

Exploring Environmental Damage in Novel *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *Bekisar Merah* by Ahmad Tohari: A Literature Ecocritics Review

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Abstract

*This study aims to discuss what environmental damage is discussed in the novels *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *Bekisar Merah* by Ahmad Tohari. In this study using a qualitative method as the method, data collection is done by analyzing the dialogues in the novel and then writing it down and researching it. The use of supporting sources is also applied in this study. For further research, it is suggested to put more emphasis on what environmental damage occurred in the novel and compared it with environmental damage in the real world. Comparisons like this are very interesting to study, but due to the lack of available sources, it is requested to conduct further research.*

Keywords: *Literary ecology, ecocritics, ecocriticism, novel*

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a work produced by authors which contains the intent and purpose of the author. Frequently, literary works in general only contain systems of thought and their ideas and theories. But, according to (Guillen, 2015) literature also contains an idea and thoughts. From the explanation above, it can be concluded that a literary work contains an idea, theory and the author's system of thought. Literature in general is often used to express a thought either orally or even in writing. And in a literary work includes works of drama, poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. In the delivery of expressions, emotions, feelings of the author or even experience, literature can be the right medium.

Environmental damage is an issue that can be raised and exposed to the media. In confer about environmental damage, it is not only about environmental conditions that are discussed but there are also other things that are discussed such as according to (Garrard, 2004) explored about concepts related to eco-criticism, including: (a) pollution, (b) wilderness, (c) apocalypse, (d) housing/dwelling, (e) animals, and (f) earth. In environmental literature, society and the natural or ecology, have a role as an

intermediary for the author to reflect a literary reality which can change the values contained such as social values, life and local wisdom. AS stated by (Allen, 2011) ecocriticism which considers functional literature as well as the emergency caused by environmental crises and examples of the emptiness of the interior of modern humans on the other hand, modernist poetry presents a view of life in modern society, and is often related to the urban landscape as one of the factors responsible to generations in poetry

T. S. Eliot's early poetry (Parashar, 2015), which describes the spiritual anxiety he identified in modern society, foreshadows much ecocritical analysis. In literature, novel is one of the media for authors and even the artists to express the story of their own experience. The most famous and in-demand literature is novel, because (Imron Al-Ma & Farida Nugrahani, 2017) said that in the novel it is presented and even packaged the story of human life in the form of a story, whether the story is raised through personal experience or a true story or even the story is just a fictional story. In this article, the authors want to find out about the environmental damage in the novel "The Color Purple" by Alice Walker and "Bekisar Merah" by Ahmad Tohari, using the ecocriticism theories and critical approach to analyze the novels.

LITERATURE OF REVIEW

As one of the media for literary works, the novel is a means for literary works which in the process of preparation that have themes, facts which contain plot, setting, characters and also literary devices such as language style and angles and perspectives. (Mishra & Mishra, 2016) said that from an ontological perspective, we see that literary ecocriticism is a pattern of thought and understanding that literature can be connected to the environment, based on an epistemological understanding that explains that the concept of literature arises as a result of environmental demands so that literary ecocriticism can be useful in explaining and revealing a relationship, be it a mutually beneficial relationship or relationship not between climate and research. Nature and literature have always shared a close relationship as is evidenced in the works of poets and other writers of all ages in almost all cultures of the world.

Ecocriticism is the interdisciplinary study of ecology and literary criticism that is not uncommon as a combination of the natural sciences and humanistic disciplines. Thus, according to (Harris, 2013) to explain the relationship between literature and the environment ecocriticism is the right method because ecocriticism can describe the relationship between the environment and humans in literature. Another purpose of ecocriticism is to reveal that literary works also have empathy for the environment and contribute to solving problems related to ecology. Another opinion expressed by (Sharma, 2016) states that helping to explore and solving broader problems related to ecology can be helped by literary ecocriticism. (Ellis, 2020) pointed out that literary criticism has 3 uses including: a) useful for literature, b) providing useful information to readers in this case the wider community, c) can be useful for research development. In an ecocritical approach centered on nature, the environment and the earth in this case,

of course for or from the point of view of learning & literary studies. (do Couto, 2014) said that ecocritical theory can be interpreted as a study or theory that discusses a relationship between literary works, literature and the environment. The ecology can be used for something that can and cannot be done if people want to protect or even exploit the environment and nature, as well as keep social inequality from being mixed up or even can be used to mix up social problems and inequalities, besides that racism can be justified, along with the use of ecology and the critical approach can be used to criticize situations and communities that are racist or radical.

