

## HUMAN VS NATURE: ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE IN THE POEM “THE TREE AGREEMENT”

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### Abstract

This research analyses how the poem *The Tree Agreement* uses personification and metaphor to illustrate the unrest between human-centered (anthropocentric) and nature-centered (ecocentric) worldviews. Using qualitative methods and the ecocritical theoretical framework, this research interprets the symbolism of the Siberian Elm tree in a poem “The Tree Agreement” by Elise Paschen as a representation of nature's resistance to human exploitation. The data collection technique used is a literature study by collecting data relevant to the topic under study. In this research, the data analysis technique used is metaphor and personification analysis technique from the selected data collection. The tree becomes a powerful metaphor to illustrate the true value of nature, which challenges anthropogenic attitudes and prioritizes human comfort. This research shows that Paschen's poetic technique effectively highlights the adverse effects of environmental degradation while promoting ecological awareness. The results of this study might develop the field of ecocriticism by showing how literary works can encourage sustainable practices and deep reflection on the interconnectedness between humans and nature.

**Keywords:** *Ecocriticism, environmental awareness, poetic devices, human-nature conflict, sustainability literature.*

### INTRODUCTION

Nature is a primary source for the survival of mankind such as clean water, fuel, food, and other natural resources (Ives et al., 2017). Likewise, nature also requires protection and conservation to maintain ecosystem stability (Primack, R. B, 2018). Significant environmental damage to natural resources is often caused by human actions for personal purposes (Crist, 2017). The conflict between human needs and environmental protection is a complex and urgent issue. In the poem 'The Tree Agreement,' the difference in viewpoints about the function and beauty of nature became a debate. However, common people say that the tree disturbs human comfort because its leaves are falling and consider the tree as “weed” or “*gulma*” in Bahasa Indonesia. Nowadays, many people value nature only for its utility, ignoring its aesthetic value. With this research, it is hoped that it will invite readers to care more about the surrounding environment.

Thus, researchers argue that this poem is interesting to discuss because this poem not only uses unique personification of words, but also it relates to our current life where humans do not think about the impact of deforestation and the conflict between short-term benefits and long-term consequences.

Talking about deforestation, there are two different perspectives on environmental ethics, namely anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, both have opposing viewpoints. Kortenkamp, K., & Moore, C. F. (2001) told that “in anthropocentric ethics, nature deserves moral consideration because how nature is treated affects humans. Meanwhile, in ecocentric ethics, nature deserves moral consideration because nature has intrinsic value. On the other hand, “deep ecology” advocates a worldview in which nature is valued for human utility and its role in maintaining ecosystems and biodiversity (Naess, 1973). In this research, the two points of view occur when in the poem there is someone who wants to cut down the Siberian Elm Tree on the grounds that it disturbs the comfort of

the road, but on the other hand the author of the poem wants to maintain and let the tree grow because it has many benefits for living things.

These two paragraphs above provide a basic perspective on ecocriticism, emphasizing its focus on the complex relationship between humans and nature represented in literary works. The term "ecocriticism" was coined in 1978 by Rueckert (Rueckert, 1978). Rueckert (1978) defines ecocriticism as 'the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.'" Emerging officially in the late 20th century, ecocriticism aims to explore how literature not only reflects, but also shapes our understanding and attitudes towards nature (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996).

The field criticizes the ways in which human actions impact ecosystems, highlighting themes of conflict between human development and environmental preservation which is a major concern in modern ecocriticism (Walker, 2016). Thus, the study of ecocriticism cannot be conducted without a deep understanding of the environmental crisis in modern times and should thus inform personal and political action (Buell, 2005). Over the past three decades, ecocriticism has emerged as a field of literary studies that addresses how humans relate to non-human nature in literature (Johnson, 2009). The use of the term "Literary Ecology" in Meeker's essay (1972) shows that Rueckert uses ecocriticism in a double sense, namely the study of relationships that appear in literary works and the attempt to discover the important role played by both literature and the ecology of the human species.

Not only that, in this research metaphorical analysis also plays an important role in describing human relationships with nature, because metaphorical ecocriticism is an approach in literary studies that combines ecocritical theory with metaphorical analysis (Buell, 1995). There are many types of metaphor, but this research will focus only on personification. Personification in the analysis of ecocriticism is not just a style of language, because it gives us an insight into the relationship between humans and nature (Garrard, 2012). This is one of the literary tools that can imbue natural objects with 'soul' or human characteristics, so that these objects appear to live and interact with the social environment (Abrams, 1999; Buell, 1995). In Elise Paschen's *The Tree Agreement*, personification is used as a means to convey the complex relationship between humans and nature, particularly through the characterization of the Siberian Elm tree (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). By using this metaphor, Paschen shows how trees play an important role in the ecosystem and the aesthetics of the environment. personification can also foster a sense of empathy for nature in the minds of readers and can make them aware of the conflict between the sustainability of nature and the human desire for exploitation (Garrard, 2012).

