

Ecological Literacy to Build Harmony: A Critical Study on Enviromental Poems

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Ecological Literacy to Build Harmony: A Critical Study on Environmental Poems

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Abstract—The recent development of the cities has grown rapidly, followed by digital technological advances. Buildings, roads, housing, business centers, industries, and other public facilities are built to meet human needs and to foster the development of the city's economy. All of them are equipped with advanced technological facilities. In the name of modernity, a city is being established, yet it must all sacrifice the environment. Even the decision makers, as well as the developers, do not aware that they destroy nature. The progress should be followed by ecological literate policies. This study focuses on how to educate people to realize that the ecological environment needs to be taken care of so that the next generation can keep the harmony of life between people and their environment. The ecological literature has been generated by many environmental poets. Using ecocriticism approach supported with David W. Orr's concept on ecological literacy, the issue of ecological neglect depicted in the poems will be discussed. The study finds that harmonious life will be reached if the society has an ethical ecological literacy.

Keywords—digital technological advances, ecological literacy, environment, harmony.

I. INTRODUCTION

The city is a center of economic activity that attracts both rural and peripheral communities. The development of the city is very rapid with various advances in all fields of life. In the city, work opportunities and creativity are quite broad. With technological advances and modernization, people living in the cities continue to adapt to their social environment. Those who come to the city carry the values and norms of their origin, so there is a process of adaptation and harmonization between them. The city is an area that has special characteristics that can distinguish it from the village, such as the concentration of population, the center of government, and supporting facilities and infrastructure for human activities that are relatively more complete than the village. In general, a city is a place where residents of the city live and work. A city is a place of economic activity, of government, and of other fields.

In order to sustain life, urban communities adjust to adopt a set of behaviors to reduce their impacts. Urban problems such as pollution (air, water, soil, sound, light), slums, garbage, and others, in the view of environmental ethics, show that humans have exploited and drained the nature to fulfill their life's needs without taking care of it.

In the current era of digital technology, the mindset of society has surpassed the postmodernism era, whereas, in the previous era—modernism—the development of technology has been sophisticated. When linked to the problems of

modernity and environmental harmonization, these two terms, need to be negotiated. Although it is not entirely wrong that urban society is less concerned about the environment, now, because the village has also been affected by modernization, the attitude of the community is not much different. Community's behavior that is not friendly to the environment has a detrimental effect on their own lives. For example, villagers, because of being influenced by advertising, like to eat fast food, drink packaged beverages; they also use plastic materials for household appliances, etc. In short, the impact may not yet be felt, but in the long term, the impact on health, social behavior, and so on will be seen. The value of environmental ethics seems to be neglected. In this case, modernization and urbanization also contribute very significantly to the community's behavior, especially towards the ecological environment.

This study will discuss the behavior of urban communities living in the modern era who need to get ecological literacy education in order to sustain the harmony of lives with nature. The object of discussion is environmental poetry written by young generation poets who are very concerned with the ecological situation of the environment. They are Cecilia Parkin ("Urbanization"), Gordon J.L. Ramel ("Wetlands"), Ron Cleeve ("Little Blue Top"), Sri Wuryaningsih ("Tangisan Bumi"), Sapardi Djoko Damono ("Hujan Bulan Juni").

This study will also negotiate the values of environmental ethics, namely the extent to which urban society in living a modern life in the city should practice those values. The expectation is that the life of the urban community will be harmonious because there are changes in people's behavior in treating their environment after reading the poems or results of this study.

Romero et al. (2018), in his research on ethnic acculturation of his new environment in Canada, found that when there was a desire to adopt behavior in a sustainable manner, a lack of norms, regulations, and infrastructure could influence their attitude. Community institutions play a very important role in this matter. Therefore, support is not only in the cultural and legal aspects but also the physical condition of the infrastructure, as stated by Grunwald (2016) that the supporters of eco-modernism agree that there are rules and meeting places to discuss and monitor their behavior itself, including urban communities, which in the end they will apply environmentally friendly technology.

The study of negotiating environmental ethics values in literary works is relatively limited. Even if found, what negotiated is about human dignity in contemporary short stories

(Jayaraman, 2018). While other negotiations are about environmental limitations in fiction (Achilles, 2017). The study above is similarly about literary and environmental work, about how to see people's behavior and the influence after reading environmental literary works and literary study reports. Since the main focus of this discussion is on ecoliteracy, the writer uses an ecocriticism approach supported by David W. Orr's concept of ecological literacy, and Charles Birch's environmental ethics.