In this case, ecological theory and critical approach can be useful as a way to criticize society, so that a theory called the literary theory of eco-criticism was born. In plain view, (Markku Lehtimäki, 2013) ecocritical and pragmatic theories in the field of contemporary literary scholarship have become things that steal attention and make it a concern, but in terms of mimetic interest in nature in the world it has always been a recurring fact since the beginning of written literature. Furthermore, (Kopnina, 2012) in solving and discussing environmental-related issues one must revisit cultural and natural assumptions and ways to conserve them. Moreover, research and literary studies related to nature can be lessons and can increase our awareness of the natural world.

In the novel of *The Color Purple* talked about the suffering experienced by the character Celie and the suffering not only from a psychological perspective but also from a psychological perspective. According to previous research from (Nurbayani, 2021) said that pain that is caused both physically and psychologically and can weaken people is also called suffering, but physical suffering is still lighter than psychological. Walker through her novel, makes Celie the main character in the novel. She became the centerpiece of the story, as the main character Celie has a strong character, able to love sincerely in the *The Color Purple* novel there are also some protagonist characters like Nettie, Shug Avery, Sofia. According to previously studies (Rahmatullah. A. S., 2016) pointed out about *The Color Purple* novel tell about the lesbianism Celie with Shug, moreover in this novel also describes Celie's struggle in getting her rights and happiness.

This novel is set in the United States in ancient times, where in fact discrimination against blacks was very high. Discrimination against black people and especially discrimination against women was very familiar at that time, as stated by (Nurbayani, 2021) in this novel it is raised about the struggle of female characters to face discrimination. There are many moral messages that can be taken from this novel, about women's struggle to face social and environmental discrimination and so on. It can also be seen clearly as stated (Hanum, 2011) that the background and environment at that time were also very damaged, where women had no right to voice their opinions, and violence against women was also very common. But through this novel, a story about the struggle of the main female character is presented and a moral message is also given.

The next novel that has similar story is called *Bekisar Merah* by Ahmad Tohari. In this novel the writer, raised a story about the life of a beautiful village girl named Lasi whose father was a Japanese soldier who had a distinctive beauty, namely milky white skin and exotic eyes. City life is frenzied by city entertainment which causes social

deviation. Judging from the story in the novel, Lasi's life has changed from she was still in the village with her in Jakarta. The previous study by (Maydita & Supriyanto, 2021) pointed out that the main character of the novel Lasi has a crisis lack of self-confidence because the husband she loves betrayed her marriage and left her, she is trying to find her self-confidence which has faded over time. For the shortcut, she became a rich man whose strata of life were better by marrying Pak Handarbeni and that's the way she fought to get her confidence back is through marrying a rich man from the city. Also, this novel talked about how life in the village with life in Jakarta.

In Karangsoa, in general, the community still adheres to the customs that apply in the village, for example when Mukri helped Darsah who fell from a coconut tree while taking the juice from the sap by sprinkling urine all over Darsah's body, and when treating Darsah by massaging his stomach by Bunek. (Suparman, 2007) in his previous research that described the destruction of nature, namely about modernization in the novel, which is only enjoyed by people with money, in this case people living in villages are far behind compared to people living in cities. The tappers and villagers experience misery and poverty, lack of electricity supply so they only rely on torches, poverty is rampant in villages such as Karangsoa, dropping out of school so many young people from the village choose to migrate to cities. Therefore, in the novel there are religious values seen when Darsah spills all her troubles back to the creator by praying on a rock beside the river because the problem is that she has to marry Sipah (Bunek's daughter) and is left by his wife Lasi.

The purpose of this research is about revealing the environmental damage in the novel *Color Purple* and *Bekisar Merah*. Those novels also have similarities like discrimination for women. In addition, through this research the author wants to raise the environmental damage of the two novels according to the author's point of view.

