



Hubungan Manusia dan Alam dalam Cerpen “Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut”: Kajian Ekokritik Poskolonial

Human-Nature Relationship in the Short Story “Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut”: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Reading

Arga Dara Ramadhani¹

¹Postgraduate Program in Literature Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia
argadaramadhani@gmail.com

Nita Puspita Sari²

²Ph.D. Program in Literature Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia
sari.nitapuspita08@gmail.com

Nilna Maulida³

³Master of Asian Studies, Center of East and Southeast Asia Studies, Lund University, Sweden
nilna.maulida.8580@student.lu.se

Abstrak: Cerpen “Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut” karya Lamia Putri Damayanti mengungkap kompleksitas hubungan manusia dan alam. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap bahwa eksploitasi terhadap alam dan anak-anak terjadi karena praktik kapitalisme dan adanya agensi alam yang mengubah perspektif tokoh. Metode yang digunakan adalah analisis tekstual yang berfokus pada narasi yang berkaitan dengan hubungan manusia dan alam melalui pendekatan poskolonial ekokritik Graham Huggan dan Helen Tiffin. Langkah penelitian dilakukan melalui beberapa tahap: (1) pembacaan mendalam, (2) penentuan kutipan dalam teks yang berkaitan dengan topik penelitian, (3) analisisnya dengan menggunakan pendekatan poskolonial dari Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, dan (4) penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian mengungkap adanya ironi kematian tokoh anak sebagai penyelamat makhluk nonmanusia dan kokohnya antroposentrisme dalam cerpen. Meski tokoh dalam cerpen berhasil melakukan penyelamatan terhadap makhluk nonmanusia, hubungan manusia dan alam tetap menjadi relasi hierarkis dengan posisi alam sebagai objek yang dapat dimanfaatkan sesuai dengan kebutuhan manusia. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa cerpen “Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut” mengkritik sikap antroposentris manusia yang mengakibatkan penindasan terhadap alam dan anak. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memperkaya kajian ekokritik sastra, khususnya dalam memahami kritik terhadap antroposentrisme dan ketimpangan relasi antara manusia, alam, dan kelompok marginal.

Kata kunci: alam, anak, antroposentris, ekokritik, Cerpen Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut.

Abstract: The short story “Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut” by Lamia Putri Damayanti reveals the complexity of the relationship between humans and nature. This research aims to reveal the exploitation of nature and children resulting from capitalist practices and how nature’s agency shapes the main character’s perspective. This research employs textual analysis focusing on narration related to the human–nature relationship, using Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin’s postcolonial ecocriticism. The research was conducted in several stages: (1) close reading, (2) identifying quotations in the text related to the research topic, (3) analyzing them using Huggan and Tiffin’s postcolonial ecocritical approach, and (4) drawing conclusions. The results reveal the irony of the child character’s death as a savior of non-human beings, as well as the persistence of anthropocentrism in the short story. Although the character succeeds in saving non-human beings, the relationship between humans and nature remains hierarchical, with nature positioned as an object that can be utilized according to human needs. This research concludes that the short story “Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut” criticizes anthropocentric human attitudes that result in violence against nature and marginalized groups. It is anticipated that this research will contribute meaningfully to literary scholarship addressing contemporary ecological crises.

Keywords: anthropocentrism, children, ecocriticism, “Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut” short story, nature.

INTRODUCTION

The interaction between humans and nature is closely interconnected, and each influences the other. Dibaj and Rusdiarti (2021, p. 58) state that regarding nature and everything within it as an object and a means to serve human interests in pursuit of profit is an anthropocentric mindset. On the one hand, humans are present with their interests; on the other hand, nature has interests of its own, demonstrated through its agency in human life. In relation to this, humans, whether intentionally or unintentionally, cause environmental damage that brings about changes to human life. Environmental changes such as the degradation of soil, water, and air are the consequences of the excessive use of nature (Ifan et al., 2025, p. 114). In this case, it can be seen that the exploitation of nature can occur because of arbitrary human behaviour toward nature.

As part of nature, animals also play a role in maintaining the balance of ecosystems. Animals can assist human life, and in some instances their presence can be regarded as that of an equal companion to humans (Shakoor et al., 2024, p. 545). In addition, environmental damage caused by humans can also result in the

exploitation of animals. For example, fishing practices in the capitalist industry that use destructive fishing gear such as trawl nets and bombs reflect violence not only against the sea as an ecological space, but also against marine animals. These actions can damage natural habitats and threaten the survival of various species. Atit Kanti, a researcher from the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (formerly LIPI), stated in the seminar "Conservation of Endangered Fish in Indonesia" that the large-scale exploitation of the sea through habitat destruction by bombing has endangered many marine species in Indonesia (Suriyani, 2020). Furthermore, Kerit (as cited in Ahmadi, 2017, p. 138) states that the vastness of Indonesia's seas also gives rise to numerous maritime threats, such as marine environmental degradation, smuggling of goods, people, and weapons, and armed robbery.