The environmental crisis faced by modern humans is a direct result of "non-ethical" environmental management. That is, humans manage natural resources almost without taking care of the rules of ethics. Thus, it can be said that the ecological crisis faced by humanity is rooted in an ethical or moral crisis. Human beings are less concerned with the norms of life or replacing the norms supposed to be with the orders of creation and its own interests. Modern man faces nature almost without using conscience. People exploited and polluted environment without feeling guilty. As a result, there is a drastic decline in the quality of natural resources such as the disappearance of some species from the earth followed with a decline in the quality of nature. That is why, educating people to appreciate and sustain the ecological environment is extremely urgent.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The criticism of ecological literature or ecocriticism was first defined by William Rueckert (1978), the inventor of ecocriticism, namely the use of ecological concepts into literary works. This definition according to Glatfely (1996) is too narrow because it is only related to ecology, then he offers a broader definition, namely the study of the relationship of literary work with the physical environment (in Griffith, 2014: 219). Literature and the environment are (like humans living on earth. Literature needs the environment, meaning literature has an ecosystem.

In controlling humans' awareness of environment, David W. Orr (1992) has six points as the concept of ecological literacy to identify whether humans are sensitive towards ecology or not. Those are:

1. Complete knowledge of the environmental issue
2. Empathy towards the environment
3. Knowledge in acting
4. Environmental responsibility towards trusts, values, and attitude
5. Willing to involve ourselves
6. Active in finding solutions on environmental problems

The concept above is the main concept in the discussion of poetry which is being an object of discussion. With this concept, human behavior in poetry will be measured, whether the speaker in the poem is environmental lover or not.

Besides the concept of ecoliteracy, negotiations among ecological literature, environmental ethics, and human behavior towards the environment need an integrated concept, so Charles Birch's theory will support the analysis of the issue. Birch's environmental ethics will also be applied to support the discussion of the issue. Ethics is a critical and fundamental thought about teaching moral views. Charles Birch (1982), an

ecologist and environmental ethics thinker, holds that environmental ethics is understood as a critical reflection of moral norms or values in the human community to be applied more widely in biotic communities and ecological communities. Environmental ethics is a guide of human practical behavior in trying to manifest morals and efforts to control nature in order to remain within the limits of environmental sustainability.

III. DISCUSSION

A. The Portrayal of Ecological Neglect in the Poems

The five poems that become the objects of this study tell how humans ignore nature/ecology to damage. In the poem "Urbanization", ecological neglect is expressed obviously for deforestation happens as the best way to develop a city. In the second stanza, it is illustrated the operation of saws to spend wood in the forest. The process of destroying ecology begins by deforestation. It is proven by operating saws in cutting down the trees. In stanza III, IV, and V, ecological neglect is clear, because after clearing the forest, the woods are carried out to some places to establish office blocks (stanzas III and IV). Then a town is built, the roads are paved. This is a characteristic of a city that is urbanized. As a result, there is no sound of birdsong because trees are scarce. What currently available is the light beam and the sound of vehicles for transportation (stanza V). So this poem is actually a form of the poet's protest against deforestation opened for developing smart urban regions.

The poem "Little Blue Top" tells about the destruction of the earth. Humans have acted with various businesses. In the third stanza, *a man leaves his mark where ever he goes: on land, sea, and air*, and finally, *mass extinction*. It can be interpreted that human activities in various fields and areas bring disaster to environmental ecology. Some people are apathetic; some respond with despair (stanza IV: 2-3) because they think that nature's damage is not entirely by humans. Astronomy also plays a role in (stanza V). This attitude is repeated in the eighth stanza. The poet's anger turns to peak in stanza nine that the greed of the humans' ego to rule and govern according to their desires cannot be stopped.

In the poem "Wetlands", this area is water-saturated land which serves to support the growth of aquatic plants, such as cattail, bulrush, umbrella plant, canna, and some other living biota (Metcalf and Eddy, 1991 in Safitriani, 2014). The poet analogizes this area like a paradise for biota living in the region included flora and fauna ranging from small to big. They live there, breed comfortably and freely, which the poet describes as *a special grace*. This can be interpreted that the region is the gift of the Creator. There are dozens of bird species mentioned in the poem: ducks, bees, turtles, butterflies, small mammals, and frogs. Whereas flora, are trees, flowering plants, water lilies, and so on. Watching it all, the poet did not have any heart to think about if one day the area becomes dry and damaged. And in fact, the area was dry because a large project was carried out there.

