

Human and Nature in Donny Dhiringantoro's *5 cm*: An Ecocritical Reading

Olivia Tedjowahyudi

Master's Program in Literature, Faculty of Humanities and Creative Industries, Petra Christian University,
Siwalankerto 121-131, Surabaya 60236, INDONESIA
Email: a21210001@john.petra.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze Donny Dhiringantoro's novel, *5 cm*, from the perspective of ecocriticism. It tries to investigate the roles of each setting and the portrayals of human-nature relationship in the narrative. The results indicate that there is a dichotomy of the city and mountain. City is depicted as the antagonist while mountain is the protagonist, taking the role of a mother. The narrative conveys nature as an autonomous entity with power to attack/ support the inhabitants. There is interdependency between nature and human beings in the text. Nature needs human beings to protect it while humans maintain their good relationship with nature by keeping the rules and social norms around the setting in order to obtain the protection from nature. Despite the novel's attempt to put nature as the more superior entity, the character's decision at the end of the narrative shows that nature is still seen as a source of comfort to satisfy human's needs.

Keywords: ecocriticism; nature; human-nature relationship; natural world

INTRODUCTION

Modernization and industrialization have been part of urban society. Unfortunately, the development of technology has also accelerated the environmental destruction. In the city, water, air, and land pollution become serious issues for its inhabitants. In a bigger scope, it cannot be denied that the world is dealing with serious environmental crises such as predictions of global warming, natural disasters, and many others. However, unlike history and sociology, previous literary work and studies have not inclined to these ecological issues (Glotfelty, 1996). Major publications of literary works were more responsive to other issues, such as race, gender, and social class, while scholars rarely applied an environmental perspective in studying literature. It was only in the mid-1980s that scholars began to work together in order to establish ecocriticism as a new genre in a literary work.

The term *ecocriticism* was firstly introduced by William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and ecology: an experiment in ecocriticism" in 1978. According to Rueckert, ecocriticism refers to "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature." In its early presence, ecocriticism did not gain much popularity compared to other humanities disciplines as the movement was initially disorganized. Most studies and efforts which contain awareness on environmental crises were more into individual rather than collaborative works. They were scattered and written under various headings, such as human ecology, pastoralism, regionalism, and many others, making it "difficult to defend" (Glotfelty, 1996). In its further development, ecocriticism began to flourish and appear in the program of annual literary conferences and annual meetings, one of which is the 1991's Modern Language Association (MLA) session organized by Harrold Fromm (Glotfelty, 1996).

Tedjowahyudi: Human and Nature in Donny Dhiringantoro's *5 cm*:
An Ecocritical Reading

Oftentimes, human beings are given an active and dynamic role in literary works. They present the natural world as an element of a story rather than an entity that really exists, out there beyond ourselves, affects us, and which we can affect, perhaps fatally, if we mistreat it" (Barry, 2009, p. 243). However, this does not happen in Donny Dhiringantoro's work of *5 cm*. The distinctive feature of this novel is its environmental concern. The narrative provides details about each setting, such as the city bustle, the scenic view and harsh face of the mountain area, along with its active and dynamic roles. It also describes how the setting affects and is affected by the characters, inviting readers to rethink about human-nature relationship.

The object of the study in this research is the novel of *5 cm* which was written by Donny Dhiringantoro and published by Grasindo publisher, part of Kompas Gramedia group. *Tirto.id* reports that the book has been considered a bestseller in Gramedia stores for two consecutive years since 2005 (Maarif, 2022). In 2012, a film adaptation based on this book was produced by Soraya Intercine Film and directed by Rizal Mantovani. It starred some popular names such as Raline Shah as Riani, Fedi Nuril as Genta, Denny Sumargo as Arial, Junot as Zafran, and Saykoji as Ian. Similar to the novel's success, the film gained a *box office* with 2.5 millions of audience (Maarif, 2022).

Generally, this novel presents the metropolitan city and natural setting, Jakarta and Mahameru mountain. In a brief account, the novel's plot revolves around five main characters namely Genta, Arial, Ian, Zafran and Riani, the only girl in the group. Having been together for seven years, they realize that there is no new experience in the relationship. To relieve the boredom, they agreed to separate for three months and not to contact one another before August 14th. Many things happen to each of the group members during these three months. Ian, who is the only member of the group who has not graduated from university, decides to focus on his thesis. Before the separation, Genta proposes an idea to arrange for a 'celebration' for their upcoming meet-up. He contacts the group a week before the reunion date to inform them about the meeting point and things to prepare. Five of them, added with Arial's twin sister, meet on *Senen* train station on August 14th and find out that they are going to have a trip to Mahameru mountain and reach the summit to join a flag hoisting ceremony on August 17th.