The interaction between humans and nature is not portrayed solely through humans positioning as subjects. Nature also becomes a subject that has agency in influencing humans. This issue is present in the short story "Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut" by Lamia Putri Damayanti, published on December 1st 2018 on Tempo website. The short story tells the story of a nameless child who is separated from his mother and spends six years enslaved on a fishing vessel. He lives on the ship together with other children who are enslaved by harsh and ambitious adults. In this situation, the character '*Aku*' interacts with an imagined koala that he longs for, and encounters the fish and other marine animals that become his catch, until death comes upon them.

The short story "Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut" is highly relevant to current problems and issues. Exploitation by humans damages not only nature but also marginalized groups. Children, together with nature, constitute one of the marginalized groups who are positioned as vulnerable entities that can be oppressed by dominant power parties. This is emphasised by Huggan and Tiffin (2015, p. 125), who state that anthropocentrism ultimately creates tensions among humans, shapes individual human relationships with nature, and simultaneously alters the nature reality. Based on these matters, the relationship between humans and nature in the short story "Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut" needs to be examined.

Children who are forcibly displaced from land to sea experience a profound ecological disconnection. This includes the loss of a place and of comfort (Albrecht, 2019, p. 34). Land is present not merely as a living space for the children, but as a landscape that shapes their lives and their knowledge of the world. The separation resulting from abduction and displacement of their origin place cannot simply disappear, especially when the children have a strong bond between the people and the shared territory.

The short story "Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut" by Lamia Putri Damayanti reveals the exploitation of nature and children, as well as the nature agency, which appears to bring human awareness of ecological interconnectedness. Through an ecocritical approach and an analysis of point of view, plot, setting, and metaphor, this study represents the destructive relationship between humans and nature, with humans as the actors who damage nature and oppress minority groups.

The short story "Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut" by Lamia Putri Damayanti was previously studied by Suwondo et al. (2023). Broadly, that study examined 25 short stories with a sea setting published by Indonesian newspapers between 2010 and 2021. Through a discourse analysis approach, the study revealed that the sea setting in "Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut" plays an important role as a creative field for the author. It is also used to convey that the sea is a space of economic struggle, underpinned by the intersection of the real and magical worlds. The study employed a critical approach grounded in semiotic theory, positioning the sea as an arena of ideological struggle. However, it remains necessary to explore how the relationship between humans and nature reveals the impacts of exploitation and the agency of nature in the story. Therefore, this research seeks to fill that gap by applying a postcolonial ecocritical approach to analyze the short story "Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut," with forms of exploitation and nature's agency as the core of the analysis. This approach enables readers to engage critically with how the relationship between humans and nature is portrayed in the short story.

The relationship between humans, nature, and animals is also explored in the previous studies by Hardiningtyas (2016), Susilowati et al. (2021), Nahdhiyah et al. (2023), and Rifa'i et al. (2024). The study by Nahdhiyah et al. (2023) on *The*

Alchemist by Paulo Coelho reveals that humans believe animals and plants are messengers for life. That study demonstrates a harmonious relationship between humans and nature. This aligns with the study by Rifa'i et.al. (2024) in Mahfud Ikhwan's *Kambing dan Hujan*, which shows the attachment between humans and animals, particularly humans' dependence on animals for their livelihood.

In contrast, the relationship between humans and nature in the studies by Hardiningtyas (2016) and Susilowati et al. (2021) was found to be more negative. The studies by Hardiningtyas (2016) and Susilowati, Ngatma'in & Affandy (2022) further explore the relationship between humans, animals, and nature in Balinese context. Based on findings regarding land and environmental problems resulting from modernisation in Bali, Hardiningtyas (2016), in Made Adnyana Ole's *Dongeng dari Utara*, reveals that human greed for natural resources leads humans to greater losses and affects human lives. This is in line with the findings of Susilowati et al. (2022) studying Ayu Utami's *Bilangan Fu* and indicate that nature and animal exploitation in Bali is caused by human greed and an anthropocentric view that regards humans as the rulers and owners of nature.