In the poem "Tangisan Bumi" (Earth's Crying), the poet criticizes air and sound pollution caused by machinery. The word "cry" juxtaposed with the word "earth" is an expression of

deep sadness over human behavior towards the earth. Through this poem, ecological criticism is expressed in relation to human activities that can damage the environment. Hearing the engine with a loud sound in line 1 of stanza II *Aku terjaga oleh gemuruhnya suara mesin* (I am awake by the roar of the engine sound), is not desired, because it disturbs the surrounding environment. The speaker cannot bear to see the earth's face covered with soot (stanza III).

While in the poem "*Hujan Bulan Juni*" (Rain in June), the poet tries to explore the relationship between humans and ecological environment, so that it fosters human's concern to sustain and preserve environment. In this poem, there is no expression of ecological neglect. The rain in June is eagerly awaited by large and small plants, even humans. However, viewed from the cycle of season in a country with two seasons, June has entered the dry season, even if there is rain, it has rarely dropped. So with this poem, the poet might want to convey a message to take advantage of something that is very valuable in its limitations. One must be wise to respond to something unexpected even if it is his/her own problem.

B. The Ecological Literacy in the Poems

Literacy education in the digital era is still needed by the community, especially about the environment. Humans treat the environment inappropriately not because they do not care, but they may not know. For this class community, education will be beneficial. At least they are given prior awareness that they live side by side with nature, so they should be acquainted with nature. Ecological literacy educators might not be bored with this situation, they must remain consistent in giving this literacy, to anyone, anywhere in accordance with their respective fields. The environmental crisis must be prevented from now on. Because it is in a literary field, ecological literacy works and is disseminated to the public through the literary works.

In the poem "Urbanization", the speaker said that everyone is speechless witnessing deforestation:

*Yellow haired men toil away
Their saws screeching,
Nothing to say!*
(stanza II)

In this stanza, Orr's concept of 'complete knowledge of the issue' (point 1) is expressed by the poet. In the modern era, all people dream to live comfortably in the city that gives well services to its community. All needs can be met from basic to luxurious needs. Modern life requires all things easily accessible because, in this era, people work hard all day conducting their profession to meet the demands of the era. This make humans compete together. Because knowledge has developed rapidly, education has advanced, so is technology increasingly sophisticated. Humans just fill this era according to their competence. Therefore, they cannot do anything when they witness projects that damage ecology but, basically, aimed at the welfare of human life itself.

As expressed in the last stanza, that for the sake of developing a modern smart city, it must sacrifice ecology. It

relates concepts 1, 2, 3, and 4 that become the point of the discussion.

*No birdsong in this blighted place
No swaying trees, no flowers to grace
Neon lights - commuter rage
The price we pay for progress take!*
(Patin's "Urbanization": V)

As a result of deforestation, the city life exists with all its compliments. Urban city happens since it invites suburban and other villagers to settle the area. As a consequence, ecology is neglected.

The main natural resources for humans are soil, water, and air. Soil/land is a place for humans to do various activities. Water is needed by humans as the biggest component of the human's body. While air is a natural source of oxygen for humans to breath. A healthy environment will present if humans and the environment are in good harmony. Ramel in his poem "Wetlands" stated in his first stanza about the function of wetland for sustaining the living creature as well as an ecosystem. He also expects that people who have problems with the environment ultimately appreciate the importance of respecting nature (the last stanza). This is an ecoliteracy, if connected with Orr's concept, all six points are covered.

Sri Wuryaningsih in "*Tangisan Bumi*" (Earth's Crying) called for not fulfilling the earth with noise/sound pollution (stanza II), and air pollution (stanza III). The earth is crying because of suffering from the bad condition (points 1 and 2)

*Aku terjaga oleh gemuruhnya suara mesin
Wahai bumi raut wajahmu kian pilu
Terjebak
Bumi pun menghiba menangis
Wahai manusia hentikanlah.*
(stanza II)

But in "Little Blue Top", Ron Cleave invites readers to plant trees, save energy (stanza X), in the last stanza, to use time well as expressed in the following lines

*time's a waste 'n, for spinning tops
before this top wobbles and stops.
little blue top spinning in space
it needs some help with humility and grace.*
(Cleave's "Little Blue Top": XIV)

David Orr's concept to make society literate in the poem above is reflected in the message that is conveyed carefully by the poets. Readers are required to understand natural signs. Ecology contains a mystery that can only be understood through the accurate mind's eye. And in the last line above, sincerity will bring blessings (points 2, 4, and 5).

