorogo has realized and practiced the need to have character traits that will ensure the success of its community members. This situation places humans and the village ecosystem in a bond of integrity and high standards of behavior. This phenomenon shows positive behavior towards every human being who lives side by side with their environment. The purpose of this study is to reveal the importance of defining "character building" innovation with an "anthropocene" approach and to provide guidelines regarding the elements of effective and comprehensive "character building" needs. Stakeholders in Bedingin village agreed to provide traditional capital for its people to build quality human character, through reading of inherited sacred book that is called as Kitab Ambyo since 1995. This research reveals reading activities in the society, maps the pattern of writing narratives of Kitab Ambyo and determines the interdisciplinary influence of reading on humans, mentality, and the landscape of Bedingin village. The qualitative methodology of ethnographic anthropology is the reference for this study, where data acquisition and analysis are obtained from the interview process and direct observation of behavior, concern and its influence on relationships between individuals and groups in Bedingin village and its influence on their living environment.

Keywords: ideology; character; nation; anthropocene; Kitab-Ambyo

Introduction

Many people are concerned about the damage to children's healthy moral development. Rates of delinquency, pregnancy, violence, and substance abuse continue to rise among adolescents (1). Character development is crucial in every aspect of society; this paradigm must involve humans in synergy with the natural world. Children need consistent messages, and they need all adults in their lives to have high standards and expectations for ethical behavior (2,3). This is what is called "anthropocene" character development—a long-term, community-wide effort that prioritizes human and natural institutions such as schools, parents, social service agencies, law enforcement, religious institutions, businesses, and other youth and family organizations (4).

The term "anthropocene character building" is used in a very simplistic way, as its purpose is to problematize the political project of creating individual identity and focus on issues of human identity that are ethnic and geographical (5). The process of character development is complex and varies across time and space. Characters can overlap, and individuals may have multiple identities (6). And to emphasize the need for early character building for individuals in every corner of the region to develop good character, which includes knowing, caring for, and acting based on core ethical values such as respect, responsibility, honesty, justice, and compassion (7).

In Bedingin Village, Sambit District, Ponorogo Regency, character formation begins on the day a baby is born (8). On the first day of birth, the community, initiated by village elders, intensively reads the Ambyo book until it is finished, interpreted as a manifestation of spiritual support for the baby (9). This support is also given to the baby's parents with the aim of strengthening their journey to nurture, educate, teach, and love their offspring (10). The recitation of the Ambyo book is also intended to provide a spiritual foundation for local residents to support the new individual in navigating a life process that adheres to applicable customs, rules, and norms (11). With the background outlined above, the initial stage of this research focuses on the following questions:

1. What reasons make the Ambyo Book acceptable in the Bedingin village community?
2. What messages in the Ambyo Book are particularly memorable and touching for its listeners?
3. How does the Ambyo Book accommodate the context of "anthropocene" knowledge and its supporting components?
4. What are the challenges of translation, both linguistic and conceptual, and ensuring an anthropocentric interpretation of the Ambyo Book?
5. How does the Ambyo Book text articulate an understanding of environmental

change and the relationship between humans and nature at various temporal scales?

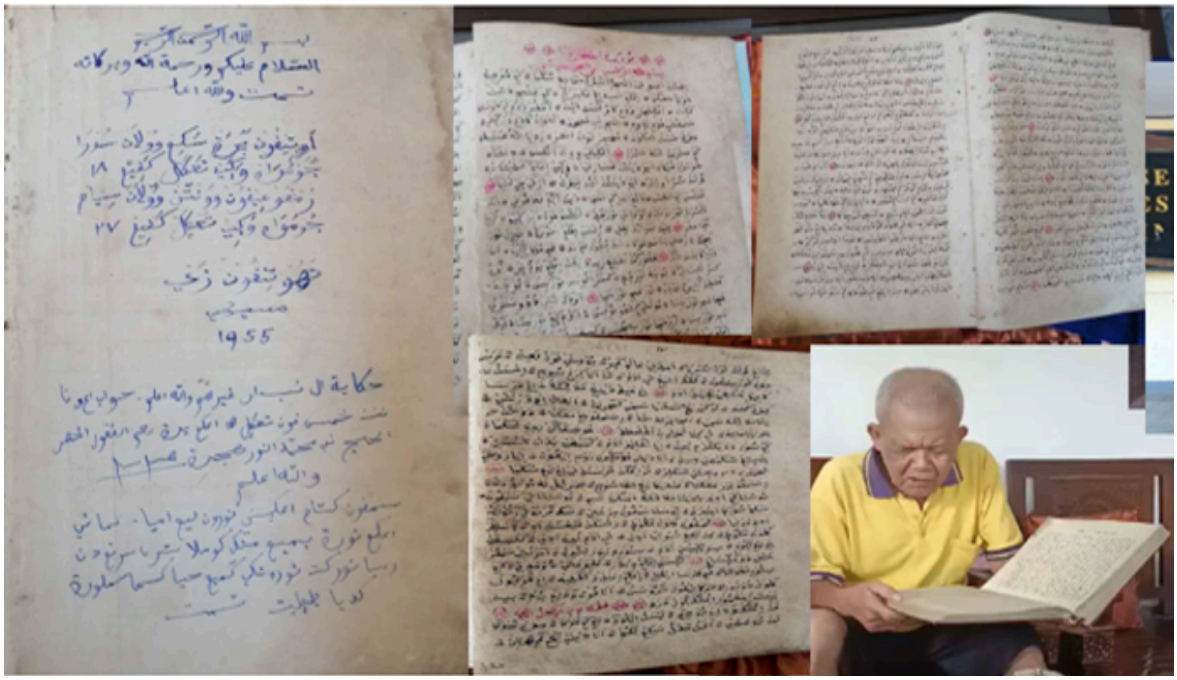

Figure 1

The Ambyo Book is a book containing the life stories of the prophets, compiled in a way that embodies noble, universal values practiced by the people of this village. Furthermore, this book is often used as a reference for guidance on various occasions, especially births and weddings (12).

A recent issue is the frequent occurrence of social, ethical, and moral violations, as well as violence in various forms, such as fights between students, promiscuity, crime, unethical behavior toward teachers, and various forms of violation of school rules. (13) (14)

Figure 2

This phenomenon raises deep concerns about the continued identity of the next generation in Bedingin village. This includes the successors to the Ambyo Book, of which only eight elders are currently able to recite the Ambyo Book because the letters are written in Arabic but the sounds produced are Javanese.

This research combines the "reader-response" approach and the "anthropocene" approach, a branch of ethnographic anthropology, as a method to address issues that all center on the role of humans and their objects. Reader response theory focuses on individual reactions and interpretations of a text, proposing that only readers can assign adequate meaning to a text (15) depending on their intelligence or knowledge of the history depicted, their mood, personal experiences, ideology, and culture (16).

Meanwhile, the Anthropocene approach emphasizes the strong relationships across spatial and temporal scales of humans within their ecosystems. Phenomena occurring over long timescales impact decision-making and policies over much shorter timescales, and vice versa (17), creating dependencies that are not always explicitly understood in relation to people's habitats and behaviors.

Methodology

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method. Qualitative research is a naturalistic inquiry process that seeks an in-depth understanding of social phenomena in their natural setting (19). This approach focuses on the "why" rather than the "what" of social phenomena and relies on the direct experiences of humans as meaning-making agents in their daily lives. Qualitative research is a type of research that explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems. The methods applied involve interventions or introducing treatments that generate hypotheses and further investigate and understand non-numerical data. Qualitative research based on ethnographic anthropology emphasizes empirical data, perceptions, and participant

behavior. It answers the how and why, not the how much or how many (20). This research can be structured as a stand-alone study, relying solely on qualitative data, or it can be part of a mixed-methods study that combines qualitative and quantitative data. The figure below introduces readers to some basic concepts, definitions, terminology, and applications of qualitative research.

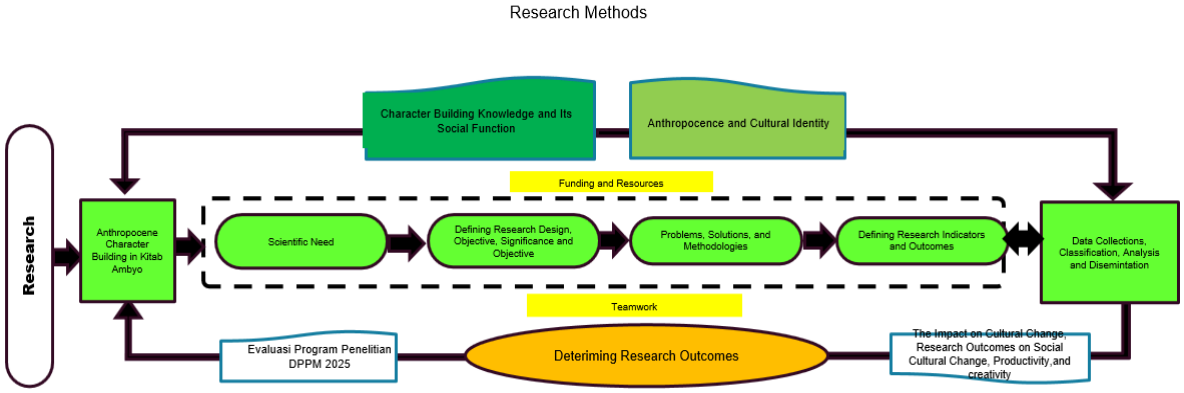

Figure 3

Qualitative research uses several techniques, including interviews, focus groups, and observation. Interviews may be unstructured, with open-ended questions on a topic and the interviewer adjusting their responses (21). Structured interviews involve a predetermined set of questions asked of each participant. They are typically one-on-one and are suitable for sensitive topics or topics requiring in-depth exploration. Focus groups are often conducted with a target number of 8-12 participants and are used when group dynamics and a collective perspective on a topic are desired. Researchers can act as participant-observers to share the subject's experiences, or as non-participants or detached observers.

The Reader Response Criticism approach is part of the data analysis method related to readers' ability to analyze texts. In this study, data obtained from interviews with listeners of the Ambyo Book reading were classified and processed to determine the listeners' perceptions. Reader Response Theory is the reaction generated by readers that changes our perception of the text, the reader, and the creation of meaning (22). Meaning is created in the interaction between the reader and the text. The reader response theory applied by the researcher is the transactional reader response theory proposed by Louise Rosenblatt. According to her, feelings, associations, and memories arise when we read, and these responses influence how we understand the text as we read it (23). The literature we encounter prior to this reading, the sum total of our accumulated knowledge, and even our current physical condition and mood will influence us as well. However, at certain points while we read, the text acts as a blueprint that we can use to correct our interpretation when we realize it has strayed too far from what is written on the page. This process of correcting our interpretation as we move through the text usually results in us returning to previous sections in light of new developments in the text. Thus, the text guides our self-correction process as we read

and will continue to do so after the reading is complete if we return and reread parts, or the entire text, to develop or complete our interpretation (24). Thus, the creation of poetry, a work of literature, is the product of a transaction between the text and the reader, both of whom are equally important in the process. This transaction between the text and the reader can occur, in the reader's perception of the text, but it must be aesthetic rather than efferent. When the reader reads in an efferent mode, the reader focuses solely on the information contained in the text, as if the text were a repository of facts and ideas to be taken forward.

This research is expected to uncover the history of the development of the reading of the Kitab Ambyo in Bedingin village; to find out the acceptance of the Bedingin village community towards the reading of the Ambyo Book; to explain the reasons why the Ambyo Book is acceptable in the Bedingin village community; and to identify the messages in the Ambyo Book which are very impressive and touching for the community that listens to it (25).

Results and Discussion

Bedingin Sambit Village, Ponorogo, is home to an ancient text of significant historical and cultural significance in Indonesia, known as the Kitab Ambyo. Believed to have been written in the 18th century, this manuscript is a compilation of teachings and wisdom passed down through generations in the Ponorogo region. As a graduate student with a background in literature and history, I had the opportunity to analyze this manuscript in depth, and I found its contents to be rich and thought-provoking.

One of the main aspects of the Kitab Ambyo found in Bedingin Sambit Village, Ponorogo, that stood out to me was its language and writing style. The manuscript is written in Javanese, a language rich in symbolism and nuance. Through my analysis, I came to understand that the language used in this manuscript is not only a means of communication but also a reflection of the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the Ponorogo people.

Beyond the language, the manuscript's content is equally fascinating. The Ambyo Book contains numerous teachings on various aspects of life, including morality, ethics, and spirituality, passed down by our ancestors through their understanding of the stories of 25 prophets they knew. Through my analysis, I found that these teachings are presented in a profound and accessible manner, making them relevant to today's readers.

Furthermore, the manuscript also contains stories and myths that provide insight into the beliefs and cultural practices of the Ponorogo people. Through my analysis, I was able to uncover layers of meaning and symbolism within these stories, revealing the values and traditions that have shaped the community for centuries.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the Ambyo Book, unique to the Ponorogo region, is its depiction of power dynamics and social relations within the community. Through my analysis, I found that the manuscript offers a nuanced perspective on issues such as leadership, authority, and social hierarchy. By examining these themes, I gained a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics underlying Ponorogo's social structure.

Furthermore, this manuscript also contains practical advice and guidance on various aspects of life, such as health, agriculture, and family relationships. Through my analysis, I found that these teachings are rooted in the practical realities of everyday life in Ponorogo, demonstrating the pragmatic and resourceful nature of the people of the region.

Beyond its practical wisdom, the Kitab Ambyo also explores spiritual and metaphysical themes, such as the nature of existence, the afterlife, and the relationship between humans and the divine. Through my analysis, I found that these teachings offer a profound and insightful perspective on the mysteries of life and death, inviting readers to ponder the deeper meaning of their existence.

Overall, my analysis of the Kitab, sacred to the Bedingin Sambit Community of Ponorogo, has revealed a manuscript that is not only a valuable historical document, but also a treasure trove of wisdom and insight. Through its language, content, and themes, this manuscript offers a window into Ponorogo's rich cultural heritage and provides a fascinating glimpse into the beliefs and traditions of its people.

As a graduate student, I continually strive to deepen my understanding of the world around me through careful analysis and critical thinking. Bedingin Sambit Ponorogo has provided me with a unique opportunity to engage with a text that is both intellectually stimulating and spiritually enriching. I am grateful for the chance to explore this manuscript and uncover the hidden truths and teachings contained within its pages.

Throughout this research study on Reader Responses to the Book of Ambyo, several key findings have emerged that shed light on how readers engage with and interpret this complex text. The Book of Ambyo, a mystical and allegorical text from Indonesian literature, presents readers with a dense and layered narrative that challenges traditional notions of storytelling and interpretation. Through a close examination of reader responses to this text, it becomes clear that readers approach the Book of Ambyo from multiple perspectives and engage with its mysterious themes in diverse ways.

One of the main conclusions drawn from this study is that readers of the Book of Ambyo deeply engaged with the text's spiritual and allegorical elements. Many readers described the text as a profound and transformative experience, with themes of self-discovery and spiritual awakening deeply resonating with their own personal beliefs

and experiences. This suggests that the Book of Ambyo serves as a powerful tool for self-reflection and spiritual growth, inviting readers to explore their own beliefs and values in deeper and more meaningful ways.

Another key finding of this study is that readers of the Book of Ambyo were drawn to its unique narrative structure and unconventional storytelling techniques. The text's fragmented and nonlinear narrative style challenged readers to think beyond the traditional boundaries of storytelling, encouraging them to engage with the text in a more active and participatory manner. This finding suggests that readers of the Book of Ambyo were not passive consumers of the text, but rather active participants in the construction of its meaning.

Furthermore, it becomes clear that readers of the Book of Ambyo were deeply influenced by the cultural and historical context in which the text was situated. Many readers described the text as a reflection of Indonesian culture and society, with themes of mysticism and spirituality deeply intertwined with the country's rich cultural heritage. These findings highlight the ways in which readers bring their own cultural backgrounds and experiences into their interpretations of the text, shaping their understanding of its themes and messages in deeply personal ways.

Furthermore, this research has revealed that readers of the Book of Ambyo are highly attuned to the text's complex symbolism and allegory. Many readers described the text as a puzzle to be solved, with enigmatic symbols and metaphors inviting them to dig deeper and uncover hidden meanings. These findings suggest that readers of the Book of Ambyo are intellectually curious and eager to engage with the text on a deeper level, exploring complex themes and ideas with a critical and analytical eye.

Furthermore, it is clear that readers of the Book of Ambyo are deeply moved by the text's emotional and philosophical resonance. Many readers described the text as a deeply emotional and thought-provoking experience, with themes of love, death, and transformation evoking deep feelings of empathy and compassion. These findings suggest that readers of the Book of Ambyo were drawn to universal themes and eternal truths, finding in its pages a source of profound and enduring inspiration and wisdom.

1. Structure of the Ambyo Book Text

The Ambyo Book text is one of the most common forms of storytelling across various cultures and time periods, offering diverse insights into the values, beliefs, and social customs of the society in which it emerged. While narratives can take many forms—from oral traditions to modern novels—the Ambyo Book text typically adheres to a recognizable structure that guides the reader through a coherent and engaging story. This narrative structure often includes distinct elements such as exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. Understanding this structure is crucial for academics and practitioners in various fields, including literature, communications, and

even psychology, as it explains how stories function in human culture.

The exposition serves as the foundation of the narrative, introducing key characters, the setting, and the context. This initial stage establishes the story's world, which can shift between familiar and exotic locations, set in the past, present, or future. Furthermore, the exposition often hints at the central conflict or thematic issues that will develop throughout the narrative. By placing the reader in the story's environment and establishing its main characters, the exposition lays the groundwork for emotional and intellectual investment that will develop as the narrative progresses.

Following the exposition, the narrative typically enters a rising action phase, where complications arise and the stakes rise. This is where the characters face obstacles or challenges that threaten their goals. This rising action is marked by a series of events that create tension and propel the narrative forward, building to the story's climax. This phase is crucial for developing character arcs, as protagonists must navigate complex situations that often force them to make difficult choices, revealing their motivations, weaknesses, and strengths. Narrative pacing and emotional resonance are crucial during this phase, as effective writers use dramatic tension to keep readers engaged and invested in the outcome.

The climax marks a turning point in the narrative—often referred to as the moment of greatest tension or conflict. This is where the narrative's stakes reach their peak, and the characters face their greatest challenges. The choices and actions taken during this crucial moment are crucial not only for character development but also for thematic resolution. The climax often serves as a metaphorical crossroads that forces characters to confront their inner conflicts and external challenges, which can lead to a transformative experience for both the characters and the audience. Scholars point out that the emotional gravity of this section is often what makes a story memorable, as it crystallizes the narrative's central themes.

After the climax, the narrative transitions to falling action, where tension begins to subside. This phase is characterized by characters facing the impact of the climactic events and moving toward resolution. Here, the narrative typically addresses the consequences of the characters' choices, answering questions raised during the rising action and climax. This stage provides the reader with closure, as it explains the outcome of the conflict and reaffirms the narrative's main themes. While some narratives may end with a clear resolution, others may leave certain elements ambiguous or open-ended, inviting further reflection and interpretation from the audience.

Finally, the resolution or denouement provides a sense of closure, tying up loose ends and answering lingering questions. In traditional narratives, this section often reflects on the story's moral or highlights the character's development throughout their journey. The resolution can serve as a commentary on broader social or philosophical

issues, reinforcing themes established earlier in the narrative. In many cases, this final section invites readers to reflect on the implications of the characters' journeys, encouraging them to consider their own experiences in light of the narrative's lessons.

The importance of adhering to this traditional structure lies not only in facilitating the coherence of the Kitab Ambyo but also in engaging the audience. More than mere entertainment, a well-structured narrative provides a framework for readers to interpret their own lives and worldviews. The emotional rhythms established within the narrative's flow resonate with universal human experiences, making the study of the Kitab Ambyo's structure a valuable endeavor across disciplines, including anthropology and psychology, where narratives are examined for their role in shaping identity and community.

The music used in the Ambyo Book recitation is derived from the periodization of human existence, from the womb to the afterlife. Thirteen music pieces can be harmonized with the Ambyo Book recitation: Maskumambang, Mijil, Sinom, Kinanthi, Asmarandana, Gambuh, Dhandhanggula, Durma, Pangkur, Megatruh, Wirangrong, Pucung, and Gurisa.

Conclusion

The Book of Ambyo has provided valuable insights into how readers engage with and interpret this complex and enigmatic text. Readers of the Book of Ambyo approach the text from multiple perspectives and engage with its spiritual, allegorical, and cultural themes in diverse and deeply personal ways. Through a close examination of reader responses to the Book of Ambyo, it becomes clear that readers are drawn to the text's unconventional narrative structure, intricate symbolism, and emotional resonance. Overall, this study highlights how readers of the Book of Ambyo actively participate in the construction of meaning, bringing their own cultural backgrounds, experiences, and interpretations to bear on their engagement with this rich and complex text

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MIGRANT FARMERS: READING VIETNAMESE LITERATURE ON LABOUR EXPORT AFTER 1986

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Abstract

This article examines the representation of the migrant peasant in Vietnamese literature after the 1986 Renovation (Doi Moi), with a particular focus on the theme of labour export. From the perspectives of ecocriticism and cultural studies, the article argues that the peasant migration journey is not only a geographical shift for economic survival, but also a process of "uprooting" from the ecological and cultural environment, leading to profound identity crises, cultural collisions, and gendered traumas. By analysing representative works by Do Tien Thuy, Y Ban, Nguyen Ngoc Tu, Thao Trang, Thuan, and Doan Le, the article shows that contemporary literature has significantly reflected the complex consequences of neoliberal globalisation on rural Vietnam. This migration phenomenon, which is a concrete manifestation of the global trend of "de-peasantization", is portrayed through personal tragedies in literature, highlighting issues of ethnicity, gender and loss of identity.

Keywords: Migrant farmer; ecocriticism; labour export; gender; Vietnamese literature.

Introduction

Since the Doi Moi policy in 1986, Vietnamese society has undergone profound changes under the impacts of the market economy and the process of global integration. One of the most obvious consequences is the changes in the structure of the countryside and the fate of farmers. Pressure from new economic policies, market

competition and climate change has made traditional livelihoods based on agriculture precarious. Losing their fields, fish ponds and gardens, farmers are pushed into an insecure situation, forced to find new forms of livelihood, notably the wave of labour export (Hesse and Pham, 2024, p. 2).

This phenomenon is not unique to Vietnam but is part of a global trend called "de-agrarianization" and "de-peasantization" by political-economic researchers, which has been taking place strongly since the 1980s under the impact of neoliberalism. "De-agrarianization" is a change in economic structure, arising from the shrinking of the rural population whose main livelihood is agriculture (Bryceson, Kay and Mooji, 2000). Neo-liberalism, since the 1980s, with policies promoted by international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, has accelerated both processes globally. Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) have forced governments in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to reduce agricultural subsidies, abolish protectionism, privatize state-owned enterprises, and liberalize markets. Simply put, it is a process by which the role of agriculture in the economy and rural populations has been reduced ((Bryceson, Kay, and Mooji, 2000). Across the continents of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, small-scale farmers have lost their livelihoods due to structural adjustment programs and competition from subsidized agricultural products from industrialized countries, forcing them to migrate.

In that context, contemporary Vietnamese literature has been quick to grasp and reflect this complex reality, creating a rich archive of the experiences of displacement, exile and adaptation of farmers. After 1975, Vietnam witnessed successive waves of migration: boat people leaving after the war; labour and study migration to Russia and Eastern Europe in the 1990s; and since the early 2000s, when many Asian countries faced population aging, the labour export movement (especially in the field of domestic work) and the trend of cross-border marriages of rural Vietnamese women have exploded strongly.

This article approaches these literary works from an interdisciplinary perspective. First of all, ecocriticism provides tools to analyse the close relationship between humans and their living environment (land, and village). Accordingly, leaving the land is not only a loss of means of production but also a separation from the "roots of the soul", from the ecological-cultural space that has shaped their identity, causing a feeling of "unsteadiness" and insecurity. Second, cultural studies and gender studies allow to decode cultural clashes, ethnic issues and gender pressures that weigh on migrant subjects, especially women, in a transnational environment. The combination of analysing the status of migrant peasant women in solidarity with issues of gender and ethnicity allows a deeper look into personal tragedies, instead of considering migration as a purely economic phenomenon.

Results and Discussion

1. Literary discourses on rural labour migration

a. The dream of the West and the degenerate reality

"Western" countries, the term used by Vietnamese people to refer to the United States and European countries with advanced economies and technocratic civilizations, have long been in the imagination of many immigrants as destinations that promised a life of freedom and prosperity. However, Vietnamese literature has exposed a completely opposite reality, "the West" has become a place where dreams are shattered and people have to face alienation, deadlocks and risks to their dignity.

The novel *Quyen* (2011) by Nguyen Van Tho mainly writes about Vietnamese intellectuals who went to Russia to trade and make a living, but at the end of the novel, the character Hue appears, a simple rural girl: "I was born in the village, all my life I only knew the fields" (Nguyen Van Tho, 2011). Following her husband to Russia, living here and there in the markets, then being infected with HIV AIDS, Hue appears among most of the characters in the novel who started as intellectuals as a very subtle prediction about the situation of farmers leaving their living space to marry foreigners and go to work abroad more and more in the future.

Thuan's work, though primarily focused on intellectuals and urbanites, has sketched out the fate of farmers in the context of global migration. In *Letter to Mina* (2019), the image of a young woman from Nghe An fleeing across the border, being raped and eventually forced into prostitution in the red-light district of Saint-Denis is a tragic symbol of the vulnerability of migrant women. They are deprived of their autonomy and become victims of transnational criminal networks.

In *25 degrees below zero* (2024) by Thao Trang, the farmer becomes the central character. Inspired by the tragedy of 39 Vietnamese people who died in a container truck in England, the novel records the dangerous illegal border crossing journey of Lam, a rural young woman from the Central Region. Forced by her adoptive parents to go to England to improve her family's life, Lam had to embark on a life outside the law, lacking all basic social security conditions. The work emphasises that the issue of immigration is always linked to the issue of race. Asian migrants are often brutally treated and abandoned, and their lives are completely dependent on luck. They not only lose their connection with their homeland but also their status as people in a foreign land.

b. Asia: labour markets and gender burden

If the West is a symbol of the dream of changing one's life, then industrialized Asian countries such as China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan appear as a giant labour market. The labour export movement in the Asian region is growing strongly in the context of the aging population in many countries. This process increases the demand for care services, especially jobs associated with meticulousness and thoughtfulness

that are associated with female workers, such as caring for the elderly or doing housework. Although this type of labour does not require too much physical strength or young age, it is essential for societies. In Vietnam, since the Renovation (Doi Moi) in 1986, the wave of exporting female workers to these markets to do housework and care has become a common phenomenon, reflecting both the needs of the regional market and the livelihood strategies of rural households. Post-1986 literature clearly reflects the "feminisation of migration", when rural women are no longer dependent but become active agents in the process of leaving their hometown, taking on the role of economic pillars and nurturing the hope of changing the life of the whole family.