A number of studies on the relationship between humans and nature in prose fiction reveal that the relationship is both harmonious and destructive. This study aligns closely with the studies by Hardiningtyas (2016) and Susilowati et al. (2021), which found the anthropocentric nature of humans in their works. However, previous studies have not explicitly linked this to the agency of nature and to how that agency transforms perspectives on the awareness of the ecological interconnectedness between humans and nature. Therefore, this study offers novelty by examining the short story "Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut" to show that the nature agency can influence the characters' thoughts and actions, and how this relates to an awareness of the ecological relationship between nature and humans. The main research question addresses how the short story "Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut" represents human-nature relationship, a narrative critique of anthropocentrism. This question is divided into two sub-questions: (1) How is the exploitation of nature and children represented in the short story "Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut"? (2) How does nature's agency in the story function as a narrative

strategy to criticize the anthropocentric relationship between humans and nature?

Furthermore, this study aims to highlight the narrative's critique of the anthropocentric attitudes that lead to environmental degradation and harm marginalized groups. It also uncovers the exploitation of nature and children resulting from capitalism. Furthermore, it aims to reveal how the agency of nature can influence the thoughts and actions of characters, and how this relates to an awareness of the ecological interconnectedness between humans and the natural world. This work is intended to contribute to literary discussions concerning the ecological crisis.

METHODS

This research uses textual analysis methodology along with an ecocriticism approach in the short story by Lamia Putri, *"Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut"* (2018). The analysis focuses on the narrative representations of human-nature relationships, particularly the exploitation of nature and children under capitalist practices and the agency of nature in shaping the main character's perspective. The research was conducted in four stages: (1) close reading of the short story; (2) identifying and collecting textual quotations related to the research focus; (3) analyzing the selected quotations using Huggan and Tiffin's postcolonial ecocritical framework, particularly the concepts of alienation and nature's agency; and (4) concluding.

The concept of postcolonial ecocriticism by Huggan and Tiffin (2015) will be applied to examine the exploitation of nature and children's bodies and the agency of nature. Primarily, it is represented through the interaction between humans and nature. The concept of alienation as an imaginative attempt to reconstruct a place left behind is used to read the child's attachment to the land through the figure of the koala and the land-sea dichotomy (p. 76-77). Then, the concept of nature's agency is used to examine how the sea and marine animals alter the character's thoughts and actions as a narrative critique of anthropocentrism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Exploitation of Children's Bodies and Nature in "Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut"

The short story "Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut" centres on the character "Aku" (I), who is separated from his mother on land. Through a first-person point of view, the story unfolds by recounting *Aku's* life aboard the ship and his work as a fish supplier together with other children. Narratively, this interaction is employed through a storytelling technique that emphasizes a first-person narrator and moves the plot from a child's point of view, as well as through a strong element of setting as part of the story. The story opens by depicting interactions between the children and the animals.

I had been obsessed with seeing a koala since I was seven years old. At first, I thought it was a squirrel because both of them climb trees. My mom said that both of them are mammals, too. Even so, the koala has wide and round ears also a rounder body. (Damayanti, 2018, para. 1)

The quotation shows that the character recounts a flashback of his life when he was obsessed with and closely attached to a koala. Although the character has never met a koala in person, he has a strong image of the animal because he once saw a picture of it in a newspaper used to wrap rice. The explanation given by his mother about koalas brings the image of the koala into his imagination, as shown through the phrase "*the koala has wide and round ears also a rounder body*". This phrasing shows the main characteristics while reflecting the simplicity of a child's understanding. The character even considers that koalas look like squirrels, drawing a parallel based on their shared habit of climbing trees. His attachment to the koala does not remain in the past, but it stays in his memory until he was on the fishing ship.

Furthermore, the interaction between the child character and the fish is also depicted. This portrayal reveals the character's awareness that catching fish at sea is an act of exploitation. This is conveyed in simple language typical of children, as evidenced by the following quotation.

For years I have lived here, and the only animals I have seen are fish. Even then, we had to catch many of them and never saw them again. It feels like it must be painful to be separated from the rest of the school... It probably feels almost the same for me, separated from my mother and never seeing land again. (Damayanti, 2018, para. 10)

Through this quotation, it is revealed that the activity that he and other crews undertook at sea is an exploitative manner. The phrase "*we had to catch many of them*" signals the exploitation of marine resources by the ship owner. This exploitation refers to the excessive capture of marine animals such as fish, squid, octopus, and whales. This is further illustrated in another paragraph describing his encounter in the afterlife with marine creatures that are indicated to have once been his catch while he was on the ship (Damayanti, 2018, para.36). The fact that the character never saw the fish again after they were caught shows that there are collective actors operating in the sea and playing a role behind the exploitation that takes place. Another paragraph describes larger vessels arriving to collect the catch from the ship he was on. This can then be interpreted as a capitalist network operating through extensive cooperation. According to Anggriani (2020, p. 104), weak supervision of the high seas allows capitalism to expand exploitation through overfishing for profit. At the same time, it demonstrates that the exploitation targets not only nature but also children, through their abduction and captivity.