Previous research has discussed about the way nature treated by humans, the importance of increasing human awareness in preserving nature. Research conducted by Purwanto et al. (2023) analyzing a novel entitled "*Tuhan Maha Asik*" by Sujiwo Tejo and Dr. MN Kamba., the research examines the novel from various perspectives including highlighting metaphor and symbolism in the novel. Then the next research, Arisa and Rahmi (2024) examined a novel that is quite popular among Indonesian youth, namely 'Hujan' written by Tere Liye. In their research, they analyzed the representation of environmental damage in the novel. This research it is still relevant to previous research, namely discussing natural damage and its impact on humans, but in this research, it is more focused on one tree that is useful for humans. Then the next research by Al Fawareh (2023) is more interesting because in his research personification may be used to describe nature or God, for example through the depiction of nature as a living figure or God as a close figure. Nevertheless, in this study, personification is used as the poet's language style to describe trees as a shelter for living creatures that are seen as disturbing the beauty of the environment for some people. All previous studies used the Ecocriticism approach theory, and almost all of the previous studies analyzed the relationship between nature and humans or the representation of nature in the literary works studied. However, there are limited numbers of research focusing on ecocriticism in relation to personification. Thus, this research is intended to analyze a poem of which theme is representing the conflict between humans and nature using the ecocriticism approach. Moreover, this research also analyzes the personification used by Paschen in her poem which functions as a means to convey the complex relationship of humans and nature. Through this analysis, this research is intended to address the

following research questions: (1) How is the nature represented in the poem? (2) Is there any relevance between the poem and real-life events?

## METHOD

In this study, the research used a qualitative method. Moreover, this research utilizes library study using the theory of ecocriticism approach which involves data collection techniques in form of reviewing books that are relevant to the topic of the research conducted, as well as reviewing previous research. In gathering the data, the researcher collects the data by examining the book and journals. Not only that, this research uses a checklist instrument as a tool in data analysis. Then, this checklist instrument is also used to analyse the poem *Perjanjian Pohon* in more depth. With this approach, the research can reveal how metaphor and personification in the poem represent the conflict between humans and nature.

On the other hand, to analyse personification contained in the poem 'The Tree Agreement' to see how the conflict between humans and nature is depicted in the poem, the researchers employ data analysis steps for conducting library research. The steps are: 1) Finding the variables to be studied, 2) Distinguishing things that have been done and find things that need to be done, 3) Synthesizing and gain new perspectives, 4) Determining the meaning and relationship between variables (Sarwono, 2006). Its implementations in this research are in the following steps:

1. Selecting poems that are relevant to the ecocriticism approach;
2. Re-reading the poems that have been selected
3. Processed the data from the selected poems, then analysed the meaning contained in the poems, especially personification and metaphor.
4. Concluding all previous research results
5. Identifying personification and literary approaches.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### An Analysis of the Use of Language Style Found in The Poem "The Tree Agreement"

Paschen gives the tree human characteristics by personifying it, which allows the reader to relate to nature. The ongoing environmental conflict between short-term human desires and long-term sustainability is reflected in the conflict between the narrator and the neighbor which is the depiction of nature in the poem 'The Tree Agreement'. This is based on the theory proposed by Buell (1995) that metaphorical ecocriticism is an approach in literary studies, which combines ecocritical theory with metaphorical analysis. In the next explanation, the researcher is trying to elaborate the analysis of metaphor and personification contained in the poem. In the following chart, the researcher will examine the analysis of metaphor and personification contained in the poem.

### *Metaphor*

Based on the data analysis that has been conducted, there are three metaphorical findings: 1) Description of the word Siberian Elm as a "weed" tree, 2) The meaning of "leaf-hoard" in the poem, and 3) The use of the phrase "Chatter-song" which also contains metaphors.