In Y Ban's *I am a Woman* (2019), the character Thi, a mountain woman, leaves her family to work as a maid in Taiwan. The work is a tense dialogue between "instinct" and "civilization". The natural physiological instinct and the unselfish love of a rural woman from a mountainous region collide strongly with the cold, rule-bound urban world. When taking care of a paralysed man in a vegetative state, physical contact awakens her love and feminine instinct, however, they also push her into serious trouble: she is accused of sexual abuse by the wife and children of the man she cares for and taken to court. The character Thi becomes a symbol of the alienation of rural people when placed in an environment that is both artificial, mechanical, and full of prejudice.

The short story *Floating Fields* in the collection *Urban Wounds* (2017) by Do Tien Thuy depicts another tragedy, where the economic burden and gender responsibility weigh down on women in farming families who do not have enough land for production. Nen's family only has two small plots of land, and the high cost of fertiliser and seeds makes it even more difficult to maintain production. The income is not enough to feed four mouths, forcing the husband to go to the city to make a living. But urban life is full of uncertainty, cruelty, and competition. He had to struggle to earn money, eventually becoming addicted to drugs and becoming a drug dealer. He was stuck between two urban and rural worlds: he did not want to return to the fields, but being an urban resident made life precarious and unstable. Physically and mentally exhausted, he returned to his hometown, but could not bear the deadlocked life: struggling with addiction and the pressure of raising two children, he committed suicide with a knife. Nen, his wife, had to go to Taiwan to work as a maid to pay off her drug-addicted husband's debt. Here, women both actively go abroad to save their families and are pressured to "be wives and mothers" from afar, a dual responsibility that creates fierce erosion. The child's naive words "I will go abroad to work and earn a lot of money as a maid like my mother" show that the illusion of life change via labour export has been passed down as a sad legacy. The work acknowledges the proactive role of women but at the same time emphasizes their fragility and vulnerability to gender stereotypes and cultural clashes.

c. Cross-border marriage: illusions vs. reality

Besides labour export, marrying a foreigner is also a common migration route for rural women, who are often surrounded by the illusion of a prosperous life. However, literature has torn apart that velvet curtain to expose a painful reality. The "feminization of migration" shows that women have become active agents in the journey of leaving their homeland. They are strong, bear economic responsibilities, but are still surrounded by gender stereotypes, loneliness, and the risk of exploitation, abuse and suffering many injuries. Literature shows these paradoxes: women's initiative and resilience go hand in hand with human tragedies, the instability of ecological-cultural identity.

In most cross-border marriages, women are the ones moving to their husbands' homelands, reflecting patrilocal norms and an inherent power imbalance. Men are often the initiators of these flows, while women are often the "receivers." However, women are not simply passive victims. Many actively seek and use marriage as a deliberate strategy for social, economic, and geographic mobility. They may act in accordance with or sometimes against their families' wishes. Greater distance may mean greater vulnerability due to separation from their home communities, but it can also bring greater freedom and opportunity. Migration experiences are deeply shaped by the intersections of gender, class, ethnicity, and nationality. Studies of women's migration in Eastern Europe and Africa show that women are no longer passive, dependent actors in the migration process. Instead, they are proactive, purposeful agents who make their own decisions to migrate through marriage or work to improve their lives, escape constraints at home, or support their families (Penttinen & Kynsilehto, 2017), (Passerini, Lyon, Capussotti, & Laliotou, 2007). This is also true for a segment of Vietnamese female migrants originating from rural areas: they also actively seek transnational marriages or go abroad for labour export. They migrate to escape the gender pressures of local patriarchy, to seek a more modern life, or to take on the role of economic breadwinner for their families. However, in these works of fiction, that initial initiative is gradually diminished or crushed in the migrant environment due to their level of education, the influence of the patriarchal culture that has ingrained itself in them and their husbands, or the prejudiced gaze of foreigners in richer Eastern European or Asian countries.

The short story *Sadness on Puvan Peak* in the collection *Single Wind and 9 Other Stories* (2009) by Nguyen Ngoc Tu tells the story of Diu, a girl who went to Taiwan to work. She was raped by her boss and had to return home in humiliation. Her life thereafter became adrift and miserable, proving that abandoning the "security of the land" makes women "unstable" and most vulnerable to the vortex of globalization. Nguyen Ngoc Tu's view of the close relationship and similarity between women and nature in this work is quite consistent with her other works (not about migrant women). For example, in *Endless Field* and *Magnificent Sky Smoke*, she shows a profound similarity between the fate of women and nature in the Southern region. The female characters often have to endure physical and emotional abuse in a patriarchal society. Their resilience is likened to the vitality of natural systems. As nature gradually disappears due to human exploitation, some female characters also choose to retreat

into the wilderness as a form of resistance and self-protection (Cao, 2024). The migratory environment has broken that traditional connection with the land of Vietnamese farmers in general and rural women in particular, causing them to lose the ability to reposition and heal themselves through their traditional cultural and ecological identity.

Meanwhile, the short story *Virginity of the Pagoda Hamlet* (2011) by Doan Le reflected the current situation of migration via cross-border marriage in rural Vietnam: many peasant women became lazy and tried every way to marry foreigners, but then became victims of transnational prostitution organisations. Ms. Lay Lay married a foreigner to change her life, but became a henchman in the chain of human trafficking rings. Miserable because of the poverty and deadlock in the countryside, choosing international marriage is also a desperate attempt by the women to seek a better life and change their position in the family. The reason may not only be economic, but also the expectation of a more “modern”, “advanced” husband, and the change in their economic status and influence in the family in Vietnam. However, they were disillusioned when their expectations clashed with reality: either they were deceived, became victims of women trafficking, like the women in *Virginity of the Pagoda Hamlet* or were disappointed by their patriarchal European-Vietnamese husbands. Those husbands, when returning to Vietnam to find a wife, expected to find a “traditional” wife with a lower economic status and education, who was obedient, submissive and faithful. That is the case of Hue, a rural young woman who migrated to Eastern Europe to marry in the novel *Quyen* (2011) by Nguyen Van Tho. Her husband was not only a patriarchal man, often beating his wife brutally, but also unfaithful. Hue left and later contracted HIV-AIDS from another man during her wandering journey in the foreign land.

2. Diaspora depression and ecological identity crisis

From an ecocritical perspective, the above works all raise a warning voice about rootlessness. For farmers, land is not only a means of production but also a living space, a place that contains collective memory, cultural identity and spiritual values. Being "uprooted" from that space makes them lose their place of belonging, fall into a state of insecurity and easily become corrupted.

Huynh Nhu Phuong once compared the previous generation's worries about the "wave of modernisation" with today's reality, when "many girls leave their villages to marry Taiwanese, Korean men... and bring back children of mixed blood" (Huynh, 2016). This is not only a change in demographics but also a rupture in cultural and ecological identity. These analyses place Vietnamese literature within the global flow of migration, while revealing the intertwining of the gender, ethnic, and ecological issues in the phenomenon of Vietnamese peasant migration.

Conclusion

Vietnamese literature after 1986 has created a powerful and multidimensional discourse on the phenomenon of peasant migration for labour export. Through the interdisciplinary lens of ecocriticism, cultural studies, and gender studies, it can be seen that the works do not simply record migration stories but also perform a deep surgery on social wounds. They show that the process of neoliberal globalization, while opening up economic opportunities, simultaneously creates deep cultural, social, and psychological fractures.

The journey of the peasants leaving their land is the journey of losing their roots, the source of the insecurities and identity crises in the contemporary era. In this process, women stand out as central subjects, demonstrating both initiative and strong vitality, and clearly exposing the tragedies of prejudice and exploitation.

This article on the one hand recreates the wave of migration of Vietnamese farmers in the opening period with its chaos, complexity and instability. At the same time, it shows the depression of exile, loss and separation from the space of belonging. The article especially emphasizes the status of migrant women farmers in solidarity with the issues of gender and ethnicity. By raising the voice of the vulnerable, literature has performed the role of social criticism, warning about the costs of development and integration, and affirming the importance of the connection between people, places and gender in maintaining a full life.

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Sineenadh Keitprapai's Moving with Nature: Exploring Meditative and Spiritual Connections

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Abstract

Sineenadh Keitprapai is a theatre director, actor, educator, and the artistic director of Crescent Moon Theatre, a theatre company based in Bangkok, Thailand. With a background in theatre, body movement performance, and Butoh dance, Sineenadh has, in recent years, beginning during the Covid-19 pandemic, been practicing what she calls Moving with Nature, which is a self-healing process through body movement in natural surroundings. This paper explores Sineenadh's journey into Moving with Nature and later eco-performance practice. This paper also examines the relationship between Sineenadh's work, which is meditative in nature, and Buddhist ecology and meditation, emphasizing the idea of "interbeing," which means that we do not exist as a separate being but are interconnected with everything else. Once we see that we are not separate selves, that the environment is not outside of us but a part of us, we stop acting from greed and exploiting the environment for selfish gain. Buddhism teaches that everything originates from the mind. The state of our environment begins in the minds of people and manifests itself through our actions. Therefore, the understanding of interconnectedness can change both our perceptions and actions. One way to experience glimpses of interconnectedness is through meditative practice. This paper thus considers Sineenadh's Moving with Nature a great tool to develop a deeper relationship with the natural world and the sense of interbeing that can lead to further actions.

Keywords: performing arts, eco-performance, meditation, Buddhism, Buddhist ecology

Introduction

Sineenadh Keitprapai is a Thai theatre director, actor, educator, and the artistic director of the Crescent Moon Theatre, a theatre company based in Bangkok, Thailand. With over 30 years of experience both in Thailand and abroad, she has a background in

theatre, movement-based performance, and the Japanese Butoh dance. In 2008, She received the Silpathorn Award in Performing Arts, which is an award to honor Thai contemporary artists given annually by the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, Ministry of Culture of Thailand. In recent years, beginning during the Covid-19 pandemic, Sineenadh has been practicing what she calls Moving with Nature, which is a self-healing process that fosters connection with oneself and with the natural world. Moving with Nature is the basis of what Sineenadh refers to as eco-performance.

In this paper, I will explore Sineenadh's journey into Moving with Nature and eco-performance practice, from her desire to connect with nature during the Covid-19 quarantine, to her self-study and self-exploration, and to her classes and workshops. The information about Sineenadh's journey and Moving with Nature practice comes mostly from personal communication (interviews and personal journals), her presentation about Moving with Nature at the Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network (APARN) Conference 2025, as well as my own experience attending one of her Moving with Nature workshops. After discussing Sineenadh's journey, I will examine the relationship between her work and Buddhist ecology and Buddhist meditation, with an emphasis on the idea of "interbeing," which is a term coined by Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, meaning we do not exist as a separate being but interconnect with everything else. Then, I will discuss the significant impact that Moving with Nature might have on students, theatre practitioners, and workshop participants, particularly in how it may inspire them to cultivate deeper ecological awareness, nurture creative practices, and take further actions to protect the environment and the world around us.

Covid-19

During the Covid-19 pandemic, schools and universities were closed. Work had to be done from home, and theatre productions and gathering events were prohibited. The terrifying phenomenon of Covid-19 itself, which was new to everyone at the time, caused even more stress. Sineenadh, like everyone else, had to work from home and stay at home most of the time. She felt like being trapped. Being an actor who was used to working with her body and her emotions, Sineenadh began to observe herself. She noticed that she was extremely anxious, which affected both her physical and mental health. (Keitprapai, 2025)

Sineenadh began to move her body at home and recorded some short pieces of movement-based performance and posted them online. She felt that it helped relax her body, but it was not enough. She had a strong desire to be outside in an open space and to be with nature. Therefore, whenever she could, she would go outside and move with nature. She found that both her body and mind became more relaxed, and she became more connected to nature and the present moment. She continued to practice by herself in various spaces in nature: a rice field, a beach, a mountain, a waterfall, and a park. Through this process, she found that nature really healed. (Keitprapai, 2025).

The Foundation

Sineenadh has been trained to use her body for performance for over 30 years. Her teacher and the founder of the Crescent Moon Theatre, Kamron Kunadiloka, was influenced by Jerzy Grotowski's Poor Theatre, which emphasizes the training of the physical body of the actor. In addition, Sineenadh has been trained in Butoh dance and was inspired by Hungarian dance artist Rudolf Laban. (Ketiprapai, 2025) She has conducted numerous acting and movement workshops and has also performed in and directed many movement-based performances. Therefore, her extensive experience has provided her with a strong foundation in body movement and in working with the body.

The process of Moving with Nature, however, began in a very simple way. Sineenadh explained that she began by simply being there in the space in the present moment with nature. She was not looking for anything, and there was no expectation. It was not a performance, and she was not looking for ways to create a performance. The focus was on just being there. In the natural space, she began by observing her body honestly to get to know her own body. She explored different ways her body could move. She became aware of her body and her mind. Once the body and the mind connected, she could see further and understand better. (S. Keitprapai, personal communication, August 3, 2025)

Sineenadh mentioned that in the beginning of her self-exploration process, she had a chance to go to a beach. She discovered that the ocean had very strong and intense energy from the wind, the waves, the sound, the sand, and the mountain in the background. When she went to a forest, on the other hand, she found that the forest was calmer and more still. She began to sense these subtle differences in different natural spaces as she continued to understand and develop her process by practicing, reading, and attending related courses and workshops. (S. Keitprapai, personal communication, August 3, 2025)

Sineenadh stresses that, from all the years that she has been working with the body, she sees her body as a teacher. The body is a medium or a door that opens to both our inner self and the outside world. It is the medium that helps us stay rooted in the present moment and get to know ourselves better. When she began to work with nature, Sineenadh also discovered that nature is a teacher that can teach us many things. As a performer, Sineenadh is used to being looked at and evaluated all the time. And she understands and accepts it. When she works with nature, however, she discovers that nature embraces us as we are and does not judge us. Moreover, nature is constantly changing, which is why Sineenadh emphasizes being in the present moment and being in the flow with nature. As a result, we move spontaneously and we get to know our own movement, as opposed to following a pattern. (S. Keitprapai, personal communication, August 3, 2025) Our movement comes naturally from how we feel at each moment, which constantly changes and creates something new, just like nature.

The Process

After about four years of self-exploration and self-study through Moving with Nature, Sineenadh felt ready to share her experience with others. (S. Keitprapai, personal

communication, May 20, 2024) She began offering workshops to people who were interested. The people who attended her workshops came from all walks of life, and prior experience in movement or performance was not required. The Moving with Nature workshops differ from her other workshops because they are not oriented toward performance; they focus more on personal experience and connection.

There are some basic exercises or activities in Moving with Nature; however, Sineenadh adjusts and organizes them differently based on the place, the length of time available, and the nature of the participants. The following is an example of the process of Moving with Nature taken from her presentation at the APARN Conference 2025 and from an earlier draft of her paper that was given to me with more details about the process (S. Keitprapai, personal communication, June 12, 2025):

The process usually begins with getting to know the body and relaxing the body. Sineenadh says that the body is our medium of communication and expression that is always open, even when we are asleep. The body does not exist on its own but comes with the mind and the spirit. Understanding the body creates a channel to other discoveries. During this process, we relax our body by paying attention to our breathing. We can also focus on our feet and stand grounded like a tree.

After we relax our body, we begin to open our senses. We focus on what we see, smell, hear, taste (both the taste in our mouth and/or the taste of edible plants), and touch. We focus especially on the skin and the perception of the skin. After we open our senses, we open our heart. We move or go wherever our heart desires. We move our body without thinking – moving with the heart. Along with our senses, we observe our breathing without trying to control it. We let everything be natural.

Next, we combine everything and move with the body and mind. We can start by moving our hand very slowly and see where it takes us. We can walk around in space with all our senses and observe the natural world around us. We let our body move with its natural rhythm as we connect with our environment. We keep observing and exploring. This is one version of the introduction of the process of Moving with Nature.

It is important to note that when you move with nature, you are not performing. And nature is not merely the background of your performance. (S. Keitprapai, personal communication, June 20, 202) Nature is the heart and soul of your movement. The way you move in nature will be different from the way you move in your room. Nature prompts you to move in certain ways. Therefore, it is important to be present in the moment, which will lead to a deeper connection with nature. Gradually, you will let go of control and become more in tune with your surroundings.

After a session of body awareness and physical movement, participants reflect on their experience. This process is very important and cannot be overlooked. First, participants may spend some time by themselves. They can choose to write, draw, or create some artwork. Then, everybody sits in a circle and shares their experience and what they have created. Sharing and listening to other people's experiences lead to understanding. When we spend time looking into ourselves and moving in space by ourselves, we sometimes encounter doubts and uncertainties. By listening to other people's stories, we might find that some people also share a similar experience. And even if they do not share the same experience, we can still learn something from them

or gain some insight into our own experience. Sometimes nature, or even our body, tries to tell us something, but we cannot understand it at the moment. By going through this process of reflection, at least we are learning to pay attention to what nature, the environment, the Earth, and our body are trying to communicate with us.

Buddhist Ecology and Meditation

There is a clear link between Sineenadh's practice and Buddhist ecology and Buddhist meditation. In The Foundation of Ecology in Zen Buddhism, Ven. Sunyana Graef describes the premise of Zen Buddhist ecology: "When we understand what we really are, we will be at peace with ourselves and our environment. We will cease trying to enlarge ourselves through possessions and power, take responsibilities for our universal self – the world – and start living to give rather than get." (Graef, 1990, para. 3) The idea of understanding who we truly are is also echoed in Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh's 2014 speech at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. He said that "We are lost, isolated and lonely. We work too hard, our lives are too busy, and we are restless and distracted, losing ourselves in consumption.... Each one of us needs to come back to reconnect with ourselves, with our loved ones, and with the Earth." (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2014, para. 7) Moving with Nature is one way to come back to ourselves and understand who we are through our connection with nature.

Sineenadh often stresses the importance of "getting to know ourselves" or "coming back to ourselves," however, for Sineenadh, the self doesn't mean the "ego" or the sense of self-importance. (S. Keitprapai, personal communication, June 20, 2025) As a performer, we need to let go of the ego so that we can be a vessel for our expression. We need to understand ourselves because our body and mind are the medium of our creativity. We perform and tell stories from our experience and our point of view. But we are not attached to the idea of who we are or how important we might be. And to relate to the natural world, we need to let go of our ego as well.

In Buddhism, one way to learn to understand ourselves and to let go of our ego is through meditation. According to Thich Nhat Hanh (2007, para 2), "The practice of Buddhist meditation is to generate three kinds of energy. The first kind of energy is Smrti; it means mindfulness. The second is Samadhi, concentration. And the third is Prajna, insight." According to Thich Nhat Hanh, Mindfulness simply means "to be aware of what's going on." (2007, para. 2) In addition, Jon Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as "moment-to-moment non-judgmental awareness. It is cultivated by purposefully paying attention to things we ordinarily never give a moment's thought to." (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, Introduction Section, para. 7) He also explains that "when we speak of mindfulness, it is important to keep in mind that we equally mean heartfulness. In fact, in Asian languages, the word for "mind" and the word for "heart" are usually the same. So if you are not hearing or feeling the word heartfulness when you encounter or use the word mindfulness, you are in all likelihood missing its essence." (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, Introduction to the Second Edition Section, para. 26) This synonymity of the words "mind" and "heart" is an important aspect to consider when talking about the mind-body

connection in Sineenadh's work.

The process of Moving with Nature is exactly the practice of mindfulness. It corresponds directly to The Four Establishments of Mindfulness, found in The Satipatthana Sutta, which offer four objects for mindfulness practice: our body, our feelings, our mind, and the objects of our mind. Discourse on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness (n.d.) states that:

"Moreover,
when a practitioner walks, he is aware, 'I am walking.'
When he is standing, he is aware, 'I am standing.'
When he is sitting, he is aware, 'I am sitting.'
When he is lying down, he is aware, 'I am lying down.'
In whatever position his body happens to be, he is aware of the position of his body."

When we meditate on the body, we can be in any of the four basic postures: sitting, standing, walking, or lying down. There are also other meditation techniques in various Buddhist traditions that include some forms of movement. Therefore, you can meditate in any position as long as you are rooted in the present moment. During Moving with Nature, when you move your arm, you are aware that you are moving your arm. When you walk on the Earth, you feel your feet against the Earth. That's all. The key is to be relaxed about it. Do not concentrate too much so that it feels forced. When you feel the urge to move your body, simply move your body and be aware of it.

Next, we observe our feelings, whether they are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, without judgment. We also observe our minds by noting any mental formations that may occur. Mental formation means anything that is "formed, anything that is made of something else. (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1999, p.73) For example, anger is a formation. Agitation is a formation. We simply recognize anger as anger, agitation as agitation; that's all.

Lastly, we observe the objects of our mind or the phenomena that are happening around us, which, according to Discourse on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness (n.d.), are experienced through the six sense organs and the six sense objects. While practicing Moving with Nature, one observes the objects of the mind through the six sense organs. For example, when we hear a bird sing, the sound is the object of our mind (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1999, p.76).

In her personal journal (S. Keitprapai, personal communication, December 10, 2024), Sineenadh talks about practicing Moving with Nature by herself in a park in the city. Parks in the city are more crowded, and there is a lot of noise from the traffic or construction. Moreover, there are more complexities in terms of living organisms and more spiritual dimensions to be experienced in a forest. But as someone who lives and works in Bangkok, which is the capital of Thailand, Sineenadh can't go to a forest or go outside in the country all the time. She has to make the best out of her environment. In the city, it is more difficult to let go and stay in the present moment for a continuous period of time. She also mentions that it was harder to feel safe practicing alone in a city park; she felt like she needed someone there to watch her back so she could feel more at ease during the process. Sineenadh coped with this problem by simply noticing what came into her mind and staying in the present moment without judging her thoughts and

feelings, including her fears and insecurities.

The practice of noting and/or labeling is often employed in Buddhist meditation. “The practice is that, no matter how many times you fail and your mind starts wandering, you simply note that you’re distracted, or that you are thinking about it….Note what mood there is in your mind right now – not to be critical or discouraged, but just calmly, cooly notice….Just to know.” (Ajahn Sumedho, 1987, p. 26) What Sineenadh did in the park when she got distracted by her inner thoughts and feelings and the outer environment is similar to this practice. Without intending to do so, she notes what comes into her consciousness and then moves on.

Moving with Nature also engages in what Thich Nhat Hanh calls two kinds of concentration: active concentration and selective concentration. “In active concentration, the mind dwells on whatever is happening in the present moment, even as it changes.” (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1999, p. 105) You can go into nature and simply become aware of all your senses and take notice of whatever comes into your mind. In selective concentration, on the other hand, you can choose one object and hold on to it. (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1999, p. 106) You can pick a flower, a stone, or a leaf, and direct your attention to that object. Moving with Nature thus incorporates both kinds of concentration. “Mindfulness brings about concentration. When you are deeply concentrated, you are absorbed in the moment. You become the moment.” (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1999, p. 107) I believe this is when you get a glimpse of interconnectedness. You become one with the object of your concentration, either active or selective, and you experience a moment of interbeing.

Interbeing

The term “interbeing” was coined by Thich Nhat Hanh to describe “our deep interconnection with everything else.” (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2017, chapter 1, para. 4) He explains that “the verb ‘to be’ can be misleading, because we cannot be ourselves alone. ‘To be’ is always ‘inter-be.’ Therefore, the verb inter-be is a more accurate term to describe our experience because we inter-are with one another and with all life at all times. (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2017, chapter 1, para. 4)

Even though we inter-are with one another and with all things in our surroundings at all times, we do not often feel or experience this state of interbeing because we are often distracted by our own thoughts or social media or everyone and everything around us. Therefore, we feel anxious and uneasy as we go through life. Thich Nhat Hanh calls this separateness a wrong view. He says that “we need to liberate ourselves from this idea that we are a separate self cut off from the world…As long as we have this wrong view, we will suffer; we will create suffering for those around us, and we will cause harm to other species and to our precious planet.” (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2017, Introduction section, para. 8)

Moving with Nature is a visible form of interbeing. You can experience the human body, its shape, and its movement. However, the movement created by the body is free-flowing and is not restricted by any external constraints or limitations. The only thing the body responds to is the present moment, which is constantly changing.

Through mindfulness of the body, the feelings, the mind, and the objects of the mind, and through deeply connecting with the natural surroundings by opening all their senses, the practitioners surely catch a glimpse into the nature of interbeing. In her presentation given at the APARN conference (2025), Sineenadh stated that “practicing and leading Moving with Nature workshop is a transitional period in my life, an earth-based spiritual path leading into mindfulness and awareness of living in the moment of here and now…. Deep in my heart, I realize that we are not separated from nature.”

I believe that when a performer is in this flowing state of body and mind, an onlooker or an audience member can feel this sense of interconnection as well, although it may not be as strong. Sineenadh explains that when we move our body in nature and when we open our senses, we can connect with the space and the surroundings. It is similar to when an actor connects with space or the other actors on stage. However, the connection with nature is more subtle because the energy emitted from it might not be as intense as the set or the actors performing on stage. (S. Keitprapai, personal communication, August 15, 2025) Just as an audience feels the actor’s energy on stage, we can feel the connection between a person and nature when they are fully immersed in the present moment with nature as well. For me, this could also be a glimpse into the experience of interbeing.

Eco-Performance Practice

In 2024, Sineenadh created and offered a new course at the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Thammasat University called Eco-Performance Practice. She shared with her undergraduate students the process of Moving with Nature to get the students to connect with who they were and their relationship with nature. Then she guided the students to create their own eco-performance based on their personal stories related to the environment and the natural world around them.

Moving with Nature is a crucial element of eco-performance. Sineenadh used the process of Moving with Nature to help the students open their senses and become fully present with themselves and with nature. She slowly guided them to find some link or connection between them and nature, or to discover nature in their own way. This connection would serve as the foundation for their ideas and their performance. Sineenadh explained that by going through this process, the students were likely to develop a feeling of love and care for the environment. When transitioning to eco-performance, they would be able to find environmental issues that they genuinely care about. (S. Keitprapai, personal communication, June 20, 2025)

Sineenadh said that most of the students’ performances were conceptual. The content of their performance could be anything as long as it was related to the environment. The most important thing is that the topic should be dear to their heart and really comes from their interest. It could be a topic related to their hometown or their childhood experience. (S. Keitprapai, personal communication, June 20, 2025) The course, thus, offers tools for students to work with their body and mind (and the mind here also means the heart) and what they are truly interested in and to help them find

clarity in their expression.