Here, both children and nature are positioned as things that can be oppressed by those who hold power. This attitude and disposition of wanting to control resources for profit is called anthropocentrism. Another paragraph even mentions that dying children's bodies on the ship are thrown into the sea and become food for the fish. Plumwood (as cited in Huggan & Tiffin, 2015, p. 5) states that the exploitation of nature, animals, and humans is an ideology of colonization that forms the basis of anthropocentric thinking. This supports the thinking of the adult crew members, who equate the presence of children with animal entities that can likewise be destroyed and disposed of once they are no longer profitable.

Meanwhile, the exploitation occurring on the ship shows that children and nature are constructed as objects within an anthropocentric logic. Accordingly, the interaction between the character and the koala is shown again at the end. The protagonist clearly recalls seeing a koala in the final moments of life just before his body is thrown into the sea by the crew. The koala, which has stayed in his memory since he was seven years old, appears consistently in the protagonist's life, particularly in dangerous situations. Previously, the image of the koala and his

mother appeared after he was beaten by the crew, then at this point the koala appears at the end of his life. Unlike the earlier representation of the koala alongside his mother, the koala now appears to guide him down to the bottom of the sea. This is evidenced by the phrase, *"Two of us, Koala and I, pierced the water like a drill, diving sharply to the garden. Ah, it's a zoo ... "Come in to my pouch, let's stroll around!"* (Damayanti, 2018, para. 33)

Here, the image of the koala in *Aku's* life can be interpreted as a metaphor for protection. Although it does not appear as a real animal that has ever interacted with the character, the presence of the koala becomes interesting when related to the character's current condition. In this regard, the koala, which is associated with his mother and carries the character *Aku*, represents an internal quest for protection. All the events that happen to the character *Aku* while on the ship, together with the presence of the koala, show the child's attachment to space and to everything related to the people and objects within it.

Huggan and Tiffin (2015, p. 76) state that one form of alienation can be seen through imaginative attempts to reconstruct a place that has been left behind and through the articulation of grief. The presence of the koala becomes an initial finding that forms an important basis for the emergence of the character's ecological awareness through his connection to space when he lived on land. This finding will serve as the basis for the discussion in the next subchapter on the connection between the natural landscape and its agency in shaping the character's paradigm.

In this short story, the author goes beyond merely exposing the exploitation of nature to address other social problems, such as waste, class inequality, and violence. Bales (2012, p. 18) discusses how modern slavery is closely connected to economic exploitation, in which vulnerable individuals are subjected to control and exploitation for economic gain. In this short story, the violence inflicted on children illustrates how their bodies and labour are placed under the authority of the adult crew members. The children are not only exploited as workers but also subjected to physical violence that reinforces their subordination. Thus, their exploitation reflects a broader structure of domination in which vulnerable individuals become

instruments of economic interests which cannot be separated from anthropocentrism, as depicted in the following passage.

Its story is much like the plastic bottle I found a week ago. The difference is their age. That can is about ten years younger. It came from the western part of the world, whereas the plastic was from the southeast. Both were made by humans. After years at sea, they reached me, sending news of polluted land. (Damayanti, 2018, para. 27)

The quotation represents that *Aku* encounters not just one type of waste at sea, but many, such as plastic and fish cans. Both types of waste are the result of human actions that lack concern for nature. In this quotation, *Aku* also reaffirms a problem that never ends, both on land and at sea, which is waste. As with plastic, the used fish cans in the ocean are the result of human consumption that lacks the awareness to manage waste properly. In this regard, such an attitude can be categorised as one of the attitudes of anthropocentrism, in which humans are the centre of attention and the preservation of nature is neglected. From the quotation, it can be concluded that both land and sea are facing a waste emergency. Furthermore, the discussion in the short story moves on to a critique of social inequality, as seen in the following quotation.