Through this novel, the author seemed to signal the importance of reconsidering human-nature relationship by bringing two settings, the city and mountain, to the forefront. Applying Glotfelty's ecocritical approach, this study tries to answer two research questions: 1.) What roles do settings play in this text? 2.) How is the human-nature relationship depicted in the text?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ecocriticism is "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xviii). It is not a single theory, but rather a broad approach which requires an interdisciplinary point of view. Unlike other critical approaches or literary theories which concern more on the relation between the writer, text, and the world, this approach takes an earth-centered approach. It involves the entire ecosphere rather than just the social sphere. Practically, it studies how the literature illustrates the environmental concerns, treats the subject of nature through the narrative, and conveys the interrelationship between nature and humans.

In its development, ecocriticism is divided into three stages which follow the three developmental phases of feminist criticism by Elaine Showalter (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). The first wave of feminism concerns with the representation of women in the canonical literature.

Similarly, the first stage of ecocriticism focuses not only on how nature is represented in literature but also other topics such as “the frontier, animals, cities, specific geographical regions, rivers, mountains” (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996, p. xxiii). On this stage, it is practical to review some important questions such as “Does the setting function simply as background, or does it play an active role in the narrative? . . . How is nature affected by human beings in the text? How are human beings affected by nature? . . . Does the text raise the reader’s awareness of the natural world and his or her connections to it?” (Dobie, 2012, p. 243).

The second stage of Showalter’s feminist criticism attempts to raise people’s consciousness by revisiting and rediscovering literature written by women authors. Meanwhile, the second stage in ecocriticism is remarked by the effort of reconsidering the neglected genre of nature writing. On this stage, mainstream genres that manifest ecological awareness to their readers are considered as worth analyzing. The third stage of feminism is identified as the theoretical phase, particularly drawing on multiple theories to raise the fundamental questions about the symbolic construction of gender and sexuality. In ecocriticism, the work includes examining the symbolic construction of species and how the literary work defines the human.

Despite portraying the characters’ enlightening trip to Mount Mahameru, the novel highlights the city as opposed to the natural world to reveal a message to the readers. Both city and mountain are depicted as independent entities with strong power and bonds to the human. Dhirgantoro cleverly portrayed the urban area as the antagonist in the story. The congested traffic, severe air pollution, and extreme heat stress in the city affect the city’s inhabitants in a distinctive way. On the other hand, the mountain area is depicted as the protagonist that is calm, solemn and inspiring. It performs various behaviors, from supportive to assertive towards humans. I approach this novel from the ecocriticism perspective and intend to reveal the different roles given by Dhirgantoro to each setting including how each environment influences and/ or is influenced by its inhabitants, especially humans. I am also interested in exploring the way the narrative depicts human-nature relationship in the text.

ANALYSIS

Representation of the city

Urban and rural areas are often contrasted in many literary works. Through the recurring portrayals of urban areas and its problems, people accept and internalize the notion of a big city and its surrounding. The harsh life in the city often becomes a reason for a character to retreat to the rural areas. One of the dominant settings appears in the first half of the novel is Jakarta, the capital city. It is the place where all five characters spend their youth time for more than seven years.

Bennett (2001) states an important point about the construction of setting in a literary text, that “if ecocriticism has taught us anything, it has taught us to view ‘settings’ not just as metaphors but as physical spaces that inform, shape, and are shaped by cultural productions” (p. 197). In this novel, Jakarta is represented as a physical independent space with harmful behaviors. First of all, the city utilizes some components within its realm to tell an unpleasant story to human beings. In this story, Ian attempts to obtain some data for his thesis. Unfortunately, he gets his first rejection through a phone call from the company which initially agreed to help with the questionnaire. Saddened by the news, Ian spends his time at the balcony thinking about his thesis and is welcomed by an unfriendly atmosphere, involving the skyscrapers and polluted air of the city.

Tedjowahyudi: Human and Nature in Donny Dhirgantoro's *5 cm*:
An Ecocritical Reading

“... gedung-gedung tinggi memeluk udara hitam samar membentuk dinding asap, seakan hendak bercerita betapa kotor suram dan *nggak* enakya... Ya, betul-betul *nggak* enak. Ian menelan ludah sendiri, terasa ada yang menyangkut di tenggorokannya, mengganjal di dadanya (Dhirgantoro, 2005, p. 120).

The excerpt shows that the city is not silent. It uses its right to share about the ecological problem and suffering, despite the human's problems. The city knows how to use its capacity to mobilize the character to act, think and recall the negative things.

Aside from telling a story, the city greets Ian with a disturbing sight of the chaotic street and some terrible odors on his way to campus.