One thing that I am interested in is when Sineenadh said that the students should see that they are an important part of this process as well. (Keitprapai, personal communication, June 20, 2025) But, again, it is not about having an ego. The self here is important because it is how we relate to the world. It is through our body that we connect with nature. Sineenadh also said that in a conceptual performance, we do not tell a story through a character like in traditional theatre; we tell a story through our body and our point of view. How we see things is important. Therefore, it is vital to get to know ourselves deeply and know that even though we are just a tiny person in the Universe, our voice matters.

One student wrote in their reflective journal that "Awareness of your own body is necessary. It allows us to be efficiently open to the surrounding environment. When you can perceive and connect to your own self, through breathing in and out, you are tuned in to peacefulness and relaxation, which results in connecting to the energy of nature." (Keitprapai, 2025) Another student wrote: "Nature is not just a sanctuary but is a teacher guiding us to listen to the inner voice. Listening to the breathing, mindfully moving or staying still…. all manifest in deep self-reflection, which can ignite an artistic process." (Keitprapai, 2025) Sineenadh's Moving with Nature is not only a meditative practice for self-healing and a way to experience the sense of interbeing, but it also helps students find authentic artistic expression.

Respected Thai scholar Sulak Sivaraksa talks about the "re-envisioning education" in Ecological Suffering: From a Buddhist Perspective, saying that we should create public awareness of climate change, biodiversity, ecology, and social justice through training not only spiritual leaders but also ordinary people. (Sivaraksa, 2014, p. 152) He stresses that education should "address both the inner and outer qualities, both spirituality and material conditions." (Sivaraksa, 2014, p. 152) Through Moving with Nature and Eco-Performance Practice, students have an opportunity to explore both the inner qualities and spirituality through direct experience in a formal educational system, which can lead to artistic expression and a deeper connection with the Earth. Students also become aware of current environmental issues that are related to climate change, ecology, and other concerns.

From Healing Ourselves to Healing the Earth

Buddhism gives us the wisdom of interconnectedness, of interbeing. We are all connected to everyone and everything around us, including the environment. Therefore, "the search for solutions to the global crisis begins with each of us. To transform the world, we must transform ourselves." (Bachelor and Brown, 1994, p. ix) To heal the world, we can start by healing ourselves.

In the 2014 speech at the United Nations, Thich Nhat Hanh talked about "the spiritual pollution of our environment." (para. 9) We create a toxic and destructive atmosphere from our way of consuming. We think that the more we consume, the happier we will become. According to Vasubhanda, an Indian Buddhist philosopher, "the world is created from intentions." (quoted in Bachelor, 1994, p. 36) The nature of our

thoughts creates the world that we live in. Bachelor further explains that “the environment we find ourselves in and the way we experience it are the consequences of how we have chosen and agreed to live. If our intentions are driven by self-hatred, greed, and attachment, then that will determine the way we perceive the external environment.” (Bachelor, 1994, p. 36) However, if we develop a sense of love and care for the environment because we know that the environment is not separate from us, we will stop treating it with selfishness and greed. Moving with Nature is one way to help us heal and better understand ourselves. It can also foster a sense of love and care for the environment.

Conclusion

Sineenadh Keitprapai created and designed the process of Moving with Nature for her personal healing during the Covid-19 quarantine. After about four years of practicing and studying on her own, she began offering Movement with Nature and eco-performance workshops. In 2024, she developed and created the Eco-Performance Practice course for undergraduate students at the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Thammasat University.

Sineenadh’s Moving with Nature and eco-performance coincide with the teaching of Buddhism, especially the Buddhist view of ecology and Buddhist meditation. Being out in nature and being aware of all your senses, either staying still or moving spontaneously with the moment, one practices the art of mindfulness. By noting any thoughts or feelings, as well as any outer stimulations, that may come up, and simply letting them go, one practices observing the present moment and seeing things as they are. These activities of the body and mind are comparable to the Four Establishments of Mindfulness, where you observe your body, feelings, mind, and the objects of the mind. Through this practice, we connect with our inner self as well as our environment.

The practice of mindfulness thus leads to glimpses of interbeing, which is the awareness that we are not separate beings but interconnected with everything else. Being out in nature enhances our sense of interconnectedness with the natural environment. Buddhism believes that this realization is the first step to bringing about change. “When you realize that the Earth is so much more than simply your environment, you’ll be moved to protect her in the same way as you would yourself. This is the kind of awareness, the kind of awakening that we need,” says Thich Nhat Hanh (2014, para 5).

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DISPLACEMENT AND SOLASTALGIA IN MEKONG DELTA NARRATIVES: A STUDY OF NGUYỄN NGỌC TƯ'S SHORT STORIES

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Abstract

Situated in southern Vietnam, the Mekong Delta is both a vital ecological region and one of the world's most climate-vulnerable landscapes. This study examines how climate change produces intertwined experiences of displacement and solastalgia in literary narratives, focusing on selected short stories by Nguyễn Ngọc Tư. Through close reading and narrative analysis, informed by ecocritical narratology and place studies, the research explores how her fiction portrays the Delta not merely as a backdrop but as a fragile and shifting "place" that shapes human livelihoods, memory, and emotional life. The findings indicate that displacement in Nguyễn's work extends beyond physical migration to include cultural and existential estrangement, while solastalgia registers the grief of witnessing a homeland's gradual deterioration. Together, these concepts illuminate the Mekong Delta as a chronotope of both loss and resilience, where ecological collapse manifests as external dislocation and internal sorrow. By highlighting these dynamics, the research contributes to Vietnamese ecocritical scholarship and the health humanities, underscoring the importance of literature in articulating the psychological dimensions of climate vulnerability and pointing to the need for adaptation strategies that integrate ecological care with cultural and emotional well-being.

Keywords: Nguyễn Ngọc Tư, Mekong Delta, displacement, solastalgia

Introduction

Located adjacent to the western edge of Vietnam's Southeast region, the Mekong Delta is ecologically significant due to an unique interplay of environmental, historical, and cultural factors that have shaped its landscape, biodiversity, and human-environment relationship. Environmentally, the Delta supports exceptional aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity, including over 1,100 fish species and 20,000 plant

species, making it one of the world's most productive and diverse deltas. In addition, its history is marked by large-scale hydraulic engineering and agrarian colonization, especially for rice production, which has made it the "rice bowl" of Southeast Asia and key economic region for Viet Nam. However, its ecological health depends on sediment flows from the Mekong river. Recent decades have seen dramatic changes due to dam construction, sand mining, and water infrastructure, leading to sediment starvation, land subsidence, and increased vulnerability to sea level rise and salinization (Kondolf et al., 2022). Local communities have developed adaptive strategies to cope with flooding and climate change, but rapid urbanization, policy shifts, and economic pressure have disrupted traditional practices and increased vulnerability.

The Mekong Delta's rise in Vietnamese ecological literature can be traced to the 1950s and 1960s, with early works by authors like Sơn Nam, Đoàn Giỏi, Nguyễn Quang Sáng, Trang Thế Hy... who depicted the region as a frontier of human conquest over nature. Sơn Nam's Hương rừng Cà Mau (Scent of the Ca Mau Forest, 1962) portrays the Delta as a wild, untamed space where settlers "open up" the land, reflecting a historical narrative of migration and colonization in southern Viet Nam (Bùi, 2018). In Đoàn Giỏi's Đất rừng phương Nam (Southern Forest Land), the protagonist's thought after capturing a crocodile serves as a "manifesto" of this era's human-centric myth: "O fierce and treacherous Nature, beware! There is no power within you that humankind cannot subdue!" (Đoàn Giỏi, 2024). However, the Delta became truly central post-1975, following national reunification, as writers responded to peace-time environmental concerns. The period marked a paradigm shift from anthropocentrism – viewing humans as conquerors of nature – to ecocentrism, emphasizing harmony and critique of exploitation. By the 2000s, amid global awareness of climate change, the authors such as Nguyễn Ngọc Tư, Phan Thị Vàng Anh, Võ Diệu Thanh, Khải Đơn… This timing aligns with Vietnam's integration into global environmental discourses, influenced by Western ecocriticism from the 1970s onward, as adapted in local critiques.

Nguyễn Ngọc Tư, who was born in Ca Mau province (Viet Nam), is one of the leading contemporary Vietnamese writers renowned for poignant depictions of life in the Mekong Delta. Growing up in the southern region's riverine landscape, Nguyễn's works – primarily short stories and novels – often explore themes of environmental degradation, human displacement, and emotional resilience amid social change. Therefore, her debut works, when they emerged in the literary scene around 2005, attracted the attention of ecological criticism scholars. Research on her literature spans the first through the third waves of ecological criticism. In the first wave, studies such as Nature in Nguyễn Ngọc Tư's Short stories from the Perspective of Ecological criticism (Trần, 2014), The Riverine space in Nguyễn Ngọc Tư's short stories (Thuỵ Khê, 2006) explore how her narratives depict the Mekong Delta as a contested landscape between human ambition and the natural world. Studies in the second wave of ecocriticism portray the Mekong Delta as both a wounded and resilient landscape, where human–nature relations are imagined through the lens of spiritual ecocriticism and ecofeminist thought. This period marks a turn from purely rural, harmony-centered depictions toward more complex engagements with urban ecologies, environmental justice, linking environmental degradation to issues of gender, power, and cultural

identity. In the third wave of ecocriticism, scholars increasingly draw on concepts such as slow violence (Nixon, 2011) and eco-ambiguity (Heise, 2016) to situate Vietnamese literature within global discussions of the Anthropocene. While existing research on Nguyễn Ngọc Tư has explored how her narratives capture environmental degradation and cultural memory in the Mekong Delta, most studies remain anchored either in symbolic readings of landscape or in socio-cultural critiques such as gender and ecology. What remains underdeveloped is a sustained examination of place as both a literary construct and a lived experience shaped by ecological crisis.

The Mekong Delta, as one of the most climate-vulnerable regions in the world, provides a crucial site for place studies in ecocriticism. Here, rising threats from climate change are not only transforming livelihoods and disrupting settlement patterns but also reshaping the ways people relate emotionally and imaginatively to their environment. While global ecocriticism has begun to examine how climate change generates psychological conditions such as solastalgia and eco-anxiety, this perspective has not been systematically applied to Vietnamese literary contexts, nor to Nguyễn Ngọc Tư's short stories that vividly capture the Delta's precarious ecology. This study therefore seeks to fill that gap by analyzing displacement and solastalgia as intertwined experiences of ecological crisis in the Mekong Delta, as represented in Nguyễn Ngọc Tư's fiction. By approaching her work through the lens of place studies and the health humanities, the research highlights how literature mediates the psychological burden of climate change on human communities. In doing so, it not only advances Vietnamese ecocritical scholarship but also contributes to broader interdisciplinary dialogues on the links between place, environment, and mental well-being in climate-vulnerable regions.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design rooted in literary analysis. The primary method is close reading of selected short stories by Nguyễn Ngọc Tư, focusing on textual strategies through which displacement and solastalgia are represented. Narrative elements such as setting, temporality, voice, and character experience are examined to uncover how ecological crises are embedded in literary form. In addition, the research adopts an ecocritical narratology perspective, which emphasizes how narratives mediate the relationship between humans and their environment. This approach allows for the tracing of connections between ecological degradation, place-based identity, and psychological responses. The study also draws on place studies, a subfield that foregrounds how environments function not only as backdrops but as agents in shaping human experience.

The analysis is informed by qualitative, interpretive methods. Rather than measuring environmental or psychological change quantitatively, the study seeks to identify recurring motifs, narrative patterns, and symbolic structures that convey the psychological and social impacts of climate change. This approach enables an in-depth exploration of the lived and imagined experiences of displacement and solastalgia, as mediated through literature.

Theoretical Framework

Ecocriticism, as a field, has long emphasized the importance of place as a foundation for understanding human connections to the environment. Early ecocritical thought, particularly in the Global North, placed immense value on the idea of a “sense of place”. Influenced by writers like Henry David Thoreau and Wendell Berry, this perspective argued that a strong, intimate, and long-term connection to a specific local environment was the cornerstone of a sound environmental ethic. This viewpoint, which Ursula K. Heise terms an “ethic of proximity”, assumes that genuine care for the environment arises from direct, sensory experience and a deep familiarity with one's immediate surroundings (Heise, 2008). However, beginning in the late 20th century, scholars began to critique this localised focus for its significant limitations. The concept of “displacement” emerged as a powerful analytical tool to challenge the often-privileged and exclusionary nature of the “ethic of proximity”. As Rob Nixon criticizes in Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor, traditional environmentalism often fails to account for the legacies of colonialism, neocolonial exploitation, and the displacement of Indigenous peoples, whose connection to place was violently severed. While acknowledging that global environmental issues like climate change affect the entire planet, he highlights that their impacts manifest differently in specific areas, often resulting in delayed forms of degradation that are “dispersed across time and space” and not immediately apparent (Nixon, 2011). Nixon challenges the conventional Western environmental perspective, which prioritizes immediate sensory experiences, arguing that to understand transnational and planetary environmental degradation, it is essential to connect issues of power and perspective. To achieve this, he highlights “the temporalities of place” (2011: 18), allowing for an understanding of place in relation to both temporal and geographical dislocation. This occurs when locations are affected by global forces, resulting in the inhabitants losing their land rights and being denied access to environmental resources. Thus, displacement should not be viewed solely as the movement of people; instead, it represents a complex interplay of global and local relationships that render a place uninhabitable.

Transitioning to displacement, ecocriticism increasingly addresses how environmental changes force mobility and loss, disrupting the sense of place. Displacement here refers not only to physical relocation but also to cultural, emotional, and epistemological upheavals. In Ecocriticism and the Sense of Place, Lenka Filipova discusses concepts such as solastalgia, anthropocene anxiety, and climate grief, as examples of how ecological loss produces grief even without literal movement (Filipova, 2022). This insight widens ecocriticism’s concerns to include the mental health and emotional well-being of communities facing climate crises, linking environmental change with gender, care work, and social justice in ways that resonate with ecofeminist thought.

Results and Discussion

1. Displacement as Narrative of Uprootedness in the Mekong Delta

In Nguyễn Ngọc Tư's short stories, displacement emerges as a multi-layered phenomenon where ecological crisis, political history, and economic modernization intersect to uproot individuals, families, and entire communities. Her narratives reveal that losing one's land in the Mekong Delta is rarely a single event; rather, it is a continuum of dislocations stretching across generations. At its core, displacement in these texts unfolds in both material and existential dimensions: people are forced to abandon ancestral homes, livelihoods collapse under floods or salinization, and memories themselves become unstable as familiar landscapes vanish. The stories transform the Mekong Delta into what can be called a chronotope of loss, where space and time intertwine to narrate uprootedness, eroded traditions, and fractured identities.

Endless field, one of Nguyễn Ngọc Tư's most famous stories, dramatizes displacement through the lives of a single-dad family drifting across river networks with their flock of ducks. After his wife left for another man, the father, Út Vũ – devastated by grief – abandoned life on land and chose a drifting existence on the rivers with his two children. However, their displacement becomes inevitable as they drift on boats after their homes and fields are destroyed by alum-contaminated soil and unyielding droughts. The writer portrays salinity intrusion in the Mekong Delta with a sense of tragedy, depicting people whose "bodies festered with scabies, kid scratched themselves until their skin bled. [...] In the afternoon when people returned from the fields, they would bathe in pond water that tasted like alum, the rinse themselves with exactly two buckets of water" (Nguyễn, 2019). In this story, place is no longer the solid ground of memory or identity but a shifting terrain shaped by ecological collapse and economic pressures. The Mekong Delta, shaped by rivers that both sustain and erode, embodies a contested sense of place, where lives cling to fragile ecologies increasingly threatened by upstream dams, urbanization, and the slow violence of climate change. Nguyễn Ngọc Tư wrote:

"The fields became cities. The fields changed the taste of the water from refreshing to cringingly salty. The fields were now devoid of humans, the wild rice stalks pining for the human feet that used to wade in the mud but now wandered the cities to make a living. It was those fields that rejected the rice plants (and indirectly the ducks). The soil beneath our feet shrunk slowly" (Nguyễn, 2019: 95).

The narrative structure itself reinforces this sense of fragmentation. Told in disjointed episodes rather than linear progression, the story mirrors the family's drifting existence – moving from one riverbank to another, herding ducks, scavenging resources, never settling. This mobility is not liberating but imposed, a survival strategy in a landscape that no longer anchors life. For Điền and Nương, growing up without schools, neighbors, or lasting ties, displacement unravels more than homes or fields: it erodes villages, disperses families, and and hollows out the bonds between people and place, so much so that Nương admits, "I often miss people" finding companionship only in the ducklings. The father, once broken by betrayal, speaks less as floods rise and livelihoods shrink. His silence contrasts with the ceaseless movement around him: drifting boats, migrating laborers, rising and receding waters. The children, following his

lead, inhabit a world where words diminish alongside land and home, where relationships thin out under the weight of dislocation. Place, in The Endless field, no longer binds people together but disperses them – physically across landscapes, socially across communities, and narratively across fragmented episodes.

If Endless field dramatizes displacement through forced mobility on water, Thổ Sầu intensifies this theme by layering environmental degradation, historical violence, and economic marginalization upon the Mekong Delta's rural landscapes. The story is set in a small riverside village, its very name – Thổ Sầu (literally "sorrow soil"), capturing the paradox of land that both sustains and burdens its inhabitants. The opening descriptions of thin rice paddies, withered gardens, and trees with exposed roots establish a landscape marked by exhaustion. Such imagery makes visible a place where survival depends on precarious livelihoods: rat-hunting during the dry season, frog-spearing when floods arrive, or small-scale handicrafts sold to passing tourists (Nguyễn, 2023). Rather than offering security, the land enforces cycles of scarcity that trap families in immobility. In this sense, displacement does not always mean leaving; it can also mean being left behind in spaces that no longer provide continuity or belonging. The narrator, Đậu, serves as a central figure embodying the internal conflict of displacement, caught between dutifulness to his father and the pull of urban opportunities. As a young man tied to the land by family graves and paternal stubbornness, Đậu's refusal to leave with his friend Huệ highlights a generational divide: the older generation clings to Thổ Sầu despite its decline, while youth like Huệ seek escape through migration.

In Thổ Sầu, the tourists play a crucial role in critiquing displacement through the lens of "poverty porn", where urban visitors consume the village's melancholy as entertainment, commodifying suffering without alleviating it. Described as "ecstatic" amid mud and rain, snapping photos of patched quilts and leaky roofs, these characters embody a form of voyeurism that exploits rural hardship for emotional gratification. Thổ Sầu becomes a "spectacle" for outsiders seeking "primitive sadness", disrupting local identities by turning everyday struggles into tourist attractions. This dynamic suggests a reverse displacement for the visitors themselves-alienated from urban anonymity, they seek authenticity in rural decay, only to return home with superficial insights, like boasting of "escaping poverty" through brief immersion. In the Mekong Delta, this reflects growing ecotourism trends, where development promises prosperity but often exacerbates inequality, displacing cultural integrity for economic gain.

Another short story, The Splendid Sky Smoke (Khói trời lộng lẫy), reframes displacement from mere movement to a condition of living-on after place has been altered beyond recognition. The narrator – called Di, also nicknamed Trầu, arrives with her son Phiên on an islet the locals simply call xóm Cồn. The islet functions as a refuge and a sentence at once: "the islet, lying in the middle of the river, is by itself a place of exile", a space where people who cannot return (because of scandal, debt, violence, or shame) remake a provisional life amid water, weeds, and wind-blown huts. The story's most revealing device is the narrator's second life as a field worker for the "Institute of Natural and Human Heritage". Hired after an interview that reduces her labor to "listening to nature speak," she is told to "go find what is about to be lost – there's a lot

out there." This institutional imperative converts vanishing lifeworlds into "samples": scraps of sound (a flag snapping in the wind, a ladle clinking in iced coffee), snatches of image (children bathing in canals, a wedding arch made of palm fronds). The archive promises to "keep the world," yet the narrator recognizes the paradox: the more that gets stored, the more it testifies to disappearance outside. In a dreamlike scene, a museum motto reads, "Nothing lasts forever, keep this world," and she steps into a corridor of rooms where each door opens onto loss. The episodic structure – numbered vignettes that shuttle between the islet, the Institute, and long river errands, mirrors that archival logic: memory is kept because place is slipping away. Displacement is thus institutional as well as ecological; landscapes become files, and communities become exhibits of what modernization will erase.

Nguyễn Ngọc Tư's stories together reveal displacement as less a single rupture than an everyday condition of the Mekong Delta, where ecology, history, and modernity interlock to erode belonging. What makes these narratives distinctive is not simply their depiction of uprooted lives but their insistence that "staying" can be as displacing as leaving. Families who cling to ancestral soil find themselves inhabiting places that are no longer fertile or recognizable; those who migrate discover new forms of loss when ties dissolve behind them. This dual movement destabilizes conventional oppositions between home and exile, or stability and mobility, showing instead that displacement in fragile environments often means living in between – caught in provisional arrangements that resist permanence.

From a broader theoretical standpoint, such portrayals align with what cultural geographers describe as "precarious emplacement," where place is understood not as a fixed territory but as a relational and shifting construct. Filipova's argument about the contested nature of place helps illuminate why rivers, fields, or islets in these stories function simultaneously as refuge and exile, sustenance and threat. Yet Nguyễn pushes this idea further: by embedding ecological collapse within social and political histories, she suggests that displacement in the Delta is cumulative – layers of collectivization, salinity, and tourism stack upon one another, making belonging itself unstable. In this sense, her fiction contributes to the global discourse on climate migration while grounding it in specifically Vietnamese experiences of environmental and cultural precarity.

2. Solastalgia and the Poetics of Environmental Grief

While the physical, social, and institutional dimensions of displacement illustrate the external forces that unmoor communities, it is equally important to consider the inner, psychological weight of this process. Being unhomed is not only a logistical or economic challenge; it is also an emotional rupture. This is where the concept of solastalgia becomes central. First introduced by philosopher Glenn Albrecht, solastalgia names the distress that arises when one's home environment changes for the worse while one is still living there (Albrecht, 2005). In other words, it is the affective response to environmental displacement: the grief and anxiety felt when landscapes that once

provided comfort and belonging instead generate unease and loss. Etymologically, the term merges the Latin sōlācium (solace) with the Greek -algia (pain or grief). Albrecht used it to describe a paradoxical form of homesickness experienced without leaving home. Unlike nostalgia – defined by longing for a home that exists in another time or place, solastalgia is tied to the present, to the lived reality of inhabiting a place that has become unfamiliar, degraded, or hostile (Galway et al., 2019). This distinction matters, especially in regions like the Mekong Delta, where staying often feels as destabilizing as leaving. Here, residents do not always migrate; they remain on ancestral land, yet the encroaching salinity, floods, or urban projects slowly erode the sense of stability that "home" once guaranteed.

Understanding solastalgia is therefore essential for a fuller account of displacement. While displacement describes the external condition of being uprooted, solastalgia points to the interior experience of estrangement and grief that follows environmental change. Together, the two concepts illuminate both the visible and invisible dimensions of the climate crisis in the Mekong Delta: homes lost to rising seas, but also identities fraying in the shadow of vanishing landscapes. Reading Nguyễn Ngọc Tư's fiction through this lens bridges ecocritical theory with the lived realities of rural communities, showing how environmental change reshapes not only where people live but also how they feel, remember, and belong.

In Endless field, solastalgia deepens the displacement theme by shifting focus from physical uprooting to emotional desolation within a changing homeland. Nương embodies solastalgia most vividly. Her recurring hallucinations (imagining herself "sitting in a field nine years ago" while eating) collapse present deprivation into past abundance (Nguyễn, 2019). This is not simple longing but a psychic fracture: she remains tied to the same rivers and fields, yet those places no longer resemble the home of her memory. The alum-tainted water, described as "cringingly salty", invades her body and spirit, leaving her skin sticky and her mind unsettled. Her confession, "I often miss people", conveys more than loneliness; it signals the erosion of community life, where the ducks she tends to become her only companions. Solastalgia here is communal as much as individual, it hollows out both human bonds and the more-than-human ties that once made the Delta livable.

For characters in *The Splendid Sky Smoke*, the loss of ecological integrity is not just physical but emotional: their dreams, silences, and attempts to hold onto fragments of beauty show how solastalgia erodes identity and belonging even before people leave. For Di, solastalgia unfolds as a chronic ache rooted in the islet's physical erosion, which strips away the solace she once derived from its isolation. Her arrival in Cồn village marks a deliberate exile, but the land's degradation – driven by relentless sand extraction, turns this refuge into a site of ongoing loss. As the river widens through mining, Di observes the "earth of the islet being swallowed chunk by chunk, waves crashing and shattering the leafy banks, the soil collapsing and carrying away the bần trees that gave the islet its name" (Nguyễn, 2022a). These images evoke the notion of psychoterratic illness, where a "sick landscape" (Albrecht, 2005) reflects inner turmoil and fosters feelings of injustice and helplessness. Di's powerlessness intensifies as the xáng machines "roar and howl, manically, barbarically, as they plunge their nozzles into

the river's body, sucking its marrow, exposing its ravaged innards" (Nguyễn, 2022a), symbolizing an invasive force that desecrates her home. Unlike her Institute work, where she captures vanishing elements in controlled "samples," the islet's changes are uncontrollable, leaving her in a state of anticipatory grief – knowing the land "will do this until the final shores collapse". This suggests that solastalgia in this short story deepens the story's portrayal of the Delta as a space of provisional existence, where environmental transformation inflicts emotional wounds that archiving cannot heal. Di's distress highlights the human cost of modernization's "slow violence," urging a recognition of place-bound grief in vulnerable ecosystems.

The short story Land (Đất) is set against the turbulent backdrop of Vietnam's land reform campaigns (1953–1956), when ancestral holdings were confiscated, redistributed, or degraded under shifting political and economic regimes. This setting matters: land served as both a source of livelihood and a tie to family and memory. When these lands were taken or lost their fertility, people often stayed, facing the confusion of living in places that no longer felt like home. This captures solastalgia: the pain of staying in a familiar place as it changes beyond recognition, weakening comfort and sense of self. In "Land," solastalgia emerges not from migration but from the family's entrapment in a shrinking rural enclave amid encroaching cityscapes. The narrative weaves dreams, memories, and daily observations to show how characters grapple with this loss, using retrospective narration as a coping mechanism. This backward gaze highlights solastalgia's emotional toll: a mix of anxiety, isolation, and yearning for a pre-urbanized world.