In the middle of the ocean, I never expected to encounter things I had seen on land, if they were empty. One such item was a tin of fish floating by today. That tin told me a story: the fish inside had been eaten by healthy, wealthy kids. (Damayanti, 2018, para. 26)

At the same time, *Aku's* account of who consumes the canned fish serves as a critique of the upper class, specifically those who lack concern about waste. The narrator's characterization of "rich people" is not without basis. It stems from personal experience on land, where the narrator and their mother, who belong to the lower social class, were unable to afford such canned fish. He emphasizes, *"Because, I've seen the dead fish at the market. Or in the fast-food restaurant. Because I've seen them. Even so, My Mom and I never brought them"* (Damayanti, 2018, para. 11). This condition represents the inequality on land described by *Aku*.

Besides depicting inequality, the character *Aku* also presents the suffering of life at sea, as in the following quotation, *"Even here on the ship, we, of course, never got to eat it. If we ever did, we ate only dried ones. Even then, it was just so we wouldn't notice the stench."* (Damayanti, 2018, para. 11). The phrase also illustrates that, while at sea, the narrator did not receive food fit for consumption.

Beyond the issue of food, the character *Aku* also frequently receives harsh treatment or violence from the crew. This violence is not only experienced by *Aku*, but is also inflicted by the other children. As in the quotation, ", *I only asked them what my mom was doing today, but they punched me. They hate children who like to cry and whine. That is why they slapped me twice.*" (Damayanti, 2018, para. 5). The violence committed by the crew continues and happens to the other children as well, such as hitting them on the cheek, back, and stomach. From this, it can be concluded that anthropocentric behaviour is inseparable from acts of violence. In this short story, the violence is inflicted on children on board the ship.

The Agency of Nature in "Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut"

A shift in living space enables a character to undergo a paradigm shift in thought, practice, and perception. In this case, the short story shows the character's process of understanding and interacting with the surrounding phenomena. The character *Aku* who at first lives on land and then moves to a ship in the middle of the sea, experiences a paradigm shift. Initially, *Aku's* thinking about the dichotomy between land and sea is presented. This is shown through:

"The land feels so far away. I have almost forgotten what the soil and the trees look like. Everything is blue and vast, too vast for me, until I feel so small. It is weird, like drifting away, but not shrinking. Empty and vast, but so suffocating. Ah, it always feels like it's swaying, too. Not a single day without tragedy." (Damayanti, 2018, para. 9).

The character's perception of the situation at sea, as described in the quote, portrays his sense of disconnection and sadness. The land, which the character closely associates with soil and trees, is portrayed as gradually disappearing from his memory. The ship's distance from the land is conveyed through the character's view that he can only see an expanse of blue, without any trace of the green or brown usually associated with trees and soil. Yet, the passage shows that the land, which was previously part of his life, is slowly disappearing. According to Albrecht (2019, p. 29-30), this condition causes a deep sense of pain or longing that results from being physically separated from one's original home. Having been separated from his place of residence, the character *Aku* then transforms his perception of his comfortable place of origin into an object of longing.

On the other hand, through the character's focalization, the sea is portrayed differently from the land. The sea is portrayed as a strange and mysterious entity that ultimately influences the character's experience. The phrase "*too vast for me, until I feel so small*" can be interpreted as depicting a vast landscape that makes him aware of his own limitations in the new environment. This is reinforced by the choice of the word "*weird*," which is then paired with the phrase "*like drifting away, but not shrinking*." In the character's mind, the sea is an alien and threatening place because it can carry him far away from the land, although it does not entirely erase his sense of identity rooted in the land. The phrase "*not a single day without tragedy*" reinforces the character's psychological pressure and physical discomfort while at sea. In addition, this dichotomy indirectly shows the development of the conflict, revealing that humans have a connection with nature, as seen in the character's connection with the land he originally comes from. The sea setting is not merely the place where the story takes place; it also shapes the character's experience while he is separated from the land. According to Huggan and Tiffin (2015, p. 77), this situation represents the character's attempt to forge a connection between his place of origin and the wider world. The character's separation from the land not only changes his experience of his place of origin but is also related to his present experience of loss, which ultimately connects *Aku* with other characters.

The character's experience of loss is evident in *Aku's* relationship with a character named Topan. In this case, *Aku's* separation from his mother and from the land after moving to the ship is also related to a shift in his attitude. He also experiences repeated violence from the adult crew members, undergoes this shift when facing Topan, his friend, who is ill and cries while looking for his mother. The main character says, "*I really want to bring his mom to him [Topan]. But I don't even know where my own mom is* (Damayanti, 2018, para. 20)." This quotation shows that the main character understands Topan's suffering through his own experience of loss. This shared experience drives his care for Topan, leading him to protect his friend from the adult crew members' punches, even though he himself is also vulnerable to violence. This attitude shows a shift from suffering marked by fear of and submission to the adult crew members toward the courage to resist. The main

character no longer merely witnesses the suffering on the ship but begins to take care of others. Although *Aku*'s resistance is met with a harsh response from the adult crew members, it becomes one of the markers of the transformation of awareness into action. The character's concern for Topan's suffering shows that his experience of loss is related to his courage to protect others.