1. The description of the Siberian Elm as a "weed" tree is a form of metaphor. While it is technically not a weed, the reference to the Siberian elm as a "weed" tree symbolically explores complex depths in the representation of nature. Also, it draws attention to the conflict between human perspectives and the natural environment, illustrating the idea that some elements of nature may seem intrusive. The metaphor conveys a sense of devaluation, indicating that the Siberian elm is seen as less valuable, underscoring societal attitudes that often categorize nature based on convenience or preference. It also might suggest how society often values or devalues nature based on convenience. The term "weed" here might indicate how the tree is considered undesirable or intrusive by neighbors. Then, for the next part, the

term "weed tree" is repeated as a form of comparison showing how the tree is considered worthless or a nuisance by the neighbors. This repetition reveals contrasting views on the tree's value, highlighting how its presence is contentious, with some seeing it as an intruder rather than a valuable addition to the landscape.

This is in line with ecocriticism theory which explains how anthropocentric (human centered) viewpoints lead to the disregard of certain plants or animals as nuisances or threats (Plumwood, 1993). Ecocriticism helps analyze how literature represents this tension between nature and human attempts to control or classify it. The metaphor of the "weed" thus reflects societal tendencies to categorize and control nature based on human-centered values.

2. The term "leaf-hoard" can be considered a metaphor. The term "leaf-hoard" acts as a metaphor that represents nature as a rich and nurturing entity, emphasizing its role as a guardian of life and resources. This metaphor suggests that leaves are not merely passive elements of a tree but rather valuable accumulations that serve vital ecological functions. They provide protection or shelter, as if the leaves hold something valuable like a hoard of treasures. By referring to leaves as a "hoard," the poem evokes the idea of abundance and preservation, indicating that nature collects and protects essential resources that support various forms of life. This representation highlights nature's resilience and complexity, suggesting that even the simplest aspects of the natural world are imbued with significance and purpose. The "leaf-hoard" metaphor invites readers to appreciate the beauty and richness of nature, encouraging a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of all living things. It implies that nature has its own wisdom and ability to sustain life, framing it as an active, nurturing force that shelters and sustains not just trees, but the entire ecosystem.
3. In describing nature with terms like "leaf-hoard," ecocriticism would interpret this as an attempt to reveal nature's intrinsic value. Ecocritical readings will uncover how literature often portrays nature as rich in both purpose and beauty, shifting the focus away from human-centered uses of nature to an appreciation of its inherent worth. This perspective would support the idea of nature as an active, protective force with its own treasures. Then, Deep Ecology (Naess, 1973) argues that all forms of life have intrinsic worth and that humans should view themselves as part of a larger, interconnected web of life. This theory supports the metaphor of "leaf-hoard" by suggesting that each component of nature holds a unique value. The idea of nature as a "hoard" speaks to the deep ecological view that natural elements are not simply "things" but essential, interconnected parts of a larger ecosystem that work collectively to support life. So, the term "leaf-hoard" suggests a gathering of leaves that symbolizes protection and value. Such metaphors reveal an intrinsic value in nature's processes and materials, challenging the view of leaves merely as waste (Buell, 2005). This personification encourages readers to see natural elements as valuable resources for habitats.
4. The phrase "Chatter-song" can be considered as a metaphor describing the sounds of nature, such as the sound of rustling leaves, singing birds, and branches swaying creating a unique kind of music, that is more impressive than the noise of cars. This suggests that nature is depicted not as silent or passive but as filled with voices and the sounds of nature having a beauty, peacefulness, and tranquility that can mask the noise of the city. Thus, the phrase "Chatter-song" serves as a metaphor that represents nature as an active, harmonious, and communicative presence. This representation highlights the nature's ability to express itself, as if it has its own language or song that both exists independently and interacts with the human world. The metaphor suggests that the sounds of nature have a layered, complex quality—something more profound than the hum of daily city noise. Through "Chatter-song," nature is portrayed as having an inherent beauty and wisdom that can be heard and felt by those who are open to it, making it a kind of companion to humanity. This reinforces a theme in *The Tree Agreement* that nature is not just a backdrop but a living, expressive force capable of forming connections and agreements with humans, for those who choose to listen.

From ecocriticism perspectives, the “Chatter-song” metaphor explores the representation of nature and the environment in literature, often emphasizing the relationship between the natural and human worlds. This metaphor aligns with ecocritical perspectives that portray nature as active and expressive, challenging the idea of nature as silent or separate from humanity. Ecocriticism reveals how literature can give voice to nature, encouraging readers to see it as a vibrant, communicative force that exists alongside human culture (Buell, 1995).

Leopold (1949) introduces the concept of 'land ethic,' emphasizing that natural sounds are an integral part of the environment's aesthetic value. Buell and Glotfelty (1996) further support this notion by suggesting that literature can elevate our understanding of nature's intrinsic beauty and its calming effects on humans.