The story's unnamed narrator and her family embody solastalgia through their reactions to the land's transformation. The plot centers on a small patch of family land-once part of vast fields-now encircled by high-rises, limiting sunlight to just five hours a day and flooding nights with artificial light. This urbanization isn't abstract; it's visceral, altering daily rhythms and evoking a deep sense of violation. The grandmother, a resilient matriarch, guards the eastern corner of the land, complaining about the skyscrapers' shadows: "They took all our morning sun... If they can't steal the land, they steal the sunlight, just as vicious" (Nguyễn, 2022b). Her actions, like watching for intruders from the "Heaven" building, show a defiant attachment to the land as heritage, yet her memories of past reforms amplify the grief: without land, "we're nothing at all". Meanwhile, the narrator, who cares for her epileptic brother Hai, experiences solastalgia most intensely through dreams and flashbacks. She feels like "we're on the back side, on the edge of the light". This light pollution-a hallmark of urbanization-disrupts natural cycles, evoking isolation akin to childhood frustration with unreachable festival lights across the river. Brother Hai's tragic death, charging into a bulldozer to protect the narrator, crystallizes the family's despair. Piecing his remains together on the scarred earth, the narrator realizes she's bound forever: "I knew I'd never leave this piece of land" (Nguyễn, 2022b). Yet, in a solastalgic twist, staying means enduring constant change, leading to identity loss: "Without a name, we're nothing, no one, and have nothing at all". "Land" portrays solastalgia not as passive sorrow but as active resistance through memory. The characters' flashbacks aren't mere nostalgia; they're a protest against the "quarrelsome" sun and glowing nights that erase rural identity. By

emphasizing land as lifeblood, Nguyễn Ngọc Tư humanizes the Mekong Delta's real struggles, showing how urbanization inflicts invisible wounds – turning home into a stranger's territory.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates how Nguyễn Ngọc Tư's short stories illuminate the Mekong Delta as a site where ecological degradation, displacement, and solastalgia converge. By employing close reading and ecocritical narratology, the research reveals that climate change reshapes both the material and emotional landscapes of the Delta: disrupting livelihoods, severing ties to place, and fostering psychological distress. In this sense, displacement and solastalgia emerge as mutually reinforcing conditions that define the lived experience of environmental crisis. The significance of this research lies in its integration of place studies with ecocriticism, offering new insights into how Vietnamese literature mediates the psychological burdens of ecological change. While previous studies have emphasized symbolic landscapes or socio-cultural critiques, this project highlights the value of attending to the affective and mental health dimensions embedded in narrative form.

Nonetheless, the study also points to future directions. Further research could compare the Mekong Delta's literary representations with other climate-vulnerable regions, trace how different genres (film, oral storytelling, visual arts) register ecological grief, or investigate how community narratives intersect with state and global discourses on climate adaptation. Such extensions would enrich not only the field of Vietnamese ecocriticism but also the broader environmental humanities, where the links between climate change, place, and mental well-being remain urgent and understudied.

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Walking Through "November": A Leopoldian Approach Against Ecological Absence

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Abstract

This paper revisits Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, by putting emphasis on the "November" chapter. The chapter alone is Leopold's reflection on events occurring around his plot of land. But through his musings he articulates ecological consciousness grounded on responsibility and reverence to nature. Analyzed through contemporary environmental concepts, the sub-chapters may reveal an environmental point of view that is fresh and fitting for this modern age. "If I Were the Wind" shows his talent of ecological sensitivity to the changing season cycles. The first section shall explore this talent with hopes of cultivating such sensitivity ourselves. "Axe-in-Hand" talks about human capacity to give and take life while also encouraging to be self-critical and understand environmental choices are heavily influenced by personal bias. This second section will criticize the current *cornucopian* vision of industries, the philosophy of conservations, and possible personal attempts at conservation. The last section "A Mighty Fortress" shall be analyzed with the joint concept of Deleuze and Guattari—*machinic assemblages*—in order to uncover the ecological agency of forest life. Here, diseased trees, grubs, decay itself do not function as isolated entities, but as connected elements in a dynamic ecological system. The synthesis of all three sub-chapters function as a rich remedy to this day's ecological confusion.

Keywords: Ecological Awareness, Ecocriticism, Nature-Writings, Aldo Leopold

Introduction

Aldo Leopold stands out as a figure in twentieth-century American environmental thought. Unlike Leo Marx or Rachel Carson, whose critiques often come from a clear position of ecological crises, Leopold is much quieter. His book, A Sand County Almanac (1949), is a collection of seasonal reflections from his Wisconsin farm and is widely seen on par to the cornerstones of modern environmental ethics (Frese, 2003).

While the entire book is known for blending science and philosophy, the “November” entries especially highlight Leopold’s ecological awareness.

November is often seen as a month linked to decline. But Leopold shows that even that can be meaningful. His description of nature teaches lessons about responsibility, respect, and how all life is connected. Looking back at these November essays lets us reconsider his ideas in today’s environmental context. This paper aims to address a gap in Leopold studies by exploring how his “November” contributes to current discussions on ecological resilience and adaptation, offering a view on the challenges and opportunities of human involvement in nature.

The “November” chapter of A Sand County Almanac consists of three essays: “If I Were the Wind”, “Axe-in-Hand”, and “A Mighty Fortress”. Each essay begins with an ordinary observation, autumn winds, the swing of an axe, or the sight of a decaying tree, but ends with thoughts that reach far beyond the immediate. Leopold’s strength is noticing meaning in ordinary things, using natural cycles to reflect on human duties and mistakes.

As we face climate change and loss of biodiversity, Leopold’s “November” gives us a way to think about nature as a community we belong to and care for, not just a resource to use (Bourgoin et al., 2024; Munday et al., 2025; Newbold et al., 2016; Pollock et al., 2022; Reddington et al., 2025). Feel the gentle pressure of the breeze against your skin, carrying with it stories from faraway lands. To become the wind, for Leopold, is not merely to imagine freedom of movement but to inhabit the perspective of an element that touches everything without possession. In what seems to be a leap of imagination, his writings imply a mode of ecological perception that is both humble and expansive: humble in recognizing human smallness, expansive in recognizing connections across the land. This essay, as we will see, brings what might be called a 'phenomenological ecology,' in which perception itself is the first step to ecological action.

It is important, however, not to romanticize Leopold’s reflections as mere pastoral nostalgia. His writings are not an escape into the past but a challenge to the present. When he writes about wind, he is teaching readers how to notice change. When he writes about the axe, he is exposing the biases that shape decisions. When he writes about decay, he is dismantling the illusion that ecological health means static permanence. These lessons are not confined to the Wisconsin of the 1940s, they speak directly to the globalized world of the twenty-first century, where ecological crises demand not only technological solutions but also transformations of perception and value.

Methodology

This paper will use the qualitative descriptive method to approach Aldo Leopold’s text. Within “November”, Leopold uses descriptions of nature that, while already ecologically charged, needs further elaboration in order to connect with the concept of absence. This paper will focus on important ecocritical comments that Leopold made and the qualitative descriptive method will be used to further elaborate close the points.

The choice of using the qualitative descriptive method is driven by the need for an in-depth exploration of the cultural and symbolic dimensions associated with both text's sacred trees. Passages are chosen while keeping in mind a diverse representation ecocritical aspects. With a focus on extracting relevant passages and explaining how their cultural and symbolic aspects point out towards ecocriticism, this paper will hopefully offer a useful analysis.

At the same time, the study operates within the broader intellectual terrain of ecocriticism. Ecocriticism, understood as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, provides the conceptual scaffolding for this analysis (Garrard, 2004; Glotfelty & Fromm, 1994). Leopold's writing has always occupied a central place in the ecocritical canon because it straddles literature and science, art and ecology. An ecocritical lens allows us to appreciate how Leopold's prose does not merely describe nature but shapes how nature can be thought, valued, and acted upon. This methodological choice underscores the conviction that literature is not ancillary to environmental ethics but foundational to it. Through literature, ecological imagination is cultivated, and through imagination, ecological responsibility becomes possible.

Of course, such a methodology comes with limitations. Interpretive readings are inevitably shaped by the concerns of the present moment, and no analysis can claim neutrality. This paper does not attempt to extract a definitive 'message' from Leopold but instead offers one interpretive trajectory among many. Nor does it attempt to encompass all of A Sand County Almanac, focusing instead on the "November" as a product of Leopold's ecological philosophy. These limitations, however, also serve as strengths. By narrowing the focus, the analysis allows for depth and attentiveness. By acknowledging its interpretive nature, it remains open to other readings, other contexts, and other possibilities.

Results and Discussion

"If I Were the Wind": Cultivating Ecological Sensitivity

"The wind that makes music in "November" corn is in a hurry. The stalks hum, the loose husks whisk skyward in half playful swirls, and the wind hurries on." (1949, p. 66)

Leopold is an expert at describing change. In fact, the whole first section of *A Sand County Almanac* is dedicated to communicate the change of months and seasons. The first sentence of "November", has the spirit of the whole book. It describes the incoming change of seasons– the approach of winter. Wind is the primary enforcer of change. It moves through the fields disturbing the decay. Leaves that are already down during the autumn are bothered. What is left after the wind passes are remains that are meant to be there. Here, winter approaches quickly.

This imagery seems similar to the current situation of ecological awareness. Climate change, habitat collapse, and extinction are not distant events. They were already happening in Leopold's time and still happening today. The Leopoldian "wind" may signify the reality of ecological degradation. Even so, it is a force that approaches without any intended malice. It is merely a consequence of other forces.

But seen another way, the wind in Leopold's essay is not simply meteorological. It is seasonal, cyclical, and deeply ecological. He describes how the "November" winds reveal the change in the land, stripping leaves from trees, carrying scents of decay, and announcing the transition into winter. These winds can be agents of revelation. They do not create the seasonal shift, but they make it visible, tangible, and undeniable. To acknowledge the wind, then, is to participate in this unveiling, to feel the interplay between endings and beginnings. The ordinary reader might experience the "November" wind as nuisance. Leopold would prefer for it to be seen as a force of change. The lesson seems that every gust is part of a cycle, every cycle a reminder of nature's persistence. In the "November" wind, decay and the renewal-to-come are inseparable.

"I wander over the bar to a driftwood log, where I sit and listen to the universal roar, and to the tinkle of wavelets on the shore." (1949, p. 66)

Leopold's sensitivity to rhythms resonates with older traditions of the sublime. Philosophers like Edmund Burke emphasized that the sublime arises when humans encounter forces larger than themselves; storms, mountains, or vast starry skies (Garrard, 2004). The wind has long been one such force, capable of terror and awe. Leopold's approach, however, differs from Burke in its intimacy. He does not present nature as overwhelming but as familiar. His sublime is not in magnitude but in subtlety, not in grandeur but in its capacity to connect. This can represent an different ecological move, the sublime is not only in the extraordinary but in the ordinary, not only in mountains but in breezes. The ecological implication is that reverence does not require spectacle, it requires attention.

Attention, in fact, is the heart of Leopold's essay. His reflections are about perceiving the mundane. He notices what the wind reveals: the timing of migrations, the state of the soil, the resilience of grasses, the frailty of dying leaves. This noticing is ecological sensitivity (Liszka, 2003). Contemporary environmental science often warns of the dangers of "shifting baseline syndrome," where each generation forgets the richness of past ecosystems and normalizes decline. Leopold's attentiveness to the wind resists this forgetting. By anchoring himself to seasonal cycles, he preserves memory of continuity and change. His "November" winds remind us that perception itself is a form of conservation.

The relevance of this lesson today is evident. Climate change disrupts seasonal cycles, making winds less predictable, seasons less stable. To cultivate ecological sensitivity now is to attend not only to cycles but to their disruption. Leopold's attentiveness provides a model: by listening to the wind, by noticing its changes, humans can attune themselves to ecological shifts before they become crises.

"Axe-in-Hand": Human Agency, Bias, and Responsibility

While "If I Were the Wind" focuses on imagination and sensitivity, "Axe-in-Hand" is about taking action. For Leopold, the axe is more than just a tool—it represents the power people have to change the environment with one swing. The essay seems straightforward, as Leopold describes cutting trees on his land, but it actually explores deeper questions about human choices, personal bias, and the responsibility that

comes with making decisions about nature. The axe stands for both power and responsibility, with effects that go beyond just one place.

"If a drouthy summer follows my removal of the birch's shade, the hotter soil may offset the lesser competition for water, and my pine be none the better for my bias." (1949, p. 70)

Leopold makes clear that every swing of the axe is shaped by choice. One tree is felled because it shades a favored plant, another because it blocks a view, another because it is deemed weak or expendable. Rarely is the decision purely ecological or scientific. Instead, it is shaped by taste, preference, and prejudice. "The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away," in this case it is the landowner who both gives and takes, who decides which lives endure and which are ended. The axe thus embodies what philosophers of technology call instrumental agency: the power to transform the world in ways that reflect human priorities. For Leopold, this agency demands self-critique. Every choice is biased, every bias consequential. To wield the axe is to confront not only wood and steel but one's own ethical responsibility.

The honesty with which Leopold acknowledges bias is striking. Many conservationists of his era cloaked decision-making in the language of utility, presenting environmental choices as objective or inevitable. Leopold strips away this veneer. He confesses that even in his own small-scale acts of cutting, personal bias is decisive. A crooked tree irritates him; down it goes. A tree with sentimental value is spared. He recognizes that preference, not necessity, often rules. This candor is not meant to excuse bias but to expose it. By naming bias, he invites readers to interrogate their own. The lesson is clear: environmental decisions are never value-free. Whether made with an axe, a plow, or an industrial machine, they reflect cultural assumptions, economic incentives, and personal desires.

This recognition of bias leads Leopold to critique what is called the "cornucopian vision" of industry, the belief that nature's abundance is infinite and that technological ingenuity can solve any scarcity (Garrard, 2004). With every swing of his axe, he reminds himself that life is finite, that removal is irreversible, and that bias unchecked leads to degradation. In contrast to industrial optimism, Leopold emphasizes restraint. The axe in hand is a reminder of limits, a call to humility. By dramatizing his own small-scale choices, he critiques the large-scale illusions of his time—illusions that persist in the present. The cornucopian dream, which still animates industrial agriculture and extractive capitalism, depends on forgetting the consequences of each cut. Leopold resists this forgetting by personalizing it. He refuses to imagine himself above bias, and in doing so he suggests that honesty about bias is the first step toward ecological responsibility.

The essay also anticipates contemporary environmental philosophy's recognition of scale. One person with one axe seems insignificant compared to global industry, yet Leopold insists on the moral significance of even small acts. The axe symbolizes the intimate scale of ecological agency. Each cut matters. Each choice reshapes the land. This is not to deny the massive power of industrial machines, but to insist that

responsibility begins locally, in the hand that grips the handle. In this sense, "Axe-in-Hand" resonates with Wendell Berry's insistence that global environmental crises are rooted in local failures of care. The forest is degraded not only by distant corporations but by the countless individual decisions made with tools in hand.

Yet Leopold is no sentimentalist. He does not call for abandoning the axe. He accepts that humans must act, must cut, must take. The question is not whether we act but how, and with what awareness. This pragmatic stance separates him from purely preservationist traditions that sometimes imagined a return to untouched wilderness. Leopold's axe is a reminder that humans are always already entangled in ecological processes. The task is not to withdraw but to act with honesty and restraint, acknowledging bias, recognizing limits, and cultivating reverence. In this way, "Axe-in-Hand" is not anti-technology but post-illusion. It accepts human agency while demanding that it be tempered by humility.

Contemporary relevance is clear. The cornucopian optimism Leopold critiques has only intensified. Industrial agriculture, fossil fuel extraction, and genetic engineering all rely on the assumption of endless abundance and human supremacy. The biases that guide these industries are less personal but no less powerful: profit margins, market demand, political expediency. Leopold's insistence on self-critique is urgently needed. If individuals with axes must examine their biases, so too must corporations with machines. The recognition that all environmental choices are value-laden is the first step toward honest discourse. Without it, conservation risks becoming rhetoric that masks exploitation.

"A Mighty Fortress" Ecological Agency and Assemblages

In his final "November" essay, "A Mighty Fortress", Aldo Leopold looks at subjects many might overlook: diseased trees and decay. The title, which usually suggests strength and stability, is used with a sense of irony. Instead of finding lasting grandeur, Leopold describes rot, insects, and breakdown. But in this setting, he shares a key insight: life is not about separate, strong individuals, but about connections where even decay leads to new creation. Nature's real strength comes from these changing relationships, not from unchanging walls. Seeing this way means rethinking how we view the natural world.

Leopold describes the fallen, diseased tree with careful attention. Where others might see only waste or weakness, he perceives continuity and connection. The tree is not merely dead matter; it is habitat, nourishment, and transformation. Grubs bore into its wood, fungi break down its tissues, soils absorb its nutrients. Each act of consumption is also an act of contribution, feeding cycles that sustain the forest. Decay, far from being the opposite of life, is its precondition. The tree lives on in the lives it enables. This recognition resists the anthropocentric tendency to value only growth, strength, and productivity. Leopold insists that weakness and death are not failures but essential components of ecological wholeness.

To articulate this vision, it is fruitful to place Leopold in dialogue with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, whose concept of the machinic assemblage describes systems of heterogeneous elements interacting in non-hierarchical ways (Ueno, 2019). For Deleuze and Guattari, an assemblage is not a static structure but a dynamic

process, a coming together of parts that maintain their difference even as they produce new functions. Leopold's diseased tree exemplifies such an assemblage. The tree, the grubs, the fungi, the soil, the birds that feed on the grubs—all remain distinct, yet their interactions create an ecological whole. The fortress is not the tree standing alone but the network that continues after its fall. By reading Leopold through Deleuze and Guattari, we see how his prose anticipates systems thinking, moving beyond organism-centered views to embrace relational ontology.

Leopold's insistence on the ecological agency of decay also challenges cultural narratives of purity and progress. In industrial and cultural discourse, disease is often imagined as defect, rot as failure, and decay as decline. Leopold overturns these assumptions. He recognizes that the grubs and fungi are not enemies of the forest but integral participants. To remove them would be to collapse the system. This inversion has ethical consequences. It asks humans to revise their categories, to see value not only in the strong and productive but also in the weak and decomposing. In ecological terms, this is recognition of resilience: ecosystems thrive not because they resist disturbance but because they incorporate it. The fortress is mighty not because it is unchanging but because it changes.

From the perspective of contemporary ecocriticism, "A Mighty Fortress" offers a crucial corrective to ecological confusion. Modern discourse often swings between extremes: romanticizing nature as pure and balanced or condemning it as fragile and doomed. Leopold's fortress resists both extremes. It presents nature as resilient but not invulnerable, dynamic but not indestructible. This balanced vision helps to reframe ecological crises. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and deforestation are catastrophic not because ecosystems cannot incorporate disturbance, but because the scale and pace of human disturbance exceed ecological thresholds. By highlighting the creative role of decay, Leopold clarifies that the problem is not disturbance itself but imbalance. His fortress metaphor therefore provides a language for resilience without complacency.

In practical terms, Leopold's vision encourages new attitudes toward conservation. Traditional conservation often sought to eliminate disease, suppress fire, and prevent disturbance. Leopold shows that such efforts may undermine ecological health. To conserve is not to freeze systems in static harmony but to support their dynamic processes. Modern conservation biology echoes this insight in practices such as controlled burns, rewilding, and allowing natural succession. Leopold's reflections foreshadow these strategies, offering philosophical grounding for what science would later confirm. His fortress is a guide not for control but for cooperation.

Finally, "A Mighty Fortress" completes the trajectory of the "November" chapter. If "If I Were the Wind" cultivates sensitivity to cycles and "Axe-in-Hand" explores human responsibility, "A Mighty Fortress" expands the frame to include nonhuman agency. Together, the three essays form a comprehensive ecological ethic: perceive with humility, act with honesty, and revere the agency of all beings, even in decay. The November winds, the swing of the axe, and the fortress of rot are not separate but interwoven. They remind us that ecological wisdom is not abstract but grounded in the ordinary, in winds and trees and grubs. To attend to them is to cultivate an ethic that can

guide us in an age of ecological confusion.

Conclusion

At first, the November essays in Aldo Leopold's A Sand County Almanac might seem like simple stories from rural Wisconsin. They focus more on everyday things rather than dramatic landscapes. But through these ordinary moments, Leopold shares an ecological ethic that still matters today. His writing teaches us how to notice, act, and show respect for nature.

From "If I Were the Wind", we learn the importance of sensitivity. Leopold's imaginative identification with the wind cultivates an attentiveness to cycles of change, reminding us that perception itself is ecological action. To notice seasonal rhythms is to resist forgetfulness, to anchor ourselves in patterns that modern life often obscures. His wind is not a resource to be harnessed but a relation to be honored. By aligning ourselves with the wind, we practice humility, recognizing that our place in the world is small, fleeting, and entangled with forces beyond our control. In an age of climate disruption, when winds carry the consequences of human industry across continents, Leopold's invitation to perceive like the wind is both poetic and prophetic.

From "Axe-in-Hand", we confront the ethical dimension of agency. The axe is not simply a tool for cutting wood; it is a symbol of human power to alter landscapes. Leopold's candid acknowledgment of his own biases in wielding the axe challenges the myth of neutral decision-making. Every cut, every choice, reflects values, preferences, and prejudices. This recognition demands honesty and humility. It critiques the cornucopian optimism of industries that imagine resources as infinite, while also questioning conservation philosophies that hide bias behind utilitarian calculations. Leopold's lesson is not to abandon the axe, but to use it with self-awareness, restraint, and reverence. His reflection anticipates today's debates about the moral weight of consumption, energy use, and technological intervention. The axe in hand remains, even now, a metaphor for our ecological agency.

From "A Mighty Fortress", we discover the agency of the nonhuman. Where others might see disease and decay as failures, Leopold sees processes of renewal. The fortress of the forest is mighty not because it resists disturbance, but because it incorporates it. Grubs, fungi, and rot are not enemies but participants in the cycle of life. By honoring decay, Leopold anticipates contemporary ecological theories of resilience and disturbance. He shows that strength lies not in permanence but in transformation, not in isolation but in relation. His vision expands reverence beyond the majestic to include the humble and overlooked. In recognizing the sanctity of rot, Leopold dissolves the boundary between life and death, strength and weakness, purity and pollution. The fortress of ecology is built from relations, not walls.

In today's world of accelerating ecological crises, Leopold's "November" remains a remedy for confusion. It reminds us that the path forward is not only about technological innovation or political reform, but also about cultivating perception, humility, and reverence. The wind, the axe, and the fortress are not relics of Leopold's Wisconsin—they are enduring symbols of ecological truth. To learn from them is to resist despair, to reorient our values, and to recover a sense of responsibility for the community of life. In the end, Leopold's "November" is not a nostalgic reflection but a

prophetic guide. It teaches that wisdom begins in the ordinary, that responsibility begins in honesty, and that reverence begins in recognizing the agency of all beings. These lessons, grounded in the rhythms of November, remain as mighty a fortress as any we could hope to build against the confusion of our ecological age.

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Green Heroes: How Folklore Can Inspire Eco-Friendly Habits in Children

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Abstract

In the last thirty years, the environment of Jayapura, Papua, has been in dire need of attention. Illegal logging and mining, carelessly disposing garbage done by various people happen without control. This is an uneducating lesson for children. It is also feared that children as the relay generation will continue this bad habit. In 2019, there was a flash flood that claimed many lives. One of the communities affected is the Sentani community in Jayapura. The Sentani community has a wealth of folklore that was passed down orally from one generation to another. Those cultural heritages teach wisdom about protecting the environment. However, the habit of storytelling and chanting no longer exists. Sentani children do not recognize their ancestral folklore. This paper aims to analyze how folklore can inspire Sentani children to have environmentally friendly habits through the folklore they learn. This research analyzes ecological values revealed in Sentani folklore and (2) disseminate ecological values to develop ecological knowledge and environmentally friendly habits for children. Folkloric data are folktales, oral poems, folk songs, proverbs, and bark paintings collected from our previous research results. Those data were strengthened and enriched by interviews and FGDs with traditional leaders and Sentani elders in the East, Central, and West Sentani in July 2025. By learning the folklore, children are expected to understand the importance of a healthy environment and become green heroes who provide environmental awareness to others.

Keywords: folklore; Sentani children; ecological knowledge; eco-friendly habits

Introduction

Papua has a wealth of folklore belonging to hundreds of tribes living on the coast, in valleys, and in the mountains. Data from the Papua Province and the Papua Arts Council (2025) shows that 255 tribes live in Papua, spread across seven cultural regions, namely Tabi (87 tribes), Saireri (37 tribes), Domberai (19 tribes), Bomberai (52 tribes), Ha -Anim (29 tribes), La Pago (19 tribes) and Me Pago (11 tribes). One of the tribes living in the Tabi region is the Sentani. Administratively, Sentani is located in Jayapura Regency. The Sentani people live on the shores of beautiful Lake Sentani, which has 22 islands scattered from east to west in the middle of the lake. To the north of the lake are the Cyclops Mountain ranges, with the highest peak reaching 2,166 meters. The Sentani people call their region rali-wai, which means scattered from east to west. They have cultural heritage that is not well preserved. Only the older generation living on the islands and in the villages are still familiar with this cultural heritage. Meanwhile, those living in urban areas, especially the younger generation, no longer recognize them (Yektiningtyas, 2011, Yektiningtyas & Dewi, 2023).

Some of these cultural treasures are folklore, including folktales (legends, myths, fables), oral traditions (helaehili and ehabla), traditional expressions, folksongs, dances, carvings, and paintings (Yektiningtyas, 2023). Through folklore, various histories, beliefs, local knowledge, socio-cultural values, morals, and wisdom are conveyed, both explicitly and implicitly. One of the knowledge, beliefs, and wisdom of the Sentani people is their view of nature and its care (Yektiningtyas & Dewi, 2023; Yektiningtyas & Modouw, 2019). In various stories and oral poems, nature and the diversity of flora and fauna become the settings the story and characters that are treated with respect. The following excerpt from the ehabla singing tells of the richness of forest products, wood that is priceless.

Emere uyi rane oro hebale
Aka, kabo ohoro ayae wetemae
Raimere uyi rane oro rawale
Aka, kabo hahoro ayae mokoiteimae

(I step on the boat made of eme wood.
Brother, it's just nibung wood, just say.
I step on the boat made of raime wood.
Brother, it's just nibung wood, just say.)

Holli uyi rane oro hebale
Aka, kabo ohoro ayae wetemae
Kanbai uyi rane oro rawale
Aka, kabo hahoro ayae mokoiteimae

(I step on the boat made of holli wood.
Brother, it's just nibung wood, just say.
I step on the boat made of kanbai wood.
Brother, it's just nibung wood, just say.)

In the chant above, the wood of eme tree (Pometia pinnata), raime, holli, kanbai,) are valuable trees that are used to build houses and boats. The Sentani people are very proud because their forest is filled with expensive types of wood. Meanwhile, nibung (Oncosperma tigillarium) is wood that is considered cheap and does not need to be a source of conflicts in their family. The diversity of fauna also appears in several fables such as kangaroos (Macropodidae), birds of paradise (Paradisaeidae), cassowaries (Casuarius), cuscuses (Phalanger), crocodiles (Crocodylidae), eagles (Aquila).