The understanding of suffering appears again when *Aku* reflects on the meaning of his experiences with the fish at sea. The main character's experience on land differs from his experience during his years at sea. In his memory, fish appear only as the dead fish he used to see at the market and at the fast-food restaurant he visited with his mother (Damayanti, 2018, para. 11). This experience illustrates how fish are seen as objects of human consumption. Meanwhile, after living at sea for years, the main character sees how fish are caught in large quantities and are no longer visible once they have been caught, and he comes to feel empathy for them. This is evidenced in the following passage, *"In all my years in this place [the ship], the only animals I can find are fish. Of course, it must be painful for them to be separated from the other fish. It feels the same as what I experience."* (Damayanti, 2018, para. 10)

The quotation shows that life on the ship leads the child to interact with animals, namely fish. This living space offers the character new ways of understanding fish. The character is portrayed as more empathetic toward the fish caught on the ship, imagining the suffering he experience when separated from the other fish. He even compares the fish's suffering with his own experience of being separated from his mother and the land. The sentence *"It feels the same as what I experience"* shows that the character draws on the sadness and emptiness he feels from his own separation. Furthermore, the child narrator is key to building the irony and poignancy of the story. Through internal focalization, events are presented based on *Aku*'s limited experience and knowledge as a child. *Aku* does not yet fully understand the power structures and exploitation that position both him and the fish as objects.

The contrast between the narrator's innocence and the cruelty he experiences creates the irony of suffering narrated in such a simple way in fact strengthens the critique of the exploitation of children and nature. Thus, the child's point of view

not only builds emotional closeness with the reader but also shows how ecological awareness grows through experiences of alienation and shared suffering. In this context, the sea environment becomes a significant part of the experience that enables him to see the fish as living beings that experience loss, rather than as objects of consumption. The character's understanding of the fish's suffering ultimately shows the development of his view toward non-human beings.

The experience at sea also brings *Aku* into contact with traces of human activity on land, which broadens his understanding of the relationship between the two environments. The relationship between the sea and the land is evident in the trash he finds while on the ship. As discussed in the previous subchapter, cans and plastic become signs of the pollution caused by humans on land. This trash even becomes a messenger for *Aku*. This is shown when he says, "*So, can, please go back to the land and tell my mom that I will definitely come home soon,*" and then throws the can back into the sea ... "*Through [the cans], I tell them and ask them to return.*" (Damayanti, 2018, para. 29). This quotation shows that the trash he finds triggers his memories of the land and his mother, which evoke nostalgia for comfort and a safe life. The phrase "I will definitely come home soon" shows that the character is able to process his emotions in a more positive way. Therefore, this condition can be interpreted as showing that the sea, which carries the trash to the land, becomes a connector between the main character's past experience on land, through his memories of his mother and home, and his present experience at sea.

On the other hand, the main character's understanding of the relationship between humans and nature is evident not only in his observations but also in his attitude toward non-human living beings. This development from observation to attitude can be seen when *Aku* saves a whale (Damayanti, 2018, para. 36). This attitude is in line with his earlier experience regarding the suffering of the caught fish, which are separated from their habitat. Earlier in the story, *Aku* imagines the suffering of the fish that are caught, separated from their group and unable to return home, then connecting it with his own experience. This similarity then brings back his memory of saving a whale caught by the crew. This shows that the character's experience at sea becomes an important part of his act of saving animals. Although

he must face violence from the adult crew members, saving the whale marks the character's courage to protect non-human beings. This condition is then related to the end of the story, which depicts a funeral ceremony performed by the whales and fish after *Aku's* death.