Pemandangan yang menyapa hati Ian yang masih terasa *nggak* enak. Metromini memasuki daerah Mampang yang macet. Matahari yang panas semakin garang, bau knalpot, bau karat besi Metromini, bau keringat.... Semuanya terekam dan menambah ganjalan di hati Ian.... Panas matahari semakin beringas, menambah panas otaknya. *Semua brengsek!* rutuk Ian dalam hati. (Dhirgantoro, 2005, p. 120)

Through the previous examples above, it is evident that the city is the antagonist in the story. It adds more discomfort to human beings and evokes the character's bad feeling. The urban setting shows its intervention toward humans in a provocative way, making him complain (swear): *Semua brengsek!* rutuk Ian dalam hati (p. 120).

Ecocriticism demands attention to many kinds of ecological problems including heavy pollution in the big city. Jakarta, in this novel, is assigned to draw people's attention and shift from their personal problems to the ecological problem in the city where they live.

Representation of the natural world

The second half of the novel narrates the trip to Mahameru mountain as an enlightening journey for both the characters and readers. Nature shows its hospitality in the beginning and middle of the trip. It welcomes the characters by blowing some fresh air while they are on the train. “Udara sore yang mulai bersahabat mengalir deras berebut masuk...”, “angin sore mengelus wajah mereka berdua” (pp. 152-153). In the middle of the journey, nature maintains its kind personality through the act of protecting and sharing the beauty of nature in Ranu Pane (p. 227) and later, Ranu Kumbolo (p. 251). Ranu Pane is the last village and a legal starting point for Mount Mahameru hikers, while Ranu Kumbolo is a beautiful mountainous lake which is located before Mount Mahameru peak.

In Ranu Pane, Ian sees a cemetery near the campsite and feels nervous about it as he is the only one who notices the place. However, Ian continues his journey on the next day and reaches Ranu Kumbolo. The path is not an easy one and six of them have to deal with a shortage of drinking water. Nearly giving up, they are saved by the presence of Ranu Kumbolo, a big lake where they can drink and rest around the area. The novel proposes the idea that nature protects them during difficult times. It provides water at the right time and surprises them with another mesmerizing beauty of a lake.

A living organism is a complex entity. Therefore, mountains are never in a single nature, just like humans. Being a powerful entity is one of nature's traits. The remaining part of the journey

emphasizes more on the powerful state of nature. On their way to the summit, one of the strongest members, Arial, asks for a break. His body cannot fight against the cold air due to improper mountaineering attire. He is thinking about going back down the slope. In this case, nature's power exhibition evokes duality in human beings, between faith and doubt.

To add more challenges to the hikers, nature suddenly attacks them with some large stones, along with sand and gravel on the steep slope. Arinda and Ian get into a little accident, thus cannot get up for several minutes due to this attack. All the remaining friends think they might have some serious problems and start to cry. This particular scene, which is the climax of the narrative, invites people to reconsider their position and power. On this stage, the depiction aims to deconstruct the superiority of humans over nature by opposing life/ death through the characters of Ian and Arinda.

The selected scenes above denote nature (or mountain) as the protagonist as opposed to the city. However, the novel does not put aside the complexity of nature as an autonomous entity. Nature has freedom to show its kindness as well as exhibit its power towards human beings. On the other hand, humans do not have the capacity to urge nature to always fulfill their expectation of being kind and staying calm.

Human-nature relationship

The relationship between human and city in Dhiringantoro's work is destructive. Humans are perceived as opportunist and selfish (pp. 127-128), greedy, undisciplined, and ignorant (pp. 186-187). They are self-centered, therefore do not have time to think about the environment where they live. They do not measure the impact of their action towards the infrastructure and air pollution. Responding to their attitudes, the city and its environment lost its empathetic side. Despite the male character's problem (pp. 120, 128) and human's harsh life and complaints (p. 186), nature shares its problems to Ian. The capital city brings more inconvenience to the character instead of being an understanding partner. As a result, the human being blames the city and 'separates' himself further from the city: "*Gue emang nggak pernah suka sama Jakarta...*, hati Ian kesel, "*Gara-gara ada kejadian nggak enak, pikiran gue jadi negatif dan inget sama hal-hal yang negative* (Dhiringantoro, 2005, p. 121). Thus, it is correct to state that in this novel, human shapes are shaped by the city environment.