The old Sentani people had long been proud of their rich flora and fauna, but they also knew how to care for it and always taught this to their descendants. One way they preserve nature was through their myths, which were passed down by word of mouth from one generation to the next generation. These myths emphasize the importance of protecting nature, namely the land, forests, and lakes. The community was not allowed to cut down trees indiscriminately. They had to choose which trees to use. Large trees growing in the valley were forbidden to be cut down. Old Sentani people believed that these trees were the home of a god known as the Tree God, who was believed to protect them. They also believed in the Water God who lived in Lake Sentani and the rivers. Therefore, they had to keep the lake and water clean. If the lake was dirty, the gods would be angry and would not provide them food, such as fish (Yektiningtyas, 2021). The myths of the tree god and water god were firmly held by the old Sentani community. Their obedience in protecting nature had successfully spared them from natural disasters, such as floods and landslides.

However, since the 1970s, or since Jayapura was designated as the capital of Papua Province, forests and land had been converted into offices, schools, shops, housing, and hotels (Albert Pepuho, Helena Suangburaro, Irenius Ohee, interview July 2025). Ironically, this phenomenon had caused the beautiful nature with its flora and fauna to be destroyed by people who are only interested in themselves (Yektiningtyas & Dewi, 2023). Those who consider themselves modern were actually engaging in illegal logging and mining for selfish reasons. There were also Sentani people who were involved in selling land to people who could not manage it properly. It is interesting to note that this destruction of nature is carried out by people who know the contents of the Holy Bible, which teaches humans to respect, care for, and manage nature properly (Genesis 1:28, Genesis 2:15, Psalm 24:1). The culmination of these irresponsible human actions was the flash flood that occurred in 2019, which claimed hundreds of lives and caused immeasurable material and immaterial losses

As a fairly large city, not all of Sentani's diverse population is responsible for environmental sustainability. One example is that they litter indiscriminately. Many motorists still throw plastic beverage and food containers on the road, in gutters, or in rivers. As a result, when it rains, all the trash fills the gutters, rivers, and eventually ends up in the lake. They may not know that there are 14 rivers that flow from Mount Cyclops

to Lake Sentani. Meanwhile, there is only one river that flows from the lake to the Pacific Ocean, namely the Itaufili River (Anthoneta Ohee, Corry Ohee, interview in June 2025). Therefore, when the flash flood occurred in 2019, Lake Sentani turned into a giant garbage dump, and the homes of the Sentani people on the lake's shores and islands were submerged.

There is concern that children will imitate the actions of adults. They observe and imitate the actions of adults because they believe that what adults do is right. This is related to the theories of Bandura (1977) and Lickona (2008), which state that children learn many things through observation and imitation of the behavior of adults in their environment. In the context of instilling environmental awareness, children tend to imitate the attitudes and actions of adults they consider to be role models, such as parents, teachers, or community leaders. Children find it difficult to accept advice to maintain environmental cleanliness if adults themselves do not set a good example. Good habits need to be continuously modeled. Therefore, this group of young children needs to be initiated into learning to love the environment. A study on the basic literacy of Sentani children (Yektiningtyas & Karna, 2013; Yektiningtyas & Modouw, 2023) proves that children like folklore, such as folk tales and songs, as learning materials. Therefore, in this study, folklore is also used as a medium for learning and raising awareness of the importance of protecting the environment for children. The objectives of this study are (1) to analyze ecological values in Sentani folklore, and (2) to disseminate environmental values to children at the reading house so that they develop eco-friendly habits.

There have been several studies conducted on the use of folklore and environmental education. In 2023, Yektinininingtyas and Modouw researched the role of Papuan children's storybooks in improving children's interest in reading. In 2024, Yektiningtyas & Dewi unraveled the Sentani people's ecological knowledge through folklore. Research on fables as a medium of environmental education for Sentani children was conducted by Yektiningtyas & Silalahi in 2020. However, there has been no specific research discussing the wider use of folklore as a medium for raising children's awareness of the importance of eco-friendly habits.

Discussions of environmental-based folklore are inseparable from ecocriticism, a critical approach that studies the relationship between literature and the environment. According to Garrard (2004), ecocriticism is the study that connects literature with ecology, with the aim of criticizing anthropocentric views and raising ecological awareness through the representation of nature in literary works. Ecocriticism emphasizes the importance of viewing nature as a subject with intrinsic value, not merely a story setting or object to be exploited. This is also related to eco-theology that highlights the role of humans in managing the earth. Genesis 1:26-28 states that God created humans in His image and likeness and gave a cultural mandate to "have dominion over the earth." This mandate does not mean unlimited exploitation, but rather a call to be wise stewards. This principle reflects humans' moral responsibility towards creation as a form of respect for the Creator. Furthermore, Garrard (2004) emphasizes the way literature represents nature and human interaction with the environment. The basic principles of ecocriticism encompass four important issues. First, interdisciplinary

ecocriticism, which combines literary studies with ecology and social sciences, aims to understand human impact on nature through literary texts. This ecocriticism also emphasizes how literary works can influence society's perception and understanding of the environment (Yektiningtyas & Dewi, 2023). Second, Garrard critiques anthropocentrism, emphasizing the importance of shifting the anthropocentric perspective that places humans at the center and recognizing that nature has intrinsic value that must be respected. Third, ecological awareness, where literature serves as a medium to raise readers' awareness of environmental issues, encouraging changes in attitudes and actions that are more environmentally friendly. Fourth, the representation of nature, related to ecocriticism, examines how nature is depicted in literary works, whether nature is treated as a backdrop, a symbol, or as a living entity with a central role.

According to Bandura (1977), Glotfeley & Fromm (1996), Lickona (2008), Lange & Dewitte (2022), character education must consistently instill moral values and good habits in order to form strong positive attitudes in children from an early age. In the context of instilling environmental awareness, this process can be carried out through various methods, one of which is the use of folklore as a learning medium (Yektiningtyas & Dewi, 2023). Folktales that contain moral messages about the importance of protecting nature can build children's awareness of their responsibility towards the environment. For example, stories about living things that are interdependent in the ecosystem teach the values of empathy and appreciation for nature. Through repetition and reflection on stories, children are encouraged to internalize values of caring and begin to develop environmentally friendly habits, such as disposing of trash properly and keeping their surroundings clean (Braun & Dierkes, 2017; Buell, 2001).

With this approach, character education focuses not only on teaching theory, but also on forming observable habits and attitudes that children can apply in their daily lives. Folklore can also be an additional medium that reinforces this learning because folk tales often feature characters who care about nature and show the consequences of destructive behavior towards the environment. By seeing and hearing real examples and stories that contain moral messages, children can more easily internalize environmental values and apply them in their daily lives. Thus, role models and learning media play a very important role in shaping children's environmental awareness from an early age. Folklore that personifies nature, such as trees and animals, can be used as a medium for children to learn to appreciate the living things around them. Theories by Bandura (1997), Garrard (2004), and Lickona (2008) reinforce the argument that folklore is not just entertainment, but also a medium for education and the formation of environmental awareness from an early age. Folklore can also be an additional medium that reinforces this learning because folk tales often feature characters who care about nature and show the consequences of destructive behavior towards the environment. By seeing and hearing real examples and stories that contain moral messages, children find it easier to internalize environmental values and apply them in their daily lives. Thus, role models and learning media play a very important role in shaping children's environmental awareness from an early age (Ardoin, Bowers, Roth & Holthuis, 2018).

Methodology

This descriptive-qualitative research was conducted in May-July 2025. Folklore data was collected through observation, interviews, focus group discussions, and documentation. Observations of the lives and attitudes of the communal ecological practice were carried out on the islands of Asei and Yokiwa (east), Abar (center), and Kwadeware (west). Interviews were conducted with traditional leaders (ondofolo and khote), village heads, community elders, cultural figures, youth, parents, and children. Interviews and FGDs were conducted to obtain information and responses about the socio-cultural life of the old Sentani community and the modern community regarding their views and behavior towards the environment, namely land, forests, lakes, and rivers. In addition, these activities were carried out to obtain environment-based folklore data.

The folklore data collected through previous research and interviews and FGDs in May-July 2025 is as follows.

No	Folklore	Title
1	Myths	1. Emfote 2. Haembu 3. Tete Habhu 4. A story of land seller in Kleublow
2	Legends	1. The Origin of Lake Sentani 2. Lake Emfote
3	Fables	1. Ebi and Kandei 2. Cassoway and the Sparrows 3. Naugthy Cassowary 4. Ebeu and Nangga 5. Tepaisaka and Kilipase
4	Oral poems	1. The journy of Yabansai people to Waena 2. Journey to an old village, Kwadeware: The beauty of Lake Sentani *3. Maekor Rata wipulu, Rata klabulu*
5	Folksong	1. Kani blam kla bham 2. Igwa yo, huba yo
6	Bark paintings	1. Flora 2. Fauna

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discussion of research on the role of Sentani folklore as a learning medium for Sentani children to develop eco-friendly habits.

1. Ecological Values revealed in Sentani Folklore

This part discusses (1) natural resources and ecological values and (2) how communities care for the environment as represented in Sentani folklore. Although

folklore is not actively practiced, it is still become reference of the ecological insights of ancient communities (Glotfeley & Fromm, 1996; Garrad, 2004; Merta, et al, 2022; Padmasari, Nugraha & Dewi, 2024). Similarly, Sentani folklore, which is no longer recognized by most people, especially the younger generation, it reflects the diversity and ways in which older generations cared for nature, which became a reference for life lessons (Yektiningtyas & Silalahi, 2000; Yektiningtyas & Dewi 2023). One of these is about the richness and importance of the environment and how to care for it. The following is a reflection of the diversity of the Sentani community's environment in folklore, namely mountains, lakes, land, and flora and fauna, which are often the main themes in various folklore. In "The Origin of Lake Sentani," the beauty of Mount Cyclops (Dobonsolo) is described, filled with wilderness with diverse trees, flora, and fauna that are now becoming rare or even extinct. The following is an excerpt from a song that sings of the richness of Sentani's flora.

Yeba kam nei rorale
Aka, ra yo nare mokanale
Follo kam nei hebale
Aka, ra yam nare hebanale

(I built a hut with a roof of sago palm leaves, yeba.
Brother, I have established a village.
I built a hut with a roof of sago palm leaves, follo.
Brother, I have established a village.)

Sago (Metroxylon sagu) is a staple food for the Sentani people. There are several types of sago trees, such as yeba, follo, ninggi, yameha, eli, nahem, otekulu, and para. The existence of sago trees is now often a concern for the community and researchers because their supply is dwindling. Most Sentani people themselves cannot distinguish between these types of sago in detail. Since 1970, when Jayapura was designated the capital of Papua Province, Jayapura has undergone major changes (Irenius Pepuho, Agus Ongge, interview July 2025). Much of the land has been allocated for the construction of housing, shops, schools, hospitals, airports, etc. Many sago gardens and forests were cleared. Many plant species became rare or disappeared. In addition to flora, folklore tells of fauna that are becoming rare, as in the chant below.

Igwabun neiboi manende
The Ebaeit yo miyae kandei holo ereijae ereyole
Thaibun neiboi manende
The Hayaere yam miyae kahe holo haleijae haleyole

(Approaching the Igwa region
Women from the village of Ebaeit see a school of kandei fish
Approaching the Thai region
Women from the village of Hayae see a school of kahe fish)

The kandei fish (Glossamia beauforti) and kahe fish (Glossamia wichmanni) are endemic fish to Sentani Lake, but their populations are also beginning to decline. Several introduced fish species, such as the Toraja snakehead (Channa striata) and lohan (Amphilopus labiatus), have become predators and are causing the kandei and kahe fish to become increasingly rare. In addition, kandei, which prefer clean environments, choose to live in the middle of the lake because the lake's shores are polluted with trash (Ohee & Keiluhu, 2018).

Meanwhile, the diversity of birds living in the Sentani region is sung below.

Nalikayi thanda manende
The Ebaeit yo miyae ayeholo ereijae ereyole
Walfokayi thanda manende
The Hayaere yam miyae ayeboholo haleijae haleyole

Using a foreign boat,
A woman from Ebaeit village visited and saw various kinds of birds.
Using a foreign boat,
A woman from Hayae village visited and admired various kinds of birds.

Just like the sago palm trees, some birds in Sentani are also beginning to disappear. Among them are the cassowary (Casuarinus), the mambruk (Goura), and the bird of paradise (Paradisaeidae). They have moved to quieter and safer forests. A fable entitled “The Arrogant Cassowary” tells the story of various birds that are now becoming extinct, such as the cassowary, eagle, and cuscus (Spilocuscus).

The cassowary considered the tree to be its home. The eagle then fought with the cassowary, but because it was smaller, the eagle gave up. Even the wild boar, which had always been strong, became weak in front of the cassowary. At that moment, it saw birds, butterflies, and cuscus gathering together.

In Indonesia, kangaroos (Macropodidae) are only found in Papua. Unfortunately, they cannot be easily found. Children can only see them through the story of “Tepaisaka and Kilibahe” that is read to them.

Long ago, in a village called Yoka Waufo Boi, also known as Kamaeyaka, south of Lake Sentani, there lived a kangaroo named Tepaisaka and a dog named Kilibahe. The two were enemies.

Bark paintings are also an interesting medium for representing the diversity of Sentani's flora and fauna, such as the endemic fish of Lake Sentani, eels, lake stars, and sago palms, as seen in the painting below.

Bark paintings depicting the rich flora and fauna of Sentani (Doc. Yektiningtyas, 2025)

Through folklore, it appears that the old Sentani community had a good ecological awareness. The philosophy of the old Sentani community metaphorically described the earth as khani (Yektiningtyas, 2011), which means woman. Just as a woman has a womb that gives birth to children, the land also grows various plants that are used to support the community's livelihood. Caring for the land and treating it properly will bring onomi (blessings) to those who do so (Albert Pepuho, Yuliana Ansaka, interview in June 2025). Conversely, those who violate the land will receive pelo (a curse). A story from Klebouw tells of a husband and wife who violated the boundaries of the land. Even though they were questioned repeatedly by the tribal chief, they still did not admit that they had committed a violation. Finally, that night, the husband died mysteriously, followed by his wife shortly thereafter (Irenius Pepuho, interview, July 2025). The value of land is so sacred that there are serious consequences for violators. The story of the husband and wife who deceived the tribal chief is related to a Sentani saying, hu jokho erele (The eyes of the gods are always watching), which is used as a reminder that even if our actions are unknown to humans, the gods always see us.

The reciprocal relationship between humans and nature as represented in folklore (Garrard, 2004; Buell, 2021; Braun & Dierkes, 2017; Lestari, La Fua & Wahyuni, 2024) produces a harmonious life. This is also what the old Sentani community did. Humans take care of nature, and nature gives its best to humans. A Sentani expression says hu nei nineyaele aniyaele rowotiyaele which literally means that the gods (hu) will provide food at the right time. This expression can be interpreted as meaning that if humans treat nature well, then in time the gods will send food for them. (Yektiningtyas and Mawene (2018). Myths about the existence of gods and goddesses support the ecological concept of the Sentani community. Their belief in tree gods living in large trees prevents them from cutting down large trees. If they cut them down, they would disturb the gods and goddesses who are believed to protect the community's livelihood (Yektiningtyas & Dewi, 2023). The Sentani people believe in natural punishment for those who violate certain ecological rules. An informant (Corry Ohee, interview 2024) recounted the story of a man who died because he cut down trees indiscriminately. The story of “Haembu” tells of a man who was kidnapped by haembu, a dark force in the form of a small child with a bald head, one eye, one nose, one ear, and one tooth, because he violated the boundaries of the forest. On the other hand, those who protect nature will receive abundant harvests and fish. Interestingly, since the Gospel entered

Sentani in the 1920s, they have also received similar ecological lessons, for example from Genesis 1:28 of the Holy Bible, which says, "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" This phrase, "subduing the earth," should be interpreted as responsible management, not unlimited exploitation

Belief in the water god had long led the old Sentani people to carefully care for the water. They had a well-organized lake system, for example, for cooking, bathing, and washing. They believed that if they maintained the lake properly by not throwing garbage into it, the water god would provide an abundance of fish. Conversely, if they polluted it, the god would be angry and would not send fish. Overexploitation of animals also had consequences. A myth entitled "Tete Habu" told about a tribal chief called Grandpa Habu who ordered the community to hunt as many pigs as possible. He believed that the pig's blood, stored in a place called "habu," transformed into a boy. His greed for pig hunting disturbed the community, and the grandfather ultimately died tragically.

2. Dissemination of environmental values to children

On the one hand, years of observation show that modern society lacks good environmental habits. On the other hand, the Sentani community possesses a rich wealth of environmentally-based folklore. Therefore, this study considers disseminating the ecological values of Sentani folklore to children as the next generation. This initiative is considered crucial to prevent them from imitating the bad habits of their predecessors. This is related to children's tendency to imitate the actions of adults (Bandura, 1971; Bandura, 2018). Therefore, children need to develop their environmental habits and attitudes. According to Lickona (1991), character education must consistently instill moral values and good habits to foster a strong positive attitude in children. In the context of instilling environmental values, this process can be carried out through various methods, one of which is the use of folklore as a medium for environmental learning (Hess, Glotfeley & Fromm, 1997; Garrard, 2010; Lestari, La Fua, Wahyuni, 2024). With this approach, character education does not only focus on teaching theory, but also on forming real habits and attitudes of caring for the environment that can be observed and applied by children in their daily lives.

In this study, the dissemination of environmental values was carried out through environment-based folklore learning in several reading houses in East Sentani (Yokiwa Village and Asei Island) and Central Sentani (Hobong Village and Yoboi Village). Some of the folklore taught were fables, myths, and folk songs. This activity also involved reading house instructors and several parents and community elders. Their presence was expected to support learning about the diversity of flora and fauna and environmental care. Ironically, this folklore tells of several flora that are no longer recognizable to children because they are difficult to find in their environment, such as the khombouw tree (Ficus Sp), the soang tree (Xanthosthemos spp), several types of sago, and medicinal plants that were once often used by the community. The bark of the

khombouw tree which is commonly used as a painting canvas, is no longer easily found in the Sentani area. The community often searches for it in other districts, such as Nimboran, about a 3-hour drive from Sentani. Corry Ohee, a bark painter (interview, May 2025) said that sometimes they order bark from Kalimantan.

Various fauna often personified in folktales or oral poems are extinct or hard to find, such as the bird-of-paradise, the mambruk, the cassowary, the kangaroo, the cuscus, the turtle, and the kandei fish. In everyday life, it's challenging to introduce this diversity of flora and fauna because they're often not readily encountered. Therefore, in the learning process, in addition to using pictures and videos, parents and community elders were asked to share their past experiences interacting with these animals. They also explained why these animals have become increasingly difficult to find. Antonetha Ohee shared her experience of why birds-of-paradise and kangaroos are no longer found in the Sentani area.

Birds-of-paradise used to live in the Klimbe forest (north of Lake Sentani), while kangaroos lived in several villages. However, due to forest encroachment, the quiet-loving birds-of-paradise have now moved to quieter forests, one of which is in Repang Muafif, about three hours by car. Kangaroos are even no longer found, as Sentani has become a fairly large city with a bustling population. Even more distressing is the kandei fish, once abundant in Lake Sentani. Now, the lake's shores are littered with trash, preferring to live the clean place in the middle of the lake.

Antonetha Ohee also emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature. The extinction or scarcity of flora and fauna is caused by human activity (Dewi, 2016; Buell, 2006; Yektiningtyas & Dewi, 2023). Children are encouraged to love the environment by implementing simple practices, such as caring for animals, not littering, watering plants, and so on.

Folklore depicting characters who protect nature is also used as a good example for children. A fable tells the story of Ebi (a bird typical of Sentani) and Kandei (a fish endemic to Sentani), who were best friends. They planned to make a garden. They chose good land and cut down enough trees to clear a field. However, they left the large trees. They also cleaned up their trash and burned it. They didn't dump it in the lake. In the legend about the origin of Lake Sentani, an old man living on Mount Cyclop shared the use of his ponds. The grandfather's way of dividing the water reflects the old way the Sentani people divided the water in Lake Sentani. They did not mix water usage. Meanwhile, people now use water indiscriminately. They use the same area of water for bathing, cooking, and washing. They do not divide it according to the need. As a result, as explained by Antonetha Ohee, the village head of Asei Island, several parts of Lake Sentani have now been contaminated with E. coli bacteria. This means the lake water is no longer safe for consumption.

A folksong entitled "Khani bham. Kla bham" (No land, No forest) written by John Modouw tells the story of land and forests that have been lost because they were sold and exploited by irresponsible people. Eventually, they can no longer farm and hunt. They live in poverty and misery.

Mekhai nebham khelewamaene
Khelai nibhi mokhowoyaene

Yoho yonggo nine fewounge
Ibho ingse randa fewjeunge

The land where we farmed has been sold.
We now live in poverty.
We cannot do anything.
We cry in our own village.

Dobonsolo reyara kla mba
Ebunsolo refam klha mba
Mana ya khale hirale
Khani bham kla bham mephaele

Where is the forest on this mountain?
Where is the forest on the northern mountain?
We live in poverty now.
There is no land, no forest.

This song reflects the songwriter's concern and anxiety over the environment being damaged and passed into other hands. It also depicts the consequences of human greed in exploiting the natural world around them. The consequences of humans not properly managing nature, such as cutting down large trees to clear land for farming, have resulted in floods and landslides. This story is told in a story about two men clearing a land (Irenius Pepuho, interview, June 2025).

Through learning about the importance of the environment for children, it was concluded that many flora and fauna have become extinct or endangered. They also learned about several good figures who protect nature and the destruction caused by irresponsible exploitation. However, today's children see society disregarding the environment, such as by burning forests, logging, sand mining, and littering. This learning not only provides knowledge but also raises awareness of the importance of caring for nature (Braun & Dierkes, 2017; Frimansyah & Saepuloh, 2022; Lange & Dewitte, 2022). Evaluations conducted after three months showed positive results. Instructors and parents reported that after this activity, there were changes in the children's attitudes and habits. They became more concerned about their environment. They diligently swept the yard, watered the plants, and did not litter. They also shared their new habits with their friends at school. Children need more adults who can serve as role models so they can emulate their good deeds. In this way, they can also become little heroes who care about the environment so that in their hands this planet will be greener, cleaner and healthier.

Conclusion

The Sentani community has a wealth of environmentally-based folklore containing moral messages about the importance of preserving nature. This study concludes that

folklore can build children's awareness of their responsibility towards the environment. For example, stories about interdependent living things in an ecosystem teach the values of empathy and respect for nature. Through repetition and reflection on the stories, children are encouraged to internalize the values of caring and begin to develop environmentally friendly habits, such as disposing of trash properly and maintaining a clean environment. They are encouraged to avoid imitating the actions of adults who do not care for the environment. Instilling environmental values in children is an important step in forming a generation that cares about and is responsible for environmental sustainability. One effective medium for this goal is folklore, namely folktales rich in moral messages and cultural values. Through an eco-theory approach, folklore can be understood as a means of cultural criticism against the exploitation of nature and as a forum for showing nature as a living subject with an important role in human life. Thus, folklore functions not only as traditional entertainment but also as an educational tool that can build ecological awareness and character in children from an early age. It is hoped that they will become green heroes who disseminate the importance of protecting the environment to their peers.

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Morphological Analysis and Deforming Tendencies in the Bilingual Book of *Keong Mas*

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Abstract

Keong Mas is a well-known folktale in Indonesia. One of its modern adaptations is *Keong Mas: The Golden Snail*, a bilingual book by Dian K., designed to support children in learning both Indonesian and English. As a children's book, the translation requires careful handling to ensure clarity and meaning are preserved. This research engages an interpretative qualitative approach supported by library research. Vladimir Propp's narrative theory is used to analyze the story's structure, identifying 31 narrative functions. Subsequently, the translation is examined using Antoine Berman's theory of deforming tendencies. The analysis reveals a tendency toward foreignization in the translator's approach. Generally, the bilingual adaptation retains the core message and cultural values of the original545454 folktale, emphasizing respect for nature and animals as part of the natural world.

Keywords: Children's Literature; Narrative Structure; Deforming Tendencies; Folktale

Introduction

Folktales are a form of oral literature with origins that are often unknown. They serve multiple purposes, such as legitimizing power, explaining natural phenomena, providing spiritual reasoning, and imparting moral lessons (Taum, 2011). Folktales also act as a reflection of the cultural context in which they originate, making them an essential form of cultural expression. One of their primary functions is education, particularly for children and young adults (Chala, 2018). In Indonesia, folktales—commonly referred to as *dongeng* or fairy tales—play a significant role in introducing cultural values and ensuring their preservation through generations.

Indonesia is home to hundreds of folktales from various regions, one of the most well-known being *Keong Mas* (The Golden Snail). This fairy tale has been adapted into various forms and media, making it widely recognized. One such adaptation is a bilingual children's book titled *Keong Mas: The Golden Snail*, published by Bhuana Ilmu Populer and written by Dian K. This book presents the story in both Indonesian and

English, serving as a tool to introduce children to a second language. Bilingual books are particularly valuable in international classrooms, where children from diverse linguistic backgrounds can engage with stories in multiple languages (Creese & Blackledge, 2010).

This study aims to analyze *Keong Mas: The Golden Snail* using Vladimir Propp's narrative structure theory, which focuses on the functions of characters rather than the characters themselves. By examining the narrative structure in both the Indonesian and English versions, the study will explore how the translation maintains the original structure and cultural expressions. Additionally, translation techniques will be analyzed to determine which techniques effectively preserve the original meaning of the text. Since *Keong Mas* originates from East Java, it is crucial for the translation to retain the cultural essence of the story.

Keong Mas is also a folktale to introduce children to love nature, since it is a story centered on the main character becoming a golden snail. This image of golden and snail can spark the imagination about nature. The portrayed of the lady who takes care of the golden snail can inspire the children to help injured animals. The old lady also gets help by Candra Kirana, who is the golden snail, because she helped the injured golden snail. This value of the story, that if we help animals something good will come to us, is really good to teach children.

Translating children's literature presents unique challenges, especially when conveying cultural expressions that may not have direct equivalents in the target language (Coillie & Verschueren, 2014). This study will contribute to an understanding of the value of bilingual books in language education and how translation techniques can ensure the faithful transmission of cultural meaning.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative interpretative approach in conjunction with library research to examine narrative structure and character behavior within literary texts. The qualitative interpretative method is appropriate because the research focuses on understanding meaning, interpreting textual nuances, and analyzing characters' actions and motivations rather than quantifying data (Thorne, 2016). Interpretation lies at the heart of this method, allowing the researcher to explore the deeper significance embedded in narratives.

In addition, this study is supported by library research, which provides access to a wide range of theoretical frameworks, prior scholarly works, and primary texts. Library research is essential for grounding literary analysis in established scholarship and for drawing meaningful and critical conclusions (Connaway & Radford, 2021).To further enrich the qualitative interpretation, this study incorporates the structural narrative theory of Vladimir Propp. As Taum (2011, p. 122) points out, Propp was the first structuralist scholar to conduct a serious study of narrative structure, offering a new perspective on the dichotomy between fabula (story) and sjuzhet (plot).