METHOD

This research used descriptive qualitative. In this study, the data taken include words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and discourses that still have a relationship with eco-criticism, critical approach and the relationship between humans and nature and the environment in the novels *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *Bekisar Merah* by Ahmad Tohari. Data are taken from: journals, articles, references and other sources that have a relationship with the research discussion like google scholar and other trusted references. Data that has a relationship and related to the meaning of ecocriticism theory and also about the relationship between humans and the environment, obtained by multiplying and reading novels which are the main means of obtaining information.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this study, researchers discuss and describe the elements of environmental damage contained in the novels *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *Bekisar Merah* by Ahmad Tohari. The data obtained and based on the relevant concepts are:

a. The Color Purple by Alice Walker

In researching Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*, previous researchers like (AŞCI, 2018) emphasize the suffering of the main character but from a feminist perspective. *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker published in 1982 is an epistolary genre novel, which tells the story of the main character named Celie who is a black woman who often writes letters to God, where in her letters she pours out all the sufferings of her life. In this novel Walker also focuses on black women living in America, where at that time America still had a high level of racism. In this novel, the first environmental damage is an incestuous relationship, where Celie as the main character of this novel gets sexual violence in which the perpetrator is her own stepfather (Pa). At the time Celie was raped, she was only fourteen years old. Pa did this lewd thing to Celie because his wife was sick, but it didn't stop there when his wife died. Pa started wanting to sleep with Celie's sister, Nettie, but never succeeded. The sexual relationship between Celie and Pa is classified as free sex and adultery because Celie is still Pa's son whose legal wife is Celie's mother.

He [Pa] never had a kine word to say to me. Just say You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't. First he put his thing up gainst my hip and sort of wiggle it around. Then he grab hold my titties. Then he push his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it. But I don't never get used to it. And now I feels sick every time I be the one to cook." (Alice Walker: 1)

The above quote shows that Celie suffered a form of physical torture. Which is the celie character was raped by her father. The violence experienced by Celie was not only sexual violence, but when Pa forced his will on Celie, Celie finally became pregnant and Pa's two children were sold. It didn't stop there, Pa also threatened Celie not to talk about her rape case and often tortured Celie.

The second environmental damage is where Celie started a relationship with Shug Avery. According to (Dasgupta, 2022) discusses the deviation of the lesbian relationship between Celie and Shug Avery. Celie's meeting with Shug Avery brought about a big change in Celie's life. The love, affection, independence and hard work of Shug were able to make Celie rise from the adversity she experienced. Slowly Celie began to show the side of feminism that she learned from the people around her, one of which was Shug Avery. Shug loves someone regardless of age and gender.

*And I'm confuse. He love looking at Shug. I love looking Shug. But Shug don't love looking at but one of us. But that the way it spose to be. I know that. But if that so, why my heart hurt me so? (Walker, 1982:77).
...Nobody ever love me, I say.
She say, I love you, Miss Celie. And then she haul off and kiss me on the mouth. Um, she say, like she surprise. I kiss her back, say, um, too.(Walker, 1982:118)*

From the example above, it can be seen that Celie is very lonely and alone. Moreover, with all the suffering that she went through that could have traumatized men to her. So, she is looking for someone who really likes her sincerely without violence and even harassment to her. The figure of Shug who is present in her life, is a sensual, loving and independent woman. Celie realized that she was worthy to be loved and was able to love all thanks to the love that Shug gave to her. All of their love is manifested in the form of sexual desire that only the two of them can feel. This is what makes Celie a lesbian. As we all know that Lesbian is a disease of today's society (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2018). Although many countries have voiced their freedom to love each other of the same sex, for some countries whose religious values are still strong, such as Indonesia, such acts are considered unclean in the social environment. Sexual violence and free sex are environmental damage in The Color Purple novel which we can find in only a few chapters that we read. Sexual violence and free sex are (Fontes & Plummer, 2010) considered inappropriate by humans in terms of state law, religious law, and their effects on health, because they can lead to several possible bad consequences such as pregnancy out of wedlock, abortion, and vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases. Then, the second problem of damage is same-sex (lesbian) relationships. Lesbians are also very dangerous because they are against human nature. In addition to some of the environmental damage above, in this novel, the racism of white people against black people is also felt. *Only white people can ride in the beds and use the restaurant. And they have different toilets from colored.* (Alice Walker: 135). Which means, black people cannot be higher in rank than white people in terms of education, public facilities or anything else.

b. Bekisar Merah by Ahmad Tohari

The novel Bekisar Merah by Ahmad Tohari has shown a clear and specific time. The rural setting is a setting in the 1970s which was busy with development. The novel Bekisar Merah is the work of Ahmad Tohari which can be classified as a corruption- colored novel.