### **Personification**

In this paragraph, the researcher discusses the results of the personification analysis data contained in the poem “The Tree Agreement”. In that poem, the phrase “claim back the sap, heartwood, wild bark” can be seen as a personification, in which tree elements such as sap, heartwood, and bark are presented as if they have a value that the speaker can “claim back”. This gives the impression that these parts of the tree have rights or ownership that can be recognized.

Moreover, researcher also found the line “claim back the sap, heartwood, wild bark” personifies the tree in the poem implying that it can regain its fundamental components and so thus represent nature as a force with the agency, resiliency, and inherent advantages. This personification represents nature as a living entity that can assert its own needs and reclaim what rightfully belongs to it. The term “claim back,” highlights the strength and endurance of nature and presents it as having the capacity to self-repair and self-preserve.

Deep Ecology, holds a belief that all life has intrinsic value and that humans are only a part of the larger ecological web (Naess, 1973). Furthermore, nature is seen as self-sustaining and self-regulating, with each element (such as the tree) having a right to exist and flourish without interference (*ibid*). Deep Ecology encourages people to view nature's entities as independent beings with inherent worth, not merely as resources for human use (*ibid*). The notion of the tree “claiming back” its sap, heartwood, and bark aligns with this theory, suggesting that the tree has its own role within the ecosystem and a right to restore itself.

An element of personification in the phrase “branch house for sparrows, jays” which gives the impression that the tree branches serve as a shelter or home for the birds is also found. This highlights the role of the tree in the ecosystem and how it supports other life. The phrase above personifies the tree by suggesting it serves as a “house” for birds, as if it consciously provides shelter and refuge. This personification depicts nature as a nurturing, communal entity that actively supports and sustains other forms of life. The tree is not just a passive object but a host with purpose, offering its branches as a home for sparrows, jays, and other creatures that rely on it for survival. The personification of the tree as a “house” for birds aligns with ecocritical ideas, as it suggests a recognition of the tree's role within its ecosystem, supporting and nurturing other species. Ecocriticism reveals how literature can encourage readers to see nature as a complex and interconnected web of life, moving beyond anthropocentric views that prioritize human needs above all else (Buell, 2005)

In addition, the phrase “Sun branches down” is found, and there is a personification where the sun seems to “creep” or “radiate”. This gives the impression that the sun has the will or ability to direct rays in a certain direction, which creates a warm and pleasant atmosphere. It can discuss that the line “Sun branches down” personifies the sun in Elise Paschen's The Tree Agreement by giving it the human-like ability to reach downward with “branches.” The sun appears to be actively interacting with the environment below in this representation, as though it were reaching out to the tree and its surrounds to offer warmth and connection. This personification portrays nature as a peaceful, interdependent system in which the sun, trees, and other elements coexist. The sun's “branching” creates a symbolic and visual connection between the earthly and spiritual aspects by reflecting a tree's actual branches. Thus, the personification of the sun as “branching down” aligns with ecocritical ideas, which encourage the readers to view nature as a dynamic entity where each part interacts with



others (Buell, 2005), by depicting the sun as an active participant in the ecosystem, symbolically nurturing the tree.

### The Relation Between the Poem and Real-Life Events

According to the definition given by Forest Watch Indonesia (2020), deforestation is a complex condition that requires cooperation and knowledge from various parties to overcome. In a straightforward manner, Elise Paschen's 'The Tree Agreement' reveals the reality of deforestation and land exploitation in today's world. The desire to protect trees, referred to as 'weeds', parallels the practices of deforestation that are often driven by current economic needs, such as livestock, agriculture, or the needs of the timber industry. While the motives behind these actions are sometimes based on development or field-related work, the long-term impacts are always positive.

### CONCLUSION

After researching how nature is represented and examining the language styles used in the poem *The Tree Agreement*, it can be concluded that the poem effectively uses personification and metaphor to illustrate the conflict between human needs and the importance of environmental conservation. The analysis of metaphor and personification in the findings and discussion section signifies that the words chosen by the researcher to analyze are not just a figurative meaning of the poem, but also have an important meaning that highlights the role of trees which is a key element in the ecosystem. This research is expected to contribute to the field of ecocriticism to give a new insight into how literature can be a reminder to raise environmental awareness and criticize the exploitation of nature. For future research, exploration of similar literary works or interdisciplinary research, for example adding psychological analysis with the aim of linking literary studies with psychology, thus enriching the literature in both fields and highlighting how environmental issues are also internal conflicts that individuals experience psychologically.

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