After identifying the narrative structure through Propp's functions, the researcher will analyze the translation techniques used in the bilingual book *Keong Mas: The Golden Snail*. The focus will be on the spoken words or utterances exchanged between characters, as these often reflect the narrative functions Propp describes. Since utterances can signal key actions or roles within the story, they serve as a bridge between character interaction and narrative structure. This approach allows for an alignment between Propp's theory and the analysis of translation, as it becomes possible to observe how specific functions are conveyed across languages. By examining how each utterance is translated from Indonesian to English, the study will identify the deforming tendencies in the book and assess their impact on the preservation of narrative structure. Through this comparison, the research will highlight which translation techniques best maintain the integrity of the original narrative. Given that *Keong Mas: The Golden Snail* is a bilingual text, a careful and accurate translation is essential to ensure that meaning, structure, and cultural context are preserved across both language versions.

Propp's theory, rooted in Russian formalism, focuses not on who the characters are, but on what they do—emphasizing narrative functions over character identity. He developed an analytical model based on the idea that a story is driven by a sequence of specific actions, or "functions," which serve as the core building blocks of the narrative. According to Propp, these functions follow a consistent order and are limited in number. Through his analysis of one hundred Russian folktales, Propp (as cited in Ria Lestari, 2016) concluded that: (1) the stable elements in folktales are the functions, not the characters; (2) the number of functions is finite; (3) the sequence of functions is predictable; and (4) structurally, all tales represent a single underlying narrative pattern. Although not all 31 functions appear in every story, their presence forms the essential structure of the narrative (Mariah & Hadiansyah, 2025). This theoretical framework offers a valuable lens for conducting a qualitative interpretation of literary texts, particularly in identifying how meaning is constructed through narrative action and structure.

Table. 1 Propp Narratology Function (Hasan, 2017)

No.	Function Name	Symbol	Description
1	Absentation	α	A family member leaves the home.
2	Interdiction	β	A command or prohibition is given to the hero.
3	Violation	γ	The interdiction is violated.
4	Reconnaissance	δ	The villain seeks information about the victim.
5	Delivery	ε	The villain receives information.
6	Trickery	ζ	The villain attempts to deceive the victim.
7	Complicity	η	The victim is deceived and unwittingly helps the villain.
8	Villainy or Lack	A / a	A = villainy (harm); a = lack (need or desire emerges).
9	Mediation	B	The misfortune or lack is made known.
10	Beginning Counteraction	C	The hero decides to act.

No.	Function Name	Symbol	Description
11	Departure	↑	The hero leaves home.
12	First Function of the Donor	D	The hero is tested by a donor (a magical agent giver).
13	Hero's Reaction	E	The hero responds to the test.
14	Receipt of Magical Agent	F	The hero gains a magical item/helper.
15	Guidance	G	The hero is guided to the object of the quest.
16	Struggle	H	The hero and villain engage in combat.
17	Branding	I	The hero is marked (scar, token, ring, etc.).
18	Victory	J	The villain is defeated.
19	Liquidation	K	The initial lack or misfortune is resolved.
20	Return	↓	The hero returns home.
21	Pursuit	Pr	The hero is chased.
22	Rescue	Rs	The hero is rescued or escapes.
23	Unrecognized Arrival	O	The hero arrives home unrecognized.
24	Unfounded Claims	L	A false hero makes a claim.
25	Difficult Task	M	A difficult task is set for the hero.
26	Solution	N	The task is resolved.
27	Recognition	Q	The true hero is recognized.
28	Exposure	Ex	The false hero or villain is exposed.
29	Transfiguration	T	The hero is transformed (e.g., gains a new appearance).
30	Punishment	U	The villain is punished.
31	Wedding or Reward	W	The hero marries or receives a reward.

Taum argues that symbolic elements are not the primary focus in Propp's theory. When Propp introduced his structuralist approach, his aim was to demonstrate that literature and the humanities could be analyzed using a systematic, scientific framework. According to Taum (2011), the significance lies not in the symbols themselves but in the functions—the core actions that drive the narrative. These functions are central to understanding the structure of a story within Propp's vision of narratology. Propp identified thirty-one narrative functions, which he later organized into four major "spheres" or stages of adventure (Taum, 2011, pp. 126–132). The first sphere is the Introduction, where the initial situation and the hero's background are established. The second is the Content, which includes the main sequence of actions and conflicts. The third is the Donor Chain, involving encounters with figures who test or assist the hero. The fourth and final sphere is The Return of the Hero, which marks the resolution and closure of the narrative. These spheres provide a structured lens through which the narrative flow can be examined, emphasizing the importance of functional roles over symbolic meaning in literary analysis.

Antoine Berman responds to Lawrence Venuti's ideas in his book *L'épreuve de l'étranger: Culture et traduction dans l'Allemagne romantique* (1984), which was later translated into English as The Experience of the Foreign: Culture and Translation in

Romantic Germany (1992). Berman critiques the common tendency in translation to eliminate foreign elements through a strategy of "naturalization"—a practice later termed "domestication" by Venuti. According to Berman (ibid.: 241), “the proper ethical aim of the translating act is receiving the Foreign as Foreign.” This view significantly influenced Venuti’s foreignizing strategy. However, Berman also acknowledges the presence of an inherent textual deformation system in the target language that often obstructs the appearance of foreign words or concepts. His analysis of these forms of deformation is what he refers to as the “negative analytic”.

“The negative analytic is primarily concerned with ethnocentric, annexationist translations and hypertextual translations (pastiche, imitation, adaptation, freewriting), where the play of deforming forces is freely exercised.” (Berman, 1984, p. 242). Berman, known for translating Latin American fiction and German philosophy, believes that every translator is inherently and inevitably exposed to ethnocentric forces in the translation process (Munday et al., 2022). These forces not only shape the desire to translate but also influence the final form of the target text. According to Berman, the only way to neutralize these deforming tendencies is through a psychoanalytic approach to the translator’s own work, alongside fostering the translator’s awareness of the ideological and cultural forces that shape their decisions during the translation process.

“The principal problem of translating the novel is to respect its shapeless polylogic and avoid an arbitrary homogenization.” (Berman, 1984, p. 243). With this statement, Berman refers to the linguistic diversity and creative complexity inherent in novels, and how the practice of translation often reduces or simplifies that richness. He argues that translation frequently results in a loss of the distinctive language and style of the source text. To illustrate this, Berman identifies twelve common deforming tendencies that typically appear in translated texts.

Table. 2 Deforming Tendencies (Neno, 2025)

No.	Deforming Tendency	Description	Example
1.	Rationalization	Rearranging syntax to align with the target language often involves generalization	ST: She left without bring any money, clothes, and food TT: dia tidak membawa apa-apa saat pergi
2.	Clarification	Clarify ambiguity by making implicit meanings explicit	ST: Let him cook TT: Biarkan dia menunjukan kemampuanya
3.	Expansion	Expanding the TT, it is often unnecessary	ST: It good TT: Ini bagus sekali
4.	Ennoblement	The target text is altered to achieve a more elegant expression.	ST: He is cool man TT: dia sangat berkarisma
5.	Qualitative impoverishment	Losing the uniqueness of a word or expression	ST: Thank you, bro TT: Terimakasih, teman

No.	Deforming Tendency	Description	Example
6	Quantitative impoverishment	A reduction in lexical diversity or the elimination of wordplay	ST: She and he eat an apple TT: Dia dan dia makan apel
7.	The destruction of rhythms	Disruption of the rhythmic quality of the original expression	ST: This is night knight TT: Ini adalah kesatria malam
8.	The destruction of underlying networks of signification	The effect of a network of words within a larger context—translating them differently can impact the overall meaning	ST: I love the light, I need the light, I feel the light TT: Aku suka cahaya, Aku butuh sinar, Aku merasakan lampu
9.	The destruction of linguistic patternings	The use of varied translation techniques may lead to the distortion or loss of the original text's integrity	ST: She sells seashells by the seashore TT: Dia menjual kerang di tepi pantai
10.	The destruction of vernacular networks or their exoticization	The removal of vernacular cultural elements in the TT	ST: Ain't no man (AAVE) TT: Tidak ada seorang pun
11.	The destruction of expressions and idioms	Equivalence can be interpreted as a form of ethnocentrism.	ST: Hit the sack TT: Pergi ke dunia mimpi
12.	The effacement of the superimposition of languages	Translation often tends to eliminate the distinct linguistic varieties present within the ST	ST: Go away, Adios! TT: Pergi, selamat tinggal!

The twelve tendencies identified by Antoine Berman, known as deforming tendencies, are common phenomena in translation practice. This concept serves as a critique of translators who often alter the text based on personal preferences, resulting in the loss of distinctive features and the unique character of the source text.

Results and Discussion

The bilingual book Keong Mas: The Golden Snail by Indra K. is an adaptation of the traditional East Javanese fairy tale Keong Mas. The story centers on Candra Kirana, who is destined to marry Prince Inu Kertapati of the Kahuripan Kingdom. However, her jealous sister, Dewi Galuh, envies her fate and conspires against her. With the help of a wicked witch, Dewi Galuh curses Candra Kirana, transforming her into a golden snail and casting her into the sea. Fortunately, the golden snail is discovered by a kind old woman. Meanwhile, Prince Inu Kertapati embarks on a journey to find his beloved. When he eventually encounters the golden snail, he is initially unable to believe that it is Candra Kirana. Once the curse is lifted, the golden snail transforms back into Candra Kirana, and the two are joyfully reunited. The story concludes with their marriage and a happily ever after.

1. The First Sphere: Introduction

The first function until seven is the phase of introduction, however not all functions can be found in every folktale, it varied from one folktale to another folktale. In Keong Mas: The Golden Snail, all the functions can be identified, it serves as a good example of how a fairy tale can be analyzed through Propp narratology. The first sphere is the phase when the story starts, we will get introduced to the plot.

1. Absentation: Candra Kirana is removed from her rightful place when transformed into a snail and thrown into the sea.
2. Interdiction: The marriage between Candra Kirana and Inu Kertapati is a social expectation that should not be broken.
3. Violation: Dewi Galuh violates the norm by sabotaging the wedding through a witch.
4. Reconnaissance: The witch seeks out Candra Kirana to cast a spell on her.
5. Delivery: Dewi Galuh gives the witch a request to stop the wedding.
6. Trickery: The witch tricks and curses Candra Kirana in the garden.
7. Complicity: Candra Kirana becomes the victim of the curse.

2. The Second sphere: The Content

From function 8 until 11, which is when the hero or the main character will start the journey. This sphere starts when Candra Kirana got cursed and Inu Kertapi needs to take on a journey.

8. Villainy: Candra Kirana is transformed and removed from the kingdom.
9. Lack: Inu Kertapati lacks his bride; the kingdom lacks justice.
10. Mediation: Inu Kertapati realizes something is wrong and begins a search.
11. Beginning Counteraction: Inu Kertapati sets out on a quest to find her.

3. The third sphere: Donor Chain

This is when the main character gets help from the donor or the magical helper. Not all donors have magic. The function of the donor is to help the hero. In Keong Mas, the old man is the donor, he doesn't have magic but serves the purpose to lead our hero. His existence as the donor is the magic itself. Inu Kertapati would not know the way if he was not told by the old man.

12. Departure: He leaves the kingdom to begin his journey.
13. First Function Of The Donor: The disguised witch tests Inu Kertapati by misleading him; the old man tests his kindness.
14. Hero's Reaction: Inu Kertapati shows generosity to the old man.
15. Receipt Of A Magical Agent: The old man tells him the location of Candra Kirana.
16. Guidance: The old man leads Inu Kertapati toward the village.
17. Struggle: The old man defeats the crow (witch), removing the obstacle.

18. Branding: Inu Kertapati's noble act marks him as a worthy hero.
19. Victory: The witch is destroyed.

4. The Fourth Sphere: The Return of Hero

This is the final journey of the hero, this is when the hero gets the goal of his or her journey. This is the epilogue and conclusion of the story. Inu Kertapati, after facing many problems in his journey, finally can meet Candra Kirana and break the curse.

20. Liquidation: The curse is broken when the lovers reunite.
21. Return: They return to the kingdom together.
22. Pursuit: The crow interferes earlier, symbolizing pursuit.
23. Rescue: The old man protects Inu Kertapati.
24. Unrecognized Arrival: Inu Kertapati arrives without knowing Candra Kirana is a snail.
25. Difficult Task: Not directly applicable.
26. Solution: The curse is lifted.
27. Recognition: Inu Kertapati recognizes Candra Kirana.
28. Exposure: Dewi Galuh's evil is revealed.
29. Transfiguration: Candra Kirana becomes her true self again.
30. Punishment: Dewi Galuh admits her guilt.
31. Wedding: Candra Kirana and Inu Kertapati marry and live happily ever after.

In *Keong Mas: The Golden Snail*, the story can be analyzed through all of Propp's functions. This proves how Propp proposes that this fairy tale has a complete structural pattern, from Absentation to Wedding, which is rare since not all fairy tales have a full sequence of functions like Propp describes. Through these functions, we can see how the plot progresses. It is a good plot to teach children because the hero, Inu Kertapati, solves the problem with the help of a donor. It teaches children that they can receive help from others, and that the donor serves an important role by helping the hero. It also teaches that jealousy can lead to bad things, as shown in the Villainy function when Candra Kirana is turned into a golden snail. However, the story provides the function of Solution, where the curse is broken. With the function of Punishment, we see Dewi Galuh's evil plan exposed, but the story also teaches children about forgiveness by showing that even those who have wronged us can be forgiven. Through these functions, we understand how this fairy tale offers good moral lessons about forgiveness.

The functions also portray the golden snail as an important part of the story, which implies the significance of animals. The portrayal of the old woman helping the golden snail suggests that children should also help animals when they are in need. This teaches children to love nature, especially animals. Even though snails are often seen as pests, the story shows that they can have a big purpose. Through the functions, children can raise their awareness about the importance of nature around them. It

teaches that children should pay attention to all animals in their surroundings, even if the animals seem unpleasant, because they still impact the environment. In the story, the snail is portrayed as golden. This positions the animal not as a pest but as a beautiful creature, since Candra Kirana—a princess—is turned into a snail. It is a good opposition binary, between a beautiful princess and a snail often considered a pest. This teaches children that even an animal not typically seen as a pet or a beautiful creature can be important. It encourages children to love all animals and nature itself.

5. Identity of character

After finding the 31 functions in the fairy tale, we can find the identity of the character. With Propp, not only do we know the narrative structure but also the identity of the character. In Keong Mas: The Golden Snail there are:

1. Candra Kirana – Victim
Candra Kirana is also a central figure. She is wronged, cursed, and endures hardship. In many folktales, the "hero" can also be the passive sufferer of injustice. Candra Kirana is the central of the story however she is the “victim” and she is the hero who got suffered by villain. Also represents the Princess character type (the sought-after).
2. Inu Kertapati – The Hero
The active hero who embarks on a journey to rescue and reunite with his beloved. He shows bravery, kindness, and persistence, fulfilling the heroic quest function.
3. The Witch – The Villain
The magical antagonist who curses Candra Kirana and tries to prevent the reunion by misleading Inu Kertapati.
4. Dewi Galuh – Villain
She sets the evil plan in motion out of jealousy. While she does not act directly, she causes the harm through the witch, making her a secondary villain.
5. The Old Woman – The Helper / Donor
Saves the golden snail, offers kindness, and provides shelter. She becomes a key part in Candra Kirana’s survival and partial return.
6. The Old Man – The Helper / Donor
Tests Inu Kertapati’s kindness and rewards him with knowledge about where to find Candra Kirana. Also defeats the crow/witch.
7. The Crow (Witch in disguise) – Continuing Villain
Continuously tries to bothered the hero’s progress by misleading him on his journey.

6. Deforming Tendencies

The phenomenon of translation often involves a tendency by the translator to shift the original meaning. *Keong Mas: The Golden Snail* is a bilingual book that serves both English and Indonesian audiences. This research identifies several deformation tendencies: rationalization, clarification, qualitative impoverishment, destruction of expressions and idioms, and expansion. Some data are identified as N/A or show no

change, as the translation is word-for-word or literal. This means there is no tendency to alter the meaning, since the words are translated directly without distorting their original sense.

Table. 3 Rationalization

No of data	Indonesian ST	No of data	English TT	Deforming Tendencies
ST/6/1	Oh. itu hanya masalah kecil. Aku akan melakukan sesuatu hihlhlhl	TT/6/1	Oh. that's a piece of cake. I will do It for **you**. Hihihi ...	Clarification

The sentence "*Padahal, aku lebih cantik*" follows the structure: Padahal [Conjunction] + aku [Subject] + lebih cantik [Predicate] in Indonesian. In English, it becomes: I [Subject] + am [Linking Verb] + more beautiful [Comparative Adjective] + than her [Comparison Phrase]. There is a tendency of structural change in translation. "*Padahal*" which functions as a conjunction in Indonesian, serves to introduce a contrast or comparison. In the TT, the comparative phrase is moved to the end of the sentence to follow English syntax rules, since we cannot place the comparison marker at the beginning of a sentence in English.

Table. 4 Clarification

This tendency is usually found when the translator tries to make the hidden meaning or context more explicit. For example, the sentence “Aku akan melakukan sesuatu hihlhlhl” would, if translated literally, become “I will do something.” This is already a good translation, especially since it is spoken by a character. There’s no need to make the context explicit because it’s easy to understand—if the character is talking to another character, readers can infer who is involved. However, if the sentence is translated as “I will do it for you,” the phrase “for you” makes the action unnecessarily explicit, suggesting that the character is doing something for someone else. This addition is unnecessary, as the reader would understand the context by reading the full scene. This example is taken from a character’s utterance, so no change is needed. is better than unnecessary addition

No of data	Indonesian ST	No of data	English TT	Deforming Tendencies
ST/5/4	**Padahal**, aku lebih cantik.	TT/5/5	I am more beautiful **than her**.	Rationalization

Table. 5 Qualitative impoverishment

Qualitative impoverishment occurs when the target text (TT) loses its uniqueness because the translator cannot fully transfer the original meaning. This is a common translator tendency. For example, the phrase “kasihan sekali” carries a deeper meaning—suggesting not just pity, but an extreme or heartbreaking situation. When a character says this, it is intended to express how truly bad the condition of the old woman is. It reflects more than just a standard feeling of pity; it is a reaction to something far worse. However, when it is translated simply as “poor,” the emotional weight and nuance are lost. This translation fails to convey the intended intensity of the situation, resulting in a loss of uniqueness in the TT. A better option would be “so pitiful” or “poor thing,” as these better reflect the deeper emotional reaction and help maintain the original meaning beyond the standard expression of sympathy.

No of data	Indonesian ST	No of data	English TT	Deforming Tendencies
ST/11/4	**Kasihan sekali** nenek itu. dia tak punya slapa-slapa.	TT/11/4	**Poor** old woman. she doesn't have anyone to **take care of her**	Qualitative impoverishment, Clarification

Table. 6 Destruction of expressions and idioms

No of data	Indonesian ST	No of data	English TT	Deforming Tendencies
ST/12/3	**Oooh**, kutukannya hilang!	TT/12/3	**Oh**. the curse's gone!	The destruction of expressions and idioms

Translators sometimes have the tendency to destruct expressions. In the example above, this may seem minor at first glance, as it involves translating “Oooh” in Indonesian into “Oh” in English. However, if we look at the larger context, the change is more significant. The data is taken from a character's utterance, which means every spoken word represents an expression. The word “Oooh” expresses surprise—but in this context, it’s not just ordinary surprise. It reflects a moment of emotional relief after realizing the curse is gone. The repetition of the “o” sound in “Oooh” indicates a long and deep vocal expression, revealing mixed feelings—surprise, relief, and even disbelief. However, translating it into just “Oh” reduces this complexity. “Oh” is a much shorter and more neutral expression, commonly used to show mild surprise or acknowledgment. It lacks the emotional depth and intensity found in the original. As a result, the translated expression fails to convey the character’s emotional realization and relief, and the original dramatic impact is lost.

No of data	Indonesian ST	No of data	English TT	Deforming Tendencies
ST/16/5	Kamu salah. seharusnya kamu **ke sana**	TT/16/5	you're wrong. you should take **this way instead**	Expansion

Table. 7 Expansion

Expansion is a tendency where the translator adds more words in the TT than found in the ST. This often results in unnecessary additions. For example, the phrase “ke sana” can be translated as “go there,” which is a good translation because it maintains the same meaning and consists of two words, just like the original. However, when it is translated as “this way instead,” although the meaning still points out the correct direction, the phrase becomes three words. This is too much for a simple utterance meant only to indicate a direction. It is an unnecessary expansion because the original phrase does not carry any hidden or implicit meaning. Expanding simple literal phrases like this can lead to overtranslation, where the translator adds more than what is needed, potentially distracting or confusing the reader.

The tendencies found in the book are the result of syntactic adaptation into English, clarification of hidden meaning, unnecessary expansion, and the destruction of expression. The adaptation of syntax into English is understandable, as the text is translated from Indonesian and needs to follow English grammar rules. This is acceptable because it does not destroy the meaning; it simply helps the translation fit the target language system. Since Keong Mas: The Golden Snail is a bilingual book,

this kind of adaptation is beneficial—it helps children recognize the differences between Indonesian and English, and supports their English language learning.

Clarification, however, often leads to unnecessary additions and sometimes results in the loss of literary subtlety or "magic," as hidden meanings become overly explicit. While this book is a work of children's literature and aims to help young readers understand the context more easily, the translator should remain aware of the target audience and avoid over-explaining when not necessary. Expansion refers to the addition of words or phrases that do not support meaning transfer. Instead of helping the reader understand better, such expansions often function as fillers that do not contribute to the context or the narrative.

A more serious concern is the destruction of expression. This is not a simple or harmless error—it can affect how the target text (TT) reader interprets and emotionally connects to the story. Since the book is bilingual, this kind of loss becomes even more noticeable. When reading the Indonesian version, readers may feel the intended emotion and cultural tone. But when they read the English version, the emotional experience may be weaker or different, resulting in a loss of feeling and nuance.

Despite some expressions being lost, the English version retains the original character and place names from the Indonesian version. This shows the translator's intention to bring the reader closer to the original text, rather than domesticating it. This approach aligns with the strategy of foreignization, where the translator preserves cultural elements so the reader learns something new, rather than adapting everything to their own culture. This is a good decision, especially for a bilingual book, as its purpose is to introduce the folktale of Keong Mas through the English language.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Keong Mas: The Golden Snail, as a bilingual adaptation of a traditional Indonesian folktale, successfully preserves the narrative structure and moral essence of the original story. Through Vladimir Propp's narratology, all 31 narrative functions were identified in the text, affirming that the story aligns with a complete and classic folktale structure. This makes it a valuable tool for both cultural transmission and moral education, especially for children.

In examining the translation through Antoine Berman's theory of deforming tendencies, several tendencies were found, including rationalization, clarification, qualitative impoverishment, expansion, and the destruction of expressions and idioms. While some of these tendencies are expected due to syntactic differences between Indonesian and English, others—particularly clarification and expansion—risk reducing the literary subtlety of the original. However, the translator's choice to retain original names and cultural references demonstrates a clear preference for a foreignization strategy, allowing the target audience to engage more directly with Indonesian culture.

The narrative embeds environmental values through the symbolism of the golden snail and the characters' interactions with nature. The story promotes compassion toward animals and fosters an appreciation for nature, which aligns with the goals of children's literature as a tool for eco-pedagogy. In this way, the tale does not only entertain but also instills ecological awareness and moral responsibility.

This study underscores the importance of careful translation in bilingual children's literature. It highlights how narrative structure, translation choices, and cultural values intersect to shape the reader's experience. The bilingual format of *Keong Mas: The Golden Snail* is not only pedagogically effective for language learning but also culturally significant in preserving Indonesian folklore within a global context.