This dichotomy is explored further through the narrative until the end of the story. The natural landscape also shifts the character's paradigm regarding land and sea as a single unity of nature bound up with humans. If the previous paragraph identified the character's thinking about the dichotomy between land and sea, the ending of this short story shows that the sea also turns out to be a landscape that becomes one with him. This is evidenced in the quotation:

There are many performances put on by the animals here. The performance I like the most is the dance duet between the squid and the octopus. At the climax of the performance, the squid releases black ink. One of the octopuses laughed loudly at the sight of me. (Damayanti, 2018, para. 35)

Moreover, the closeness between human and nonhuman beings is given further meaning through a funeral ceremony performed by fish and whales. The quotation "*Not long after, a very large fish approached me, not just one, but more than a dozen, and they surrounded us... They said, this is one of the ways whales hold a funeral ceremony for the relatives they love*" (Damayanti, 2018, para. 36) shows that the portrayal of the afterlife in the short story extends animal agency. The whales, depicted as performing a funeral for "the relatives they love," indicate that animals are capable of showing respect for the death of both fellow nonhumans and humans. In this way, the short story shifts the moral centre from humans to animals. Wolfe (2003, p. 1) argues that the boundary between humans and animals has collapsed, as animal characters can display moral qualities that humans fail to enact in their relationship with nature. In this regard, the ending of the story, which depicts the character's death and afterlife among the fish, becomes an entry point for constructing an irony that reveals nature and children as vulnerable groups. Thus, the anthropocentric critique in the story emerges not only through the presence of humans as destroyers of the sea, perpetrators of violence, polluters, and exploiters of animals, but also through the agency of

nature, which transforms the character's thinking and actions in making sense of nonhuman existence. The character's tragic death at the end of the story serves as an effective narrative strategy to underline the strength of anthropocentric relations in the story, which position humans as rulers over nature and other nonhuman beings.

Huggan and Tiffin (2015, p. 207) state that nature influences the direction of human thought and action. Nature has agency that shows its power to reshape human identity and experience. The sea setting appears in the short story as a subject that influences both the plot and the character's thinking. In this case, the character Aku's life experience at sea is connected to the development of the knowledge needed to understand separateness and suffering. This understanding is evident in Aku's care for other humans, which develops into empathy for nonhuman beings and is then linked to Aku's act of rescuing the whale. This aligns with Long's (2024, p. 592) view that the physical environment in which a story takes place must have implications for the narrative, such as influencing character, plot, and theme. This narrative trajectory can be seen especially in the progression of the conflict, particularly at the climax, which combines the rescue of the whale and the death of the character at the same moment. In terms of the protagonist's mindset, nature instigates a paradigm shift concerning the land-sea dichotomy and fosters a sense of responsibility for the preservation of both the environment and humanity.

The findings of this study intersect with those of Hardiningtyas (2016), who shows that modernity in Bali contributes to environmental conflicts that erode agricultural land. Both studies reveal a relationship between human interests and environmental destruction sustained by capitalism. However, this study extends that discussion by showing the connection between the exploitation of nature and child slavery as part of capitalist practices in the short story "Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut." The findings are also in line with Rifa'i et al. (2024), who identify human greed and anthropocentric views as factors driving the exploitation of nature and animals in Bali. Nevertheless, this study places a different emphasis by showing how the character's experience at sea shapes Aku's understanding of the suffering of nonhuman beings and prompts Aku to carry out a rescue. This shift in

thinking demonstrates that human experience with nature can cultivate an awareness of ecological interconnectedness.

The short story also presents irony through the contrast between the child character's care for nonhuman beings and the violence of the adults who sustain exploitative practices. Furthermore, the sea, a natural landscape associated with water and characterised by its fluid, flowing movement, can be read as a metaphor for both the movement of the text's plot and the transformation of the character's thinking. Thus, the short story reflects the hierarchical relationship between humans and nature through the irony of a child's death. The irony lies in the child's awareness as an actor capable of understanding the interconnectedness between humans and nature and bold enough to rescue exploited animals, while the adult crew members retain their power until the end of the story.

CONCLUSION

The interaction between humans and nature presented in the short story "Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut" offers insight into the hierarchical nature of human relations. The story shows the exploitation of both nature and children by humans. Nature has the agency to change the character's mindset and behaviour, marking the emergence of a new awareness of the interconnectedness between humans and nature. This is signalled by the character's growing courage to rescue both humans and nonhuman beings. Thus, the story presents an irony through the contrast between two things: the violent ship crew who sustain the exploitation of nature and children, and the death of the child character who succeeds in rescuing humans and nonhuman beings. Using Huggan and Tiffin's (2015) postcolonial ecocritical approach, this study reveals that Putri Damayanti's "Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut" is a narrative that critiques the anthropocentric attitudes that can lead to the oppression of nature and children. This study of the human-nature relationship in the story is expected to raise public awareness of how nature and children are viewed and positioned, so that neither is dominated. In addition, it is expected to contribute to literary discussions on the ecological crisis and, ultimately, to foster environmental concern.