Karangsoga adalah sebuah desa di kaki pegunungan vulkanik. Sisa-sisa kegiatan gunung api masih tampak pada ciri desa itu berupa bukit-bukit berlereng curam, lembah-lembah atau jurang-jurang dalam yang tertutup berbagai jenis pakis dan

paku-pakuan. Tanahnya yang hitam dan berhumus tebal mampu menyimpan air sehingga sungai-sungai kecil berbatu-batuan dan parit-parit alam gemercik sepanjang tahun ... (Ahmad Tohari: 25)

This is the setting from the beginning of the novel *Bekisar Merah*. We come to the first environmental damage that we found. In this novel, the first environmental damage we can encounter is about trickery, infidelity and adultery.

“Gusti. Jadi kamu belum tahu? Darsa, suamimu, tengki! Daa bacin! Dia kurang ajar. Sipah sedang menuntutnya agar dikawin. Kamu tidak usah pulang kerumahmu. Kamu harus minta cerai” (Ahmad Tohari: 54)

“Tetapi cara kamu minta tolong itu lho. Kamu menjebak Darsa dengan menjadikan Sipah sebagai umpan. Iya, kan? (Ahmad Tohari: 58)

This is the beginning of the misery of Lasi the main character. Her husband committed adultery just because he was reluctant. Because of his bad feelings towards Pak Bunek, he wanted to do something like that and finally decided to divorced with Lasi and marry Bunek's daughter. As we all know, (Hadjiev, 2016) that the case of adultery in our time is a disgrace. Because, there are still many who believe in religious views, that any relationship between a man and a woman outside of marriage is adultery.

The environmental damage that we can find in this novel is the practice of prostitution. It was told that after her heart was broken because of her husband's actions, Lasi migrated to Jakarta. On her way to Jakarta, Lasi was met with Bu Koneng.

Mereka memajang diri di warung Bu Koneng, lalu berangkat bersama lelaki yang membelinya. Malah Lasi mengerti, kadang-kadang mereka melayani lelaki di kamar belakang. (Ahmad Tohari: 107)

During her stay in Jakarta, Lasi helped Bu Koneng at the warung, which incidentally didn't just sell food. As in the quote above, the shop is also sometimes used for the prostitution business. Through Bu Koneng, Lasi finally met Bu Lanting. In which case, Lasi's fate is not much different from when she was with Bu Koneng. He was sold to a rich widower named Handarbeni.

“Pak Han, sudah saya bilang, sabar! Bekisar Anda ada di suatu tempat dan belum akrab dengan suasana Jakarta. Dia belum jinak. Saya sendiri harus penih perhitungan dalam menanganinya. Sebab, salah-salah dia bisa tak kerasan dan terbang lagi ke hutan.” (Ahmad Tohari: 119)

After getting to know handarbeni, Lasi had the desire to marry him and show the villagers who had looked down on him that he too could be successful. But after marrying Mr. Handarbeni, Lasi's life can't be said to be happy either, because finally Lasi finds out that Mr. Handarbeni can't have children. In the end, Lasi lived like a bird trapped in a cage for the rest of her life. Lasi meets another man and gets advice to marry him immediately and leave Pak Handarbeni, but Lasi still doesn't want to.

“Tetapi, Bu, saya kan tidak bisa. Sayak tidak bisa. Saya masih istri Pak Handarbeni. Jadi mana bisa ...” (Ahmad Tohari: 275)

From some of the effects and impacts of environmental damage that have been described above, we can see that the environment is also very important in one's life.

CONCLUSION

From the novels discussed above, the most visible problem here is that the main characters, in this case Celie and Lasi, are both looking for their identity and proving themselves. But it's different from Lasi who is too follow the flow and can't say no because she feels weak. Celie, is more able to voice her voice, even though the physical and mental torture she felt from a young age often overshadowed her life. From these novels there are several moral messages that can be taken, also in these novels it introduces elements in a lot of literature and the moral messages contained therein. For further research, it is suggested to put more emphasis on what environmental damage occurred in the novel and compared it with environmental damage in the real world. Comparisons like this are very interesting to study, but due to the lack of available sources, it is requested to conduct further research.

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