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Appendices

No of data	Indonesian ST	No of data	English TT	Deforming Tendencies
ST/5/4	**Padahal**, aku lebih cantik.	TT/5/5	I am more beautiful **than her**.	Rationalization
ST/6/1	Oh. itu hanya masalah kecil. Aku akan melakukan sesuatu hihlhlhl	TT/6/1	Oh. that's a piece of cake. I will do It for **you**. Hihihi ...	Clarification
ST/6/2	Kamu pulang saja. **Yang penting**. adikmu tak akan menikah dengan Inu Kertapati.	TT/6/2	Go home now. Your sister won't marry Inu Kertapati	Qualitative impoverishment
ST/7/3	PRIKITI PRIKITI PRU PRU BLAAR!"	TT/7/3	PRIKITI PRIKITI PRU PRU BLAAR!"	N/A, no change
ST/8/2	Mengapa kamu melakukan ini? **Padahal**. aku akan menikah besok	TT/8/2	Why did you do this to me? **Don't you know** I'm getting married Tomorrow?"	Expansion
ST/9/3	Kutukanku ini akan hilang. jika Inu Kertapati bisa menemukanmu ... hahahaha ... tapi **itu mustahil**!	TT/9/3	My curse would dissolve if Inu Kertapati could find you ... hahaha ... but **you know it's impossible!**	Expansion
ST/11/4	**Kasihan sekali** nenek itu. dia tak punya slapa-slapa.	TT/11/4	**Poor** old woman. she doesn't have anyone to **take care of her**	Qualitative impoverishment, Clarification
ST/12/3	**Oooh**, kutukannya hilang!	TT/12/3	**Oh**. the curse's gone!	The destruction of expressions and idioms
ST/13/1	Siapa kamu?	TT/13/1	Who are your	N/A, no change
ST/13/3	**Aku, Keong Mas.** Nek. Yang tadi Nenek selarnatkan.	TT/13/3	**I was the golden snail**. Ma'am. The one you saved.	Clarification
ST/14/2	Huhu. **jadi apa yang harus kulakukan**?	TT/14/2	Huhu. **what must I do**?	Rationalization
ST/14/3	Kamu harus kembali ke Kerajaan Daha. Namun. aku tak tahu jalannya.	TT/14/3	You must return to Daha Kingdom. But. I don't know the way there.	N/A, no change

No of data	Indonesian ST	No of data	English TT	Deforming Tendencies
	Di sini terlalu jauh. dan terpencil. Mustahil kita bisa keluar dari sini		This place is too far. too secluded. It's impossible for us to leave this place.	
ST/15/1	Jangan kawatir. Nak. Jika Inu Kertapati memang jodohmu. dia pasti akan menemukanmu. bagaimanapun caranya. Kita yakin saja pada Tuhan	TT/15/1	Don't worry. Child. Should Inu Kertapati was meant for you. he would surely find you. no matter how. We just need to put trust on God.	N/A, no change
ST/16/5	Kamu salah. seharusnya kamu **ke sana**	TT/16/5	you're wrong. you should take **this way instead**	Expansion
ST/17/2	Nak. bolehkah aku minta makanan? Aku lapar	TT/17/2	Child. may I have some of your food? I am starving.	N/A, no change
ST/18/3	Aku akan membantumu	TT/18/3	I will help you	N/A, no change
ST/18/4	Candra Kirana **ada** di sebuah desa. bernama Desa Dadapan	TT/18/4	Candra Kirana is now **living** in a village called Dadapan	Clarification
ST/19/2	**Aku harus segera menjemputnya**, Kek!	TT/19/2	**I will go there now,** Sir!	The destruction of expressions and idioms
ST/19/3	Aku akan menemanimu. Aku tahu di mana Desa Dadapan	TT/19/3	I will accompany you. I know where Dadapan is.	N/A, no change
ST/20/3	Hei, **kalian salah**... Desa Dadapan bukan ke arah sini. Tapi ke sana,	TT/20/3	Hey, **you took the wrong way**... Dadapan is this way. Not that way.	Expansion
ST/20/5	Pergi kamu!	TT/20/5	Get lost!	N/A, no change
ST/21/3	Hmm... kamu **benar-benar** menjengkelkan	TT/21/3	Well, you **have become such** an annoyance	The destruction of expressions and idioms
ST/22/2	Terima kasih, Kek. Kini kita bisa menuju Desa	TT/22/2	Thank you. Sir. We can now go to	Quantitative impoverishment

No of data	Indonesian ST	No of data	English TT	Deforming Tendencies
	Dadapan **dengan tenang**.		Dadapan village **safely**.	
ST/22/3	Kalau begitu, aku tak perlu menemanimu lagi. Desa Dadapan sudah dekat. Kamu tinggal terus berjalan ke utara selama satu hari satu malam,	TT/22/3	Well, I don't think I need to accompany you anymore. Dadapan is not very far from here. It's only one day and one night away walking to the North,	N/A, no change
ST/24/3	Permisi, apakah ada Candra Kirana di sini?	TT/24/3	Excuse me, do you know Candra Kirana?	N/A, no change
ST/24/5	Dia di mana, ya? Apa aku salah?	TT/24/5	Where might she be? Am I wrong?	N/A, no change
ST/26/4	Aku mencari Candra Kirana	T/26/4	I am looking for Candra Kirana	N/A, no change
ST/26/5	Ya, Candra Kirana ada di sini!	TT/26/5	Yes, Candra Kirana is here!	N/A, no change
ST/27/1	Benarkah? Bolehkah aku bertemu dengannya?	TT/27/1	Seriously? Can I meet her?	Clarification
ST/27/3	**Ini**...	TT/27/3	**Here it is**...	Expansion
ST/27/4	Ini kan keong mas. bukan Candra Kirana. Nenek, **jangan becanda**.	TT/27/4	It is a golden snail, not Candra Kirana. Ma'am, **don't fool me. Please**.	Expansion
ST/28/3	Inu Kertapati, ini aku	TT/28/3	Inu Kertapati, here I am	N/A, no change
ST/28/5	**Kamu benar-benar** Candra Kirana!	TT/28/5	**It was really you**, Candra Kirana!	The destruction of expressions and idioms
ST/29/2	Ooh, pantas saja Nenek Sihir itu menyamar jadi burung gagak dan mengganggu perjalananku	ST/29/2	Ooh, that explains why the witch disguised herself as a crow and disturbed my journey to find you	N/A, no change
ST/30/4	Kakak	TT/30/4	Sister	Clarification
ST/30/7	Maafkan aku, **ya**,	TT/30/7	I am so sorry	The destruction of expressions and idioms

Reimagining Nyi Roro Kidul: Environmental Values in the Rituals and Folklore of Logending Beach

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Abstract

Nyi Roro Kidul, the Queen of the Southern Sea, is a prominent figure in Javanese folktales and cultures. She is depicted as the divine queen who holds authority over all supernatural aspects in the underwater kingdom located on the southern coast of Java. However, the media have often associated the figure with mystical dangers and natural disasters over the past decade. Meanwhile, various communities may have distinct conceptualizations of Nyi Roro Kidul, especially among local communities. This study aims to analyze how local communities in Logending Beach, Kebumen, Central Java, Indonesia, perceive Nyi Roro Kidul as both a mythical character and a member of society that coexist within the local wisdom, *Sedekah Laut*. It examines the lexicons in *Sedekah Laut*, or a coastal thanksgiving ritual. In textual analysis, the ritual's lexicons, such as *joleng*, *komaran*, and *gedhang raja*, are interpreted using Stibbe's ecosophy to disclose the underlying meaning and their association with Nyi Roro Kidul. The findings highlight the dynamics of environmental values, including sustainability and harmony, which help maintain the relationship between humans, the environment, and other entities. It implies that the community in Logending Beach regards Nyi Roro Kidul as the protector of nature, the provider of prosperity, and the harmonizer of nature and human beings. It indicates how the knowledge of local communities and folklore is an effective tool for disseminating ecological awareness.

Keywords: Nyi Roro Kidul; lexicon; environmental values; folklore and rituals; Logending Beach

Introduction

Language plays a pivotal role in conveying cultural values and ecological knowledge. In many communities, it serves as a vehicle for preserving and expressing

local wisdom. Through folklore, rituals, and oral traditions, language not only perpetuates cultural practices but also acts as a repository for environmental values that have become deeply embedded in community habits. Investigating language in this context allows us to understand how communities conceptualize their environment and sustain their relationship with their surroundings.

This study centers on the concept of the lexicon and ecolexicon, which is terms and expressions specific to a community's ecological entities, practices, and concepts. These words reveal how people perceive, classify, and interact with their environments. In Indonesia, lexicons are deeply integrated into local traditions, as demonstrated by research on rice-field communities (e.g., Lubis & Widayati, 2021), indigenous forest conservation (e.g., Prastio et al., 2023), and coastal communities (e.g., Lubis & Widayati, 2021). These studies confirm that terms related to agriculture, forestry, and marine life often have meanings that extend beyond a literal sense, embodying cultural values and ecological ethics. This supports the notion that diverse communities possess distinct traditional knowledge that contributes to environmental awareness and sustainable living.

Within Javanese culture, Nyi Roro Kidul, famously known as the Queen of the Southern Sea, stands as a prominent figure connected to both ecological and spiritual dimensions. Her image, however, is shaped by multiple discourses. The masses often portray her as a mystical and dangerous force. On the other hand, the coastal communities along Java's southern coast view Nyi Roro Kidul not merely as a figure to be feared, but as one who commands respect, as expressed through various traditions. This duality highlights the importance of understanding local perspectives that are often overshadowed by sensationalized portrayals.

The community of Logending Beach in Kebumen, Central Java, demonstrates this perspective through the ritual of *sedekah laut*, a coastal thanksgiving ceremony. The ritual includes offerings such as *joleng*, *komaran*, and *gedhang raja*, among others, which are lexicons reflecting local ecological wisdom and spiritual beliefs. Through *sedekah laut*, the community expresses gratitude, seeks prosperity, and reinforces the harmonious relationship between humans, the sea, and Nyi Roro Kidul. This practice shows how folklore and ritual can be seen as cultural frameworks for ecological awareness.

Drawing on actor-network theory, Nurcholis (2024) investigates the practice of *sedekah laut* in Jetis Village, Cilacap Regency, meanwhile Mubarok et al. (2024) investigate the tradition in Rowo Village, Kebumen Regency. The studies reveal a mutual dependency between human and non-human entities, with Nyi Roro Kidul serving as a key vertical mediator within this tradition. The ritual practice of *sedekah laut* effectively regulates the behavior of local fishermen during their fishing activities. In Mirit Sub-district, Kebumen Regency, *sedekah laut* is a ritual that expresses hope and gratitude to God for the abundance of the sea (Utari et al., 2024). Additionally, for the community at Pedalen Beach, which is near Logending Beach, performing this ritual is an act of Islamic faith. It reflects the belief that humans must seek God's assistance to coexist with all of His creation, including supernatural beings (Hartono & Firdaningsih, 2019).

This study adopts the framework of ecolinguistics as outlined by Stibbe (2015, 2024), which examines how language influences human relationships with the ecological world through the "stories we live by." These stories may encourage sustainability or, conversely, contribute to ecological harm. Central to this framework are narratives, understood as sequences of events that construct storyworlds in which humans, other species, and environments interact. Metaphors operate within these narratives by linking familiar experiences to ecological realities, thereby shaping how such stories are understood. Taken together, these concepts provide the basis for evaluating whether a narrative fosters ecological awareness, undermines it, or remains neutral.

Addressing a gap in the existing literature, this study investigates the fishing procedures and *sedekah laut* ritual related to Nyi Roro Kidul at Logending Beach to reveal the environmental values embedded in the knowledge of the coastal community. Among the many popular folklores, the figure of Nyi Roro Kidul is highlighted because her story remains relevant today and continues to live as a legend. As noted by Arwansyah et al. (2025), this folklore holds particular value due to the local community's awareness of its role in natural hazard and disaster mitigation. The analysis first examines the lexicons associated with *sedekah laut* and their connection to the figure of Nyi Roro Kidul within the local community. It then explores the dimension of ecosophy, focusing on the underlying narratives that shape and sustain this coastal tradition (Stibbe, 2015).

Methodology

The utterances of the Logending Beach spiritual guardian served as the primary data for this study. It is mainly in Indonesian and Banyumasan dialect or Ngapak, a Javanese variety spoken in Cilacap, Kebumen, and their surrondings. The data is collected by direct interview to obtain important lexicons and to dive deeper into the folklore's narrative. These utterances from a spiritual guardian were selected because they contain the values of the Logending Coastal community and act as a guideline for the people. Furthermore, these discourses were important to document because they originated from a revered elder figure within the community. This practice enables researchers to understand cultural meanings, spiritual values, and traditional practices directly through the words of a cultural actor at the research site (Kusumastuti & Khoiron, 2019).

The research was conducted at Logending Beach, Ayah District, Kebumen Regency, Central Java. As a beach located within the southern Java coastal region, cultural practices such as the *Sedekah Laut* ritual and *sesaji* (offerings) are still preserved here, led by a spiritual guardian (*juru kunci*). The oral data used in this study were spoken by a spiritual guardian named Mbah Suripto, who is also widely known as Mbah Pelabuh. He is the main *juru kunci* who leads various spiritual activities and customary rituals at Logending Beach and several other beaches spanning the areas of Kebumen Regency and Cilacap Regency.

Mbah Suripto, or Mbah Pelabuh, has been the spiritual guardian for eight years. He did not obtain this role through hereditary succession but through direct appointment by the previous *juru kunci*, Mbah Tasirin. Mbah Tasirin felt that Mbah Pelabuh was the appropriate successor, considering Mbah Pelabuh's sufficient capabilities, demonstrated by his ability to help cure Mbah Tasirin's illness. As a spiritual figure, Mbah Pelabuh is now responsible for numerous ritual sites, and his role is considered crucial in preserving customary values and local belief systems about the sea and nature.

The interview is further transcribed and labeled to find the lexicons centered around Nyi Roro Kidul narratives. The lexicons are classified into some categorizations and broken down accordingly into the ecolinguistics framework, notably biological, sociological, and ideological dimensions. The second section further elaborates on the ideological dimension that helps interpret the collective perception of the Logending community toward Nyi Roro Kidul and her representations. In this research, Nyi Roro Kidul and the Queen of the Southern Sea are interchangeable due to the increasing popularity and varied appellation among different communities.

Results and Discussion

Despite not being as extensively documented as Cilacap beaches, Logending posits a promising main commodity in pelagic fish. At the same time, the geographical area serves as a river sanctuary, enabling fishers to operate easily daily. The supporting geographical conditions further support regular daily fishing activities and establish tradition as part of coastal culture, including *sedekah laut*. The festive procession primarily offers prayers and sacrifices to Nyi Roro Kidul to maintain harmony between humans and nature in the coastal area.

Sedekah laut is a yearly ritual held on every Suran month that marks the beginning of the new year in the Javanese calendar. It involves all generations in the villages, and both young and old men work together to set the offerings adrift in the sea, host a Kenduri or a communal gathering for prayers, and conclude with a full-length performance of *wayang kulit* or shadow puppetry as the final set of rituals. The event is conducted under the guidance of a spiritual guardian, who is trusted to be the main connector between human beings and the mystical figure. This key informant is highly respected by people surrounding the Cilacap and Kebumen shores, especially by those seeking a transactional pact with the Queen of the Southern Sea. The daily operations and the events that can last up to two days emerge as lexicons that reflect the people's understanding of the coastal environment alongside the presence of Nyi Roro Kidul. In this research, nominal lexicons are analyzed to examine the locals' views towards the mythical figure.

1. Noun

Javanese lexicons can be realized in free morphemes that are morphologically acceptable to receive affixation. Poedjosoedarmo (2015) largely categorizes these lexical items into concrete words (those that can be sensed) and abstract words (those

that are mentally conceptualized). In this research, the conceptual nouns appear and belong to the lexicon in the coastal environment and the ritual at Logending beach.

a. Lexicons of Cultural Items

This category encompasses ritualistic items used in traditional ceremonies, spanning both major celebrations like *sedekah laut* and daily practices. It involves several types of *sesajen* or offerings intended to respect the Queen of the Southern Sea. There are *sesajen pasren*, *sesajen komaran*, *wedhus kendit*, and *jolen*. During the *sedekah laut*, *sesajen pasren* constitutes the majority of offerings presented to the sea. The lexicon *pasren* stems from the Javanese *Dewi Sri* or Shridevi, the goddess of rice and fertility. It consists of agricultural products and traditional dishes, including coconuts, bananas, chicken eggs, rice, and traditional market snacks. On the other hand, *sesajen komaran* refers to a fuller set of offerings, including a selected set of flowers that have been prayed for. *Komaran* in Javanese literally means intended for *lelembut* or spirits. Besides the largely edible offerings, the community also proposes the head of a *wedhus kendit*, a goat with a specific physical appearance, jet black fur with a white belt-like stripe. It functions as the supreme tribute to the Queen of the Southern Sea, as it symbolizes the sacrifice of life, and the goat bears significant economic value. Lastly, *jolen* refers to the fleet that brings all the offerings into the sea. It is shaped like a house and derives its name from the words *ojo* and *lali,* which mean do not forget. *Jolen* is a metaphor of advice for the community and fishermen not to forget the livelihood of their environment.

All lexical elements constructing ceremonies and rituals are the products of the community's cognitive structure about their surroundings, including nature (Stibbe, 2015). The choices of using natural items reflect the attempt to give the portion back to the environment, highlighting the dependency on nature. Additionally, the lexical identification reflects how the coastal community still highly regards Nyi Roro Kidul as a pivotal determinant of their maritime practices. The whole process of *sedekah laut* and its embedded lexicons constructs and preserves social knowledge among generations, positioning Nyi Roro Kidul as the central metaphor for the formidable power of nature.

b. Lexicons of Cultural Places

The Lexicons of cultural places encompass some spots considered sacred around the Logending Beach, with a close relationship with the marine environment and the mythical figure, Nyi Roro Kidul. The relationship is identified with the *sesajen* or offering placement in these particular areas. *Sesajen* can consist of *kembang pitung werna* or the flower arrangement of a red rose, white rose, *kantil*, jasmine, ylang-ylang, and *sedap malam* or tuberose, which has been consecrated through prayer. The first place is an acronym, TPI, which stands for *Tempat Pelelangan Ikan,* or fish auction market. Similar to the regular fish market located in the fishery port, TPI accommodates fish transactions between fishermen, wholesalers, and seafood distributors. The

distinctive aspect of the TPI is the frequent presence of *sesajen* or offerings in front of the TPI gate every morning. This has constituted an integral part of TPI's operational structures and activities in Logending Beach.

The second is *Budheran*. It is formed by the free morpheme *budher,* which means to gather, and is added by the suffix -an to indicate a meeting point or a place to gather people in a big group. Not far from the beach, there is *Watu Gong*, referring to a water tour that passes a rock cliff and a mangrove forest. The name is inspired by an old story of someone who was magically cured after visiting the area. *Sesajen* are further placed in the *Watu Gong*'s entrance. In addition to a tourism object, there is *Pesanggrahan,* which is derived from the term *sanggrah,* meaning to rest. It is also considered sacred by the villagers and must be cleaned daily. The last sacred place is *Jembatan Peken*. This refers to the main bridge into the market, essential to facilitate the community's daily commerce and routines.

From an ecolinguistics perspective, the concept of Logending's TPI, *budheran*, *watu gong*, *pesanggrahan,* and *jembatan peken* is influenced by biological and sociological dimensions. Beyond the role as the public space essentials for sustaining the community's livelihood, the combination of places and *sesajen* suggests a deeper belief in external nature forces. *Sesajen* completes these places to become cultural, and it frames a metaphor to indicate how the community acknowledges and perceives nature as an important element. The incorporation of *sesajen* highlights that the coastal people propose offerings to external forces, including Nyi Roro Kidul. Sociologically, these lexicons are the manifestation of language use in the coastal social group. The way these lexicons emerge suggests that people regard the presence of external force as equal to their efforts in sustaining life, and even play a pivotal role in protecting their source of income (fishery). It is an example of ecological social resilience, where the placement of offerings is the community's communal endeavor to deal with environmental dynamics (Podungge et al., 2025).

c. Lexicons of Fishing

The Lexicons of fishing operations refer to a collection of items that the fishermen and the coastal community understand. This includes the types of marine fauna that have a close relationship with the marine environment, as well as traditional fishing techniques. The community and fishermen's biological dimension reflect on how they named the fish categories: *manyung, pelik/kakap*, *lemadang*, *cucut*, *mbaleng*, *lembutan*, *kacangan*, and *tombol*. These fish are classified by size, characteristic, and function. This reflects a biological understanding of the fish, for instance, the *pelik* fish or snapper is actually derived from the Javanese "hard" as it is often challenging to capture. Meanwhile, *tombol* and *lembutan* fish are inspired by their small size and texture, similar to the Javanese *tombol* or button, as well as the texture *lembut* or soft. These fish are further regulated into high-commodity and low-commodity. The high-commodity fish are primarily sold, and the low-commodity fish are further processed into new products, particularly salted fish. This regulation reflects the sociological dimension of the coastal community, where the people develop resource management and avoid wasteful

behaviors, as the fish are considered both resources and blessings.

During the fishing season, the fishermen develop lexicons of traditional fishing techniques, including *anco*, *ulapin*, and *pasang umpan*. *Anco* is derived from the Javanese lift net, which is lowered to the water and lets fish gather before it is lifted. *Ulapin* are formed by the Javanese noun *ulap*, meaning a bright light. It is the process of catching fish using light at night. Meanwhile, *pasang umpan* is the general lexicon to involve tools and fish baits to selectively catch fish. The development of these lexicons reflects the fishermen's communal knowledge as a social group to manage the fish catch and avoid overfishing and destroying the marine ecosystem. They are also tied to some traditional prohibitions, specifically against fighting, nagging, and complaining, as such behaviors are believed to be dangerous and will disrupt the harmony in the sea. The lexicons and preferred actions are based on the shared belief of non-consumptive behaviors, as the mythical figure, Nyi Roro Kidul, would not tolerate greed and negative conduct, "*mrikane mboten purun,*" or "She would not want that," stated the spiritual guardian, Mbah Suripto.

d. Lexicons of Sacred Times

The lexicons of sacred times refer to the shared beliefs of the community as the temporal marker. This includes *Selasa Kliwon*, *Jumat Kliwon*, and *Suran*, which are tightly linked to the tradition of *sedekah laut*. It situates the ritual within a sacred temporal framework that has been held as authoritative for generations. This practice signifies the Logending Beach community's commitment to maintaining balance among the domains of humanity, the spirit world, and nature.

Selasa kliwon and *Jumat kliwon* originate from the Javanese calendar, which combines the seven-day week with the five-day *pasaran* cycle. Regarding the offerings of *sesajen*, the coastal community of Logending Beach believes that it should be performed on *Selasa kliwon* and *Jumat kliwon*. This was found in the utterances of the spiritual guardian in the following excerpt:

"Sesaji rutin Selasa Kliwon lan Jumat Kliwon."

(Ritual offerings are held regularly on Tuesday Kliwon and Friday Kliwon.)

Biologically, these days mark rhythmic cycles of time that are viewed as inseparable from natural balance. The community in Logending Beach chooses these days for *sedekah laut* to situate their ritual within a cosmic order. It affirms that the harmony of human life and nature is governed by seasonal shifts and sacred temporal patterns.

From a sociological standpoint, *Selasa Kliwon* and *Jumat Kliwon* function as crucial communal markers that schedule ritual performance. The regularity of these cycles ensures collective participation, thereby strengthening social cohesion and shared cultural identity. Furthermore, these days are broadly recognized across Javanese culture as auspicious, a belief shared by communities such as those in Pedalen Beach and Rowo Village, Kebumen Regency (Hartono & Firdaningsih, 2019; Mubarok et al., 2024). This practice thus links the Logending community's ritual life to a broader regional cultural and traditional framework.

In the Javanese calendar, *Suran* is the first month, which corresponds to the Islamic month of Muharram. The word *Suran* comes from the holy Day of Ashura, which falls on the 10th day of Muharram (Ulva & Istianah, 2024). In Javanese belief, the month of *Suran* is a time when communities reflect on the past year and prepare for the next, reaffirming the importance of cyclical balance in ecological life. This month marks the realization of *sedekah laut*, which is also called *grebeg suran sedekah laut*. "*Grebeg*" means celebration, "*Suran*" refers to the first month of the Javanese calendar, and "*Sedekah Laut"* means giving something to the sea (Utari et al., 2024).

In its sociological function, *Suran* is a communal event that strengthens unity. The ritual practices, which include offerings, vigils, and prayers, are carried out collectively, reinforcing cooperation and shared responsibility. At Logending Beach, celebrating *Suran* through *sedekah laut* further grounds ecological values in community life, where gratitude to the sea becomes a public and collective act. This ritual, which has been maintained across generations, is deeply ingrained in Javanese culture as an expression of *kula nuwun* (Hartono & Firdaningsih, 2019). This term signifies the act of formally requesting permission from the spiritual entities that the local community believes govern the southern sea.

e. Lexicons of Social-Ethical Beliefs of the Community

The social-ethical lexicons comprise the social structure and values that regulate how communities interact with the environment. These lexicons emphasize the human, in this case the spiritual guardian, along with ethical dimensions, such as honesty, are essential for sustaining ecological traditions.

The spiritual guardian is a central figure in the execution of the *sedekah laut* ritual. This importance has been established in previous research concerning sea offering traditions in fishing communities, including those in Jetis Village, Cilacap Regency, and Rowo Village and Pedalen Beach in Kebumen Regency (e.g., Hartono & Firdaningsih, 2019; Mubarok et al., 2024; Nurcholis, 2024). The guardian is responsible for overseeing the safety and activities of the fishermen while at sea. Furthermore, they serve a vital function as an intermediary between the community and the spiritual beliefs associated with the ocean, particularly concerning the figure of Nyi Roro Kidul.

Biologically, the spiritual guardian represents human stewardship of the environment, ensuring that all rituals are conducted respectfully and in harmony with natural forces. The high level of trust placed in the spiritual guardian by the Logending Beach community symbolizes their collective recognition that the natural world demands careful guardianship. This perspective is further supported by the guardian's utterances, as evidenced in the following excerpt:

> *"… Tapi kunci yang di lokasi laut itu juru kunci. Kalau sudah dibuka, ya berangkat."*
> (However, the person in charge of the coastal and ocean areas is the spiritual guardian. Once it was safe based on the spiritual guardian's vision, they could set sail.)

From a sociological viewpoint, the spiritual guardian holds authority as a mediator between the community and the spiritual realm. This figure is responsible for leading the ritual, which includes guiding prayers for safety to God and communicating with the

rulers of the Southern Seas to secure the fishermen's well-being, enforcing cultural norms, and ensuring that tradition is upheld. This role not only sustains cultural continuity but also reinforces social hierarchy, as the community relies on the spiritual guardian for legitimacy in ritual practice.

Honesty in the context of this study does not only refer to the fishing community, but to all communities on Logending Beach, including the spiritual guardian. This was repeatedly emphasized by the spiritual guardian at Logending Beach through several utterances referring to fishermen: 1) "*Nek boten jujur, ulihe gesek*" (If you're not honest, you'll only catch small fish), utterances referring to spiritual guardian such as 2) "*Sing penting kula jujur*" (The important thing is that I [the spiritual guardian] am honest), dan 3) "… *Jujur niku pokok*" (… Honesty is fundamental).

The word "honest" is an important point in controlling ethics and morals between humans and their environment. Biologically, it shapes how humans interact with nature by stressing that offerings, rituals, and fishing activities must be performed sincerely. Purity of intention is seen as essential for maintaining ecological harmony, suggesting that the environment responds not only to human actions but also to human morality. Sociologically, honesty regulates relationships withinthe community. By demanding sincerity, it fosters trust, fairness, and cooperation. In the context of *sedekah laut*, honesty ensures that the community acts collectively with integrity, making the ritual a genuine expression of gratitude rather than a mere formality. Moreover, in the context of vertical relationships between a spiritual guardian and a divine figure, honesty is regarded as an essential quality. As an intermediary, the spiritual guardian facilitates communication between the community and the spiritual rulers of the South Coast, guiding the community's efforts to seek blessings from the sea and truthfully relaying all spiritual insights back to the community (Nurcholis, 2024).

2. The Representation of Nyi Roro Kidul in the Logending Community

The Logending people's way of life is recorded in the lexicon that they use every day. The lexicons of cultural places, cultural items, fishing, sacred times, and social-ethical beliefs reflect a shared knowledge that has been shaped and maintained through generations. The use of these lexicons shares a common interpretative framework, as all terms are conceptually centered around the figure of Nyi Roro Kidul. Therefore, the lexicon reveals a crucial insight into the community's conceptualization of Nyi Roro Kidul. This figure is a longstanding cultural legacy that serves as the popular folklore in the Javanese and Sundanese communities, and remains culturally relevant in modern times (Damayanti & Taum, 2025). While popular narratives concerning the figure are enriched with supernatural properties, the Logending community holds a distinct view on the Queen of the Southern Sea.

a. Nyi Roro Kidul as the Protector of Nature

Life in the coastal area imposes distinctive and recurring challenges compared to

those experienced inland, including illegal fishing, damage to the coral reef and mangrove ecosystem, abrasion, and extreme weather conditions (Sarjana et al., 2024). Despite the communities' efforts to synchronize their activities with local terrain and environment, they still face uncontrollable variables that potentially disrupt or even threaten their lives. Kasman & Triokmen's (2021) case study even found that about 17,02% of the total areas of coastal villages in Garut can experience a high-magnitude tsunami. These circumstances quickly raise alert and awareness among the locals, thus they can respond differently to the potential danger and uncertainties.