Sapardi Djoko Damono's "*Hujan Bulan Juni*" (Rain in June) is even philosophical in appreciating nature. Readers are invited to enjoy the poem while learning to be a wise man who knows how to respect nature and its cycles. According to Howarth, humans should recognize ecology that life may speak to provide information through signs (in Coupe, 2008: 163). Readers are also required to be patient and careful in conveying feelings, no need to be emotional. No one cannot easily practice such literacy. In this case, people must have the emotional maturity and be able to think clearly. June has entered the dry season for

a country having two seasons, if there is rain, then it is an incomparable blessing. Damono, in this case, has practiced Orr's concept totally in ecological literacy.

As it was described above that ecological damage is not only caused by human beings but nature itself also plays a role. It is reasonable since the age of the earth is getting older, and it will be wiser if humans treat nature intelligently. Each poem contains ecological literacy, although the poems were written in a span of 28 years. All poets want environmental ecology to stay sustained. All invite the readers to be wise and smart in treating nature.

Moral obligation is also shown by Ron Cleave in the "Little Blue Top" (stanza IX) that even humans have intelligence but are unable to see all things related to their ecological environment. What's more, nature is like a woman who always bears all burdens (points 1, 2, and 4). This is related to the term "motherhood environmentalism" which was initiated by Catriona Sandilands. She understands that the role of women is not only to give birth to children and as a protector of their families, but also as the persons who are very aware of the ecological situation and its damage (in Buell, Thorber, and Heise, 2011: 425).

C. The Implementation of Environmental Ethics in the Poems

Human behavior in this modern era is not all incorrect or wrong in treating ecology. However, in the five poems that become the objects, due to the topic is nature or ecology, the poets criticized and complained about their experiences related to human treatment to nature. Birch and Cobb (1982) stated, "... humans are subjects in a wider community, and there exists a continuity between all levels of existence." (151-152). From this quote, it can be assumed that humans are at the highest level among living things in the world, but as said on the previous page (114) that humans have a moral obligation towards fellow beings, namely keeping ecological sustainability.

In responding to the above opinion, in this digital era, humans have increasingly understood how to treat nature. It is the demand of the age that makes them act arbitrarily against nature. This is a contradiction that occurs at the same time. On the one hand, humans have received a good education about how to treat nature, on the other hand, they are required to meet the needs in accordance with the era that must not adjust to nature.

Today, the most recent technology has tried to adjust to ecology. Products labeled "eco" have greeted modern humans, such as refrigerators, air conditioners, cars, kitchen appliances and other household appliances, architecture, parks, hotels, tourism, campus, factory buildings, waste disposal mechanisms, and so on. There has been an effort that in the digital age almost all humans' needs have been met by environmentally-friendly technology. As well as in literary works, in this case, poetry, humans, literature, and the environment according to Bennet (2001) are required to do one another adaptation. The process is ecological and ultimately forms a cultural ecology. Therefore, the harmonization process occurs (19). While environmental ethics is used to determine the extent of the relationship among living things in the poems.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above it can be concluded that ecological neglect as portrayed in the poems actually exists in real life. However, modern living leads people not to have willingness to live together with nature as well as take for granted on their environment. Modern living also demands all practicality and convenience requiring people to use time as efficient as possible for productive activities. Therefore, they overlook to consume energy efficient stuff in which ecology should be considered.

According to the analysis, not all concepts of eco-literacy are applied to each poem, because in a literary work, the authors are limited to write what they think and feel. They can only express their feeling and give comment on what they have witnessed. Additionally, the poets are only able to suggest and recommend a solution to the ecological problems.

The negotiation of environmental ethics does not work effectively since mistakes are not entirely from humans, but natural fate plays a role as well. So, in this digital era, urban people experience two things as a dilemma. Moreover, they have to live side by side with nature, on the other hand, they must meet the demands of the era, that inevitably must sacrifice the nature. The most neutral negotiation is to use environmentally-friendly technology.

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