REFERENCES

- Ahmadi, A. (2017). Wajah Laut dalam Sastra Indonesia, Persepektif Blue Cultural Studies: Menikmati Ikan-ikan Hiu, Ido, dan Homa-nya YB Mangunwijaya. *SUSASTRA: Jurnal Ilmu Susastra dan Budaya*, 6(1), 137-144. <https://doi.org/10.51817/susastra.v6i1.47>
- Albrecht, A. G. (2019). *Earth Emotions: New Words for a New World*. Cornell University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7591/cornell/9781501715228.001.0001>
- Anggriani, M. (2020). Kerentanan Nelayan dalam Industri Perikanan Global. *Balairung: Jurnal Multidisipliner Mahasiswa Indonesia*, 2(1), 100-105. <https://doi.org/10.22146/balairung.v2i1.64795>
- Bales, K. (2012). *Disposable people: New slavery in the global economy* (Rev. ed.). University of California Press.
- Damayanti, L. P. (2018, Desember 1). *Kebun Binatang di Dasar Laut*. Tempo. <https://www.tempo.co/teroka/kebun-binatang-di-dasar-laut-886550>
- Dibaj, F., & Rusdiarti, S. M. (2021). Sostalgia dan Paradoks al Upaya Penyelamatan Lingkungan pada Tiga Cerpen Merayu Langit (2017). *Konfiks: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra & Pengajaran*, 8(1), 57-64. <https://doi.org/10.26618/konfiks.v8i1.6437>
- Hardiningtyas, P. R. (2016). Masalah Tanah dan Krisis Lingkungan di Bali dalam Antologi Puisi Dongeng dari Utara Karya Made Adnyana Ole. *Atavisme*, 19(1), 45-59. <https://doi.org/10.24257/atavisme.v19i1.180.45-59>
- Huggan, G., & Tiffin, H. (2015). *Postcolonial ecocriticism: Literature, animals, environment*. Routledge.
- Ifan, M., Sulistiana, E., Iryani, E., & Taufiq, A. (2025). Kritik Ekologis dalam Lagu Daerah Bima Karya Cucu Malingi: Kajian Ekokritik dan Critical Discourse Analysis. *SUSASTRA: Jurnal Ilmu Susastra dan Budaya*, 14(1), 114-126. <https://doi.org/10.51817/susastra.v14i1.250>
- Long, L. (2024). *Critical Worlds Subtitle: A Targeted Introduction to Literary Analysis*. College of Western Idaho.
- Nahdhiyah, F., Rahman, F., Abas, H., & Pattu, M. A. (2023). Ecocritical Study On Relationships Between Humans, Nature, and God In The Novel The Alchemist. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 10(1), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2023.2170019>
- Rifa'i, I., Rosalina, S., & Muhtarom, I. (2024). Representasi Keselarasan Hidup Manusia dengan Alam dalam Novel Kambing dan Hujan Karya Mahfud Ikhwan: Sebuah Kajian Sastra Pastoral. *Lingua Rima: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia*, 13(1), 81-97. <https://doi.org/10.31000/lgrm.v13i1.11037>
- Shakoor, A., Shah, A. M., & Ahmad, M. (2024). Man-Animal Relationship in D. H. Lawrence's twin novels, The Rainbow and Women in Love: A Zoocritical Perspective. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 8(3), 544-553. [https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2024\(8-III\)49](https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2024(8-III)49)

- Suriyani, L. D. (2020, Juli 17). *Ancaman Eksploitasi Laut, 20 Jenis Ikan Terancam Punah di Indonesia Jadi Prioritas Konservasi*. Mongabay Indonesia. <https://mongabay.co.id/2020/07/17/ancaman-eksploitasi-laut-20-jenis-ikan-terancam-punah-di-indonesia-jadi-prioritas-konservasi/>
- Susilowati, D., Ngatma'in, N., & Affandy, A. N. (2022). Interaksi Manusia dan Lingkungan dalam Novel Bilangan Fu Karya Ayu Utami (Kajian ekokritik Greg Garrard). *Stilistika: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra*, 15(1), 77–90. <http://journal.um-surabaya.ac.id/index.php/Stilistika/article/view/xxxx>
- Suwondo, T., Wahyuni, D., Zamzuri, A., Satiyoko, Y. A., & Saptawuryandari, N. (2023). Creative Battle Space: The Sea in Indonesian Newspaper Short Stories. *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, 12(2), 53–68. <https://doi.org/10.21463/jmic.2023.12.2.04>
- Wolfe, C. (2003). *Animal rites: American culture, the discourse of species, and posthumanist theory*. University of Chicago Press.