The Logending community responds to these challenges by preserving the traditional folklore of Nyi Roro Kidul. The narratives are passed down among generations and preserved through the founding of a spiritual guardian who also navigates the fishing procedures. According to the spiritual guardian, Mbah Suripto, it has been the collective belief among the fishermen to avoid fishing activities on *Selasa Kliwon* and *Jumat Kliwon*, the sacred days on the Javanese calendar. Additionally, the fishermen are constantly asked to maintain their attitude and avoid greed at sea, so as not to disappoint the Queen of the Southern Sea. The local belief further emphasizes that compliance with these spiritual demands is essential to gain ecological safety and community well-being.

Through the traditional narrative, the community regards Nyi Roro Kidul as the protector of nature. It promotes and directs the community and fishermen about self-control to sustain ecological livelihood. On top of an iceberg, Nyi Roro Kidul is indeed seen as an authority who establishes rules at sea. However, within the ideological dimension of the community, she serves an important position in protecting the marine environment from illegal fishing and the damage to marine flora. It imposes ecological morals on the coastal people, therefore leading them to believe that Nyi Roro Kidul's contribution would enable the environment (the sea and the coastal side) to remain resilient and successfully regenerate. This posits an instance that folklore is a means for delivering moral messages, and this knowledge can be the fundamental approach to sustainability and environmental conservation (Preston et al., 1995; Zolotova, 2017).

b. Nyi Roro Kidul as the Provider of Prosperity

In the context of Logending Beach, a core ideological conviction is that Nyi Roro Kidul, the Queen of the Southern Sea, is the primary source of prosperity. This worldview functions not merely as individual belief but as a shared "story" that guides the community's ecological practices, ritual activities, and identity.

This ideology is reinforced and transmitted through narrative structures, which are sequences of logically and temporally connected events communicated via oral tradition or ritual performance (Stibbe, 2015). For the Logending Beach community, this narrative unfolds through the performance of *sedekah laut* on specific sacred days: *Selasa Kliwon, Jumat Kliwon*, and during the month of *Suran*. These temporal markers establish a ritual sequence that directly links human action with the spiritual presence of Nyi Roro Kidul.

The ideological dimension of these specific days emphasizes the role of spiritual forces. Folklore suggests that on *Selasa Kliwon* and *Jumat Kliwon*, the boundary between the human and supernatural realms becomes more permeable. It allows offerings to reach spiritual entities with greater efficacy (Koentjaraningrat, 2002; Kamilah & Setyani, 2018). Similarly, Suran is also treated as a sacred time for the people in Logending Beach, where it symbolizes renewal and purification. In this month, the community holds *sedekah laut* with the belief that the fish they catch comes not only from God but also through the kindness of Nyi Roro Kidul, who keeps them safe while fishing at sea. Respect for Nyi Roro Kidul shows the community's spiritual life and their closeness to the Divine. From this worldview, nature and daily life are seen as guided by both divine power and spiritual protection, which helps ensure the well-being of the people now and in the future.

c. Nyi Roro Kidul as the Harmonizer of Nature and Human Beings

The ecosophy suggests that the continuity between animate objects (humans, fauna, and flora) and inanimate elements (rivers, ocean, air, and climate system) will be guaranteed by their mutual harmonization. An ecological harmony is largely normative, imposing different local ethics, norms, and values, which leads to variation due to different value priorities (Stibbe, 2024). The community's view toward Nyi Roro Kidul is largely represented during *sedekah laut*. This concept is an example of communal work in a traditional community, which has also been proven to maintain environmental conservation well (Hidayat, 2020).

From the emergence of lexicon in *sedekah laut* procession, the community's cognitive intelligence indicates a respect toward the mythical figure with personification of her as a bridge. This bridge will channel the community's peaceful message to nature, aspiring to live together in harmony. By proposing a transactional contract using valuable biological sacrifice, such as *wedhus kendit*, the community expects the Queen of the Southern Sea to maintain harmony and reciprocality. The proposed intentions signify that the community's acknowledgement of Nyi Roro Kidul goes beyond devotional or fear-driven due to her supernatural properties. Within the community's ideological dimension, Nyi Roro Kidul has built a cultural system where language, rituals, and traditional beliefs integrate to maintain conflicts between human economic needs and ecological limits. In essence, the community further believes that offering a portion back to the mythical figures at sea demonstrates their collective responsibilities for the livelihood of all beings.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Logending community's lexicon reveals that the figure of Nyi Roro Kidul is the central cognitive metaphor around the community's entire ecological worldview. Lexicons derived from cultural items (*sesajen pasren*, *wedhus kendit*), sacred places (TPI, *Watu Gong*), fishing practices (*ulapin*, prohibitions), and sacred

times (*Selasa Kliwon*, *Suran*) all converge upon the Queen of the Southern Sea. This linguistic and ritualistic centrality provides crucial insight into her conceptualization, from a popular folklore to position her as a pivotal determinant of maritime life. Essentially, the community's language acts as the repository for a shared knowledge system that has been continuously preserved and reshaped across generations.

This ideology formally establishes Nyi Roro Kidul as the Protector of Nature, serving as the spiritual authority that enforces crucial ecological ethics. By complying with the lexicon and prohibitions, the community expresses its collective responsibility for the marine environment. Furthermore, the ritual confirms her role as the Source of Prosperity; the belief that the Queen provides both safe passage and *rezeki* (sustained bounty) reinforces a necessary reciprocal contract. This spiritual enforcement is vital for a coastal community that constantly faces uncontrollable environmental conditions, ensuring that ecological safety and communal well-being are gained only through compliance.

Ultimately, the tradition of *Sedekah Laut* frames Nyi Roro Kidul as the essential Harmonizer of Nature and Human Beings. The grand ritual, led by the *juru kunci*, is a transactional contract where the symbolic sacrifice (*wedhus kendit*) guarantees the mutual harmonization of the entire ecosystem, encompassing both animate and inanimate elements. By voluntarily complying with these sacred demands, the Logending community resolves the potential conflict between human economic needs and ecological limits, creating a sustainable system where respect for the Queen is synonymous with the long-term preservation of the coastal environment. Future studies could expand this research by broadening its data sources to achieve greater representativeness by including not only the perspectives of the spiritual guardian but also those of community members who participate in the ritual of *sedekah laut,* along with their individual interpretations of Nyi Roro Kidul.

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Natural Disasters, Survival Instinct and Psychological Trauma: Reading Natural Narratives About Landslides in Contemporary Vietnamese Literature

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Abstract

Vietnam stands as one of the nations currently confronting a severe ecological crisis. Given its geographical location and topographical features, the country annually endures numerous typhoons and tropical depressions, accompanied by floods, landslides, and mudslides. While the motif of flooding has been a significant preoccupation in Vietnamese literature from folklore to modernity, narratives concerning landslides have only prominently emerged in contemporary literature, correlating with the environmental impacts of human activity and ongoing climate change. This paper, therefore, employs an ecocritical approach, specifically Global Warming Criticism, to examine several narratives concerning the phenomenon of landslide in contemporary Vietnamese literature, including Núi lở (Landslides) by Nguyễn Ngọc Tư, Núi vỡ (Broken Mountain) by Tống Ngọc Hân and Núi lở (Landslides) by Mai Thị Hồng Quế. These narrative prose works all depict the natural disasters of landslides/mudflows and the fragile insignificance of humanity in the face of nature's fury. These natural perils not only trigger the survival instinct but also expose issues morality, ethics, humanity, and inflict profound trauma on the surviving victims. This paper aims to explore the sense of place as well as human fear within the spirit of questioning the relationship between humanity and nature.

Keywords: natural disaster; narrative of landslides; survival instinct; Vietnamese literature

Introduction

Vietnam is a country with a long tradition of agricultural production; farmers depend heavily on the weather and pay close attention to daily weather fluctuations.

Due to the characteristics of the terrain and climate, every year Vietnam always has to endure many storms and extreme weather phenomena that cause serious consequences. Vietnamese literature from ancient times has always paid attention to the weather, describing the impacts of nature and weather on human life. Associated with agricultural culture, the image of floods is shown quite a lot in literature. There are many folk songs and proverbs about the weather and experience in preventing extreme weather, such as After lightning bolts strike comes a storm; Dark clouds on Tam Dao means flood will come; Long rainbow comes flood, short rainbow comes rain; Ants swarm in July, great flood arrives,... Vietnamese literature from folk to modern also has many works showing the impact of natural disasters on human life and how they experience natural disasters: From folk literature such as the legend of Son Tinh Thuy Tinh, to modern literature such as Dead or Alive, to your own devices (Pham Duy Ton), Dike Break (Vu Trong Phung), Sea Storm (Chu Van), Summer Rain (Ma Van Khang), A Time Far Past (Le Luu), The Mystery of The Waters (Bao Ninh),.... There are some works mentioning drought such as Toad sues the heaven (fairy tale), Endless Fields (Nguyen Ngoc Tu), Paris 11th August (Thuan) ... but in general, rain, storms, floods are mentioned the most, in which the image of floods and dike breaks is a haunting image that comes back again and again in Vietnamese literature.

Over the world, literature mentioning climate appeared early and is quite rich. According to Kathryn Schulz, “Since the end of the 20th century, climate novels have begun to go hand in hand with science fiction.”[1] In Vietnam, the science fiction genre has also had some achievements, but has not really developed strongly and there are only still a few works in this genre that deal with climate change and the future of humanity.

Contemporary Vietnamese literature has many works that deal with the fates and unfortunate lives caused by natural disasters, floods or the consequences of deforestation and stone exploitation such as Where The Storm Passes Through (Nguyen Thanh Thuy), Mountain Scar (Nguyen Luan), Falling Mountain (Nguyen Bich Lan), Landslides (Nguyen Danh Lam), Broken Mountain Night (Nguyen Tran Be), Flowing Land (Nguyen Ngoc),... (in which Broken Mountain Night records the experiences of a journalist who witnessed scenes of people facing landslide disasters in the form of memoirs, while Flowing Land is an essay about landslide disasters in mountainous areas). In the scope of this article, we focus more on works that talk about landslide disasters such as Landslides (Nguyen Ngoc Tu), Landslides (Mai Thi Hong Que), Broken Mountain (Tong Ngoc Han). This article aims at texts that make us "think about fragility” base on Jonathan Bate's perspective in the essay on ecocriticism: "Criticism of global warming proposes a postulate about a natural world that is no longer seen as passive or arranged in a predetermined order and only knows how to obey. On the contrary, nature is seen as something uncertain, unpredictable and reacting to all our interventions, in ways that we cannot foresee or control. Recognizing the

[1] Kathryn Schulz (USA), Weather and Literature, Vu Thi Hue translated from NewYorker.com, Van Nghe Newspaper (VN 10-2016).

surrounded, humanized, and therefore vulnerable ecological nature of nature, Criticism of global warming promotes the texts that, in Bate's words, make us "think about fragility"[2].

Results and Discussion

Landslides: a cry for help from humans or from the ecological environment

Landslides (also known as broken mountain) are understood as "the phenomenon of shifting soil and rock masses on a slope from top to bottom along one or several surfaces (sliding) or free fall (landslides, soil, rock falls, rolling)". This is one of the manifestations of geological hazards (geological hazards/ geodisaster) - that is, dangerous geological phenomena, threatening human life, property, economy, society or the environment due to natural movements or as a result of human activities or a combination of both factors. Recently, landslides and mountain slides have appeared more and more in Vietnam, causing serious consequences and taking many lives[3]. As landslides appear more and more, environmental protection awareness is increasingly raised, and in literature there are works that directly mention landslides, mountain breaks and the relationship between humans and the environment. In the past, literature about mountainous areas often focused on expressing the mysterious and majestic beauty of wild nature, or the uniqueness of mountainous customs, which contained hidden dangers but did not directly depict disasters. There were stories about landslides that were present but events in the overall plot and were the consequences of resource exploitation (for example, Cao Duy Son's novel *Heavenly Orchestra* (*Đàn trời)).*

Works named "Landslides" or "Broken Mountains" and directly mentioned natural disasters, describing the image of mountains disintegrating, separating, and losing their tops with terrible destruction. In Nguyen Ngoc Tu's short story *Landslides*, the landslide described by Vinh was a terrible accident, the boy's family and the guests escaped and survived, but his grandfather remained forever in the mountains and in his memories. *Broken Mountain* (Tong Ngoc Han) is the story of the villagers in San Ho village who had to leave their village to avoid the risk of flooding due to hydroelectric exploitation, but for the villagers, the nightmare of the broken mountain always haunts them. The *Landslides* (Mai Thi Hong Que) tells the story of the lives of people suffering from serious illnesses as a result of the destruction of mountains for stone mining with

[2] Jonathan Bate. *Green Romanticism.* Special issue of Studies in Romanticism, 35/3 (Fall 1996)

[3] For example, the landslide disaster caused by manganese mining in Kep Ky mountain (Quang Trung commune, Tra Linh district, Cao Bang province) took the lives of more than 500 miners. Source: https://laodong.vn/phong-su/tro-lai-voi-tham-hoa-lo-nui-kinh-hoang-nhat-viet-nam-526954.ldo), The flash flood landslide in Nu village caused by heavy rains many days after the storm on September 10 flattened 33 houses, killing 52 people and leaving 14 missing. (https://vnexpress.net/5-nguyen-nhan-khien-lu-quet-sat-lo-tan-pha-lang-nu-4793102.html).)

explosives, polluting water and air sources. Broken mountains, landslides, like other natural disasters, cannot be predicted, and when they happen, people can only run away. The works describe the helplessness and smallness of humans in the face of disaster. In the story *Landslide*s (Nguyen Ngoc Tu), the boy ran to find his grandfather to urge him to leave the dangerous area, but his grandfather replied very calmly: "Well, the mountain collapsed, the mountain is also angry, isn't it?" (*Landslides* - Nguyen Ngoc Tu). For the grandfather, the mountain is not inanimate, and the mountain collapsed, simply because the mountain is "angry". In other words, humans have to suffer the wrath of nature. In the story of the contemporary writer about disaster, humans are victims of natural disasters, damaged property, casualties, and subsequent injuries. But from another perspective, mountains and nature are also victims of human exploitation and destruction. Although landslides are something that people do not know exactly when and where they will happen, there are always warnings coming from the reality of human activities.

Mai Thi Hong Que's *Landslides* is a different situation. The mysterious Song Mountain associated with the childhood of two friends Lam and Hai has now become eroded due to stone exploitation, and more and more children in the village are infected with a deadly disease. The landslide here is entirely caused by humans: "The top of Song Mountain has been cut off, revealing a patch of jagged color." Song Mountain is likened to “A Song fish struggling with its fins stained with blood on the rice fields” as evidence of nature being damaged. In this short story, there is no angry nature harming humans, it is humans who, while persecuting nature (destroying mountains), persecute each other: the air in the village “in the middle of June, the sky was as hazy as fog”, “Convoys of trucks rushed in and out, engulfing the small village in a layer of dust”, “dust flew like a whirlwind after each roar of explosives”, “rocks still collapsed, dust still rolled up like a whirlwind, the acrid smell of explosives still rushed into the village”. In the writer’s description, the heavily polluted environment can be seen (smoke and dust), can be smelled (the acrid smell of explosives) and even invisible things (poison seeping into the soil and water, silently killing humans).

In Tong Ngoc Han's *Broken Mountain*, the villagers of San Ho live on the mountain but have to move to another place to avoid the risk of the hydroelectric lake breaking. However, even after they reach their new place, they still can't get used to it. There's still no electricity, the children are still sick and crying, the grown-up daughters still leave the village and disappear, and the nightmares of the broken mountain still haunt them: "The hydroelectric plant has not yet provided electricity but has taken away so many things from San Ho. It has taken away the gentleness, diligence, and hard work of San Ho's daughters. It has taken away the warmth of husband-and-wife love. No one can see those things. They just sigh and point to the forest. There, big trees fall on small trees. Big forests fall; small forests fall. The tree sap is black in the whole area. I heard Chinh say that this area has five lakes like that. Wherever the lakes go, the forests there are dirty, jagged, and destroyed. The picturesque villages had to be evacuated because they were in the danger zone. The terraced fields that people poured so much sweat and tears to make shiny Even so, it was plowed and leveled.

When planting, there was not enough water. However, when harvesting, the flood swept away, washing away houses and doors. Everyone knows that San Ho forest is a sacred forest. No matter how sacred, it will die." The story does not describe the disaster of the mountain breaking but only mentions the risk of disaster and in reality, it only stops at the disappearance of the sacred San Ho forest and the floods that swept away houses, the impacts on people's psychology.

All three cases are cries for help from the natural environment when it is exploited, destroyed, and devastated by humans. But the authors also open up dialogue and warnings about the choice between economic development, between making a living and preserving nature: building motels on the mountains, destroying mountains to mine stones, building hydroelectric power plants. Not only is it a trade-off with the loss of landscape, loss of peace of mind, and loss of family harmony, people also have to trade-off with their lives.

Scientists have clearly pointed out the consequences of natural exploitation activities that humans must bear. Adding a voice of literature to this issue, in the essay *Flowing Land*, Nguyen Ngoc analyzed: "Floods are when the natural forest is lost, only a few sparse bushes remain, with grass, rubber, acacia, coffee... spreading everywhere, are types of trees that do not have roots to retain water (which reports and statistics keep falsely calling "coverage"), 95% of rainwater flows into waterfalls on the ground, sweeping away everything, villages and people. (...) But this year is different: This year, it is not just the water pouring down in floods. This year, something completely different, new, and very basic has happened: THIS YEAR IT IS THE TURN OF THE FLOWING LAND." From the actual observations in the Central Highlands and throughout the country, the writer explains: “The life-and-death relationship of Earth and Water is tightly bound together by Forests. For the past fifty years, with insatiable greed, regardless of all desperate cries for help, we have severed the life-and-death link: FORESTS. We have completely destroyed the forests. Without forests, natural forests, MOUNTAINS FLOW OUT like water. This year, it is not mainly water floods, but land floods. That is the fundamental change this year, and in my opinion, from now on.” (*Flowing Land*, Nguyen Ngoc). Nguyen Ngoc’s analysis explains the deep roots of landslides and mountain slides, partly from humans.

In that explanation, we can see the continuity of natural disasters: landslides and mountain slides are caused by prolonged heavy rains, due to climate change, but climate change is not simply a natural factor: in that process of change, humans are not innocent. And so, everything is somehow connected, human and nature, nature and nature, human and human. As Kate Rigby notes: In this context, the question of cultural negotiations with what has come to be called ‘natural disaster’ has acquired an unprecedented directness. Because of the overwhelming attention to ‘environmental’ issues rooted in socio-cultural factors, the literature of ‘natural’ disaster remains an understudied area within ecocriticism. Yet the excessive opposition between

'environmental' and 'natural' disaster is itself symptomatic of a modern mindset that seeks to separate absolutely human causes and effects from non-human causes and effects. In addition, the persistent attribution of today's climate-related disasters to a violent, immoral (and often feminized) "distant" nature, as Timothy Morton puts it, obscures both the human contribution to extreme climate warming and the role of socio-cultural factors in determining the vulnerability and remarkable resilience of settled communities in different places."[4]

Survival instinct and human crisis

Disasters push people into dangerous situations and face death. That is the situation that makes the survival instinct rise most strongly but is also the moment that challenges humanity the most. In Nguyen Ngoc Tu's *Landslide*s, the film that Vinh imagined about the landslide revealed many tragedies. The first scene after the mountain's shaking is the image of a woman standing there, stunned, watching her lover hastily start his motorbike and drive down the mountain alone in the misty rain and the roar of the falling rocks, leaving her behind. Then the drama is pushed up another notch: The hotel's owner and his wife climb on a motorbike and run away, taking the female guest with them, but leaves his father on the mountain, because according to the wife's quick calculation: "Dad is old. If you leave that girl to die here, you will go to jail." The landslide, in Nguyen Ngoc Tu's expression, is "the rock's precarious separation", "The rock is sliding on the rock, the rock bids farewell to the rock in a mournful sound", but it is also the eternal separation of fatherly love, of passionate love, of innocent childhood. The image of the landslide as if cut off by a knife, its "bare, bald" top is not only the collapse of humanity but also the collapse of sacred feelings. Thai Son Mountain (Vietnamese folk song: Father's merit is like Thai Son Mountain) in Vietnamese folk songs, a symbol of the lofty fatherly love, was pulled down by the son and his wife. In Vinh's account, those who survived the landslide were "those who were screaming with joy at escaping but were already dead": the death of humanity. The disaster is terrible for humans, but the survival instinct that destroys humanity is even more terrible.

From another perspective of humanity, in *Landslides* (Mai Thi Hong Que), in contrast to the dusty and smelly village of explosives is the house of Nhan - the owner of a stone quarry with a luxurious living room and elegantly dressed guests laughing and talking. The sound of joyful meditation music in that luxurious space is also completely opposite/distant from the village where children are getting serious illnesses and dying one after another. But as a contractor who makes money from stone quarrying, Nhan only needs to know: "breaking stones is a legal contract". The question of ecological ethics here is that stone quarrying is permitted by law, but can it be done in spite of the fact that it pollutes the environment, harms health, and affects human life? The sound of meditation music in Nhan's house is like a satire, because meditation

[4] Kate Rigby. *Confronting Catastrophe: Ecocriticism in a Warming World*. Published in Louise Westling (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Environment*, Cambridge UP, 201: 212 -25

music is for the peace of mind and peaceful meditation, but can one be peaceful and serene when economic profits are exchanged for the lives of villagers?

In Tong Ngoc Han's *Broken Mountain*, Chinh, a commune official who persuaded people to relocate to serve the hydroelectric power plant, also asked himself lingering questions that he could not answer: "It's a pity, my village is so beautiful. Hydroelectric power plants can be built anywhere, why must they be in such a beautiful place like this? A place where the whole world knows and comes to admire the picturesque beauty of mountains and rivers. But why, instead of making five small lakes, don't they make one big one? Either way, they'll push people into the deep forest or up the cliff, so they'll push them all at once. Either way, they'll wipe out a cultural land, wipe it all out." The torment of the San Ho people when witnessing the sacred forest gradually die is an ecological awakening: "When the forest is alive, the forest provides firewood, wood for houses, medicine, water for farming... When the forest is being destroyed, everyone ignores it. No one dared to speak up. The character Cay loved the land and village where he lived, loved the sacred San Ho Forest and could not bear to leave, but when he saw with his own eyes the immense bag of water hanging on the roof of the village, he had to leave his familiar place and could not stop blaming himself for not speaking up when the forest was being destroyed. Behind the call of survival instinct in Cay and Chinh, there was still a pain with the call of the forest, of nature and of humanity.

Topophobia and psychological trauma

Landslides and mountain collapses cause trauma to nature. Mountains in literature are a symbol of solidity, strength, and protection for people, a symbol of longevity. Mountains also have the meaning of sacred origins. People climb high mountains to feel the vastness and openness, to be in harmony with the earth and sky. Landslides are the collapse and fragmentation of the rocky mountain entity, the fragmentation of sacred symbols. In Vietnamese literature from traditional to modern times, nature has always been both an entity and a symbolic meaning. For example, storms and floods in literature before the August Revolution (1945) often highlight the contrast between the miserable, hungry people and the indifferent officials who "live and die, let them". In literature during the resistance period, even though natural disasters and storms were fierce, they could not subdue the will and strength of people. As mentioned above, landslides and mountain breaks cause natural trauma: the Song Mountain range is like a fish struggling with its fins stained with blood on the rice fields, the sacred San Ho Forest is dead, the mountain after the landslide becomes bare as if its top has been cut off. But that environmental trauma always goes hand in hand with psychological trauma.

Facing a disaster, standing on the line between life and death, people throw away all their shells to fight for survival. Having survived a terrible experience, each person falls into a different fear of places and psychological trauma. Vinh in *Landslides*

(Nguyen Ngoc Tu) confessed to his friend: “I know the details and images by heart, if I tell them, I have to tell them from beginning to end. You don’t know, I see it every night. The branches of the Lagerstroemia were thrown around, making the Lagerstroemia flowers fly in disarray.” (Nguyen Ngoc Tu - *Landslides*). On the surface of the story, Vinh is a passionate scriptwriter with a rich imagination, every little detail is described carefully, “Vinh is holding the script in his hand and reading in the red light of a duck egg bulb”. But listening to Vinh’s story and observing Vinh’s mood, this is not the story of an outsider. From the point of “Vinh still lying curled up, his hands seemed to be between his thighs, eyes half-closed and half-open”, Vinh’s emotions when imagining the story being made into a film, his mood followed the story and was pushed to the climax, “Vinh suddenly lost his breath, where can we find actors who can portray the mood of someone who was screaming with joy at escaping but was already – dead, sir? Vinh’s back was cold, he seemed to be shaking. The old, rickety bed had a fever. I frantically threw my blanket over Vinh, and while covering him up to his neck, I painfully realized that the blanket was unnecessary. Oh my god, I need something to wipe my tears.

That boy really hasn’t ended yet.” (Nguyen Ngoc Tu)

Through Vinh’s story, every detail is clearly shown, Vinh’s emotions and moods as if “possessed”, it can be seen that the memories of the previous landslide still haunt Vinh like the confession “I see it every night”. It seemed to be a great shock that caused psychological trauma for Vinh.

In the *Broken Mountain* (Tong Ngoc Han), although the event of the broken mountain has not happened in the story, the haunting thought of it every night is an equally terrifying psychological trauma: “Every night, after the hardships of making a living, people are still startled by the panicked cries for help. The water has broken... run, everyone. Every time he heard that, Cay broke the door and rushed out. The moon was trembling and rising like water in the valley”. The lives of the displaced people, besides the pain of losing the sacred forest, the pain of having an entire cultural land wiped out, also include the haunting nightly mountain breaking, and the heartache when the girls left home. Ecological trauma and psychological trauma are inseparable, as a reminder of human moral responsibility to the inhuman world, as Kate Rigby notes: The constant attribution of today's climate-related disasters to a violent, immoral “distant” nature also has the potential to fuel ecological fear, further reinforcing the dualism of culture-nature at a time when, more than ever, we need to break down the mental walls of separation and acknowledge both the responsibility of the material world for the extreme escalation of climate and the moral responsibility of humans to the inhuman Other.”[5]

Conclusion

The three short stories are different cases of landslides and mountain collapses,

[5] Kate Rigby. *Confronting Catastrophe: Ecocriticism in a Warming World*. Published in Louise Westling (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Environment*, Cambridge UP, 201: 212 -25

in different situations and due to different causes, but all show the fragility of humans before the wrath of heaven and earth. But humans are not completely innocent. Natural disasters cause the survival instinct to rise, at the same time revealing the crisis of humanity and are the root The works raise ecological ethics but also question human behavior towards nature, aiming at ecological awakening. This is an important step forward for Vietnamese literature in the context of the current environmental crisis.

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