On the contrary, the relationship between human and natural world, represented by the mountain, shows a different quality. As an autonomous entity, the mountainous nature has its freedom to be supportive, protective yet assertive. Nature comforts all hikers and shares its beauty with them in the beginning of the trip but suddenly changes its mood when they almost reach the peak. However, even after exerting its big power through rocks, sands, and gravel, the natural world remains kind and positive toward the six friends. It allows them to stay alive and reach the peak. Through this process, all human characters in the narrative gain their respects and love toward the natural world. They respond to nature's attitudes by perceiving nature as a 'mother' who nurtures and provides their needs.

Salah satu Mahadewi itu bisa juga berarti tanah ini. Salah satu ibu itu...tanah ini. Malam itu Genta tertidur bersama sang mahadewi, ibu yang telah memberikan tanah dan airnya setiap hari semenjak Genta lahir, ibu yang hilang dan baru saja ditemukannya malam ini. (Dhiringantoro, 2005, p. 227)

Another character also expresses his gratitude toward nature and decides to stay in the country.

Tedjowahyudi: Human and Nature in Donny Dhurgantoro's *5 cm*:
An Ecocritical Reading

Ian menatap sekitarnya dan meneruskan, "Iya lebih enak di Indonesia, baru sadar *gue* banyak siaran langsung sepakbola, trus juga yang paling penting temen-temen *gue* di sini, dari lahir *gue* di sini memakai tanahnya, minum airnya. Masa *gue* *nggak* ada terima kasihnya.... Di luar negeri mana ada abis nonton The Groove nonton layar tancep." (Dhurgantoro, 2005, pp. 346-347)

However, instead of describing his commitment toward nature, the character focuses on the fun and comforts he has got and continues to obtain while staying in the land (Indonesia). Nature and city or country are seen as the source of commodities and comforts which will make him happy.

The interdependency between nature and human beings in the text is seen through the act of keeping the rules and social norms (taboo) around the setting. They are not expected to pick edelweiss (p. 292) and be arrogant in the mountain area (p. 236). These unwritten rules help them to understand their active part and realize their position in the relationship:

"Ta, kalo *track*- nya begini mulu sampai puncak Mahameru, *gue* sih bisa sampai."
"Heh jangan sombong, pantangan tuh di gunung."
Ian langsung diam melihat langit. *Maap ya*, kata Ian dalam hati. (Dhurgantoro, 2005, p. 236)

Nature has an undeniable capacity to teach human beings within its territory. Realizing their position, human beings have no option other than keeping with the cultural practices and norms around the setting.

In conclusion, the tension between the two entities in the first setting is obvious. They influence each other in a rather destructive way, while nature and human's relationship in the second part of the story shows a mutualism mode. They respect each other as a single yet complex entity. Human beings are able to accept that nature can be affectionate at one point and assertive at another point. They also do their part by keeping the rules and norms to protect nature.

CONCLUSION

This study investigates two different representations of nature by applying Cheryl Glotfelty's ecocriticism approach. The result of the research shows there is a dichotomy between city and mountain or natural world in the narrative. City is depicted as the antagonist while the natural world is the protagonist. The city does not have any sympathy towards the human being and adds more discomfort to its inhabitants. Meanwhile, the natural world, taking the role of a mother, is both affectionate and assertive.

This story tries to deconstruct the dominant reading of humans as the most powerful entity and emphasizes on the interdependent human/ nature relationship. Nature owns an undeniable power to make people reconsider about the dualities of faith/ doubt and life/ death. Nature is a living entity which is fluid and shifting. It works on its dualities of support/ attack towards human beings. Moreover, it does not have any obligation to fulfill human's expectations for protection and consistent calmness. It is possible for nature to decide whether to support or against its inhabitants. However, nature still needs human beings to participate in keeping the cultural practices and norms (taboos) in nature. They, particularly hikers in the story, do so in order to get nature's protection and stay safe.

In conclusion, different representations of city and mountain and the interdependency between humans and nature show the novel's tendency against anthropocentrism. However, after completing the analysis of Donny Dhurgantoro's *5 cm*, I perceive that there is ambivalence in the novel's approach. In relation to the fact that the narrative attempts to present nature as 'the mother', the novel presents a remarkable solution through Ian. Feeling moved by nature, he states that he changes his mind about continuing his study to Manchester. However, the reasons that he mentions mainly focus on the resources provided by nature and the fun and comfort he will obtain if he stays in this country. It is perceived that the character does not plan or engage in any significant practices on environmental concern after the journey; hence this novel is still considered as human-centered because it views nature as a means to the human character in the story.

REFERENCES

- Barry, P. (2009). *Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory* (3rd Ed.). Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Bennett, M. (2001). Anti-Pastoralism, Frederick Douglass, and the Nature of Slavery. In Karla Armbruster, K., & Wallace, K. (Eds.). *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism* (pp. 195-210). University of Virginia Press.
- Dhurgantoro, D. (2005). *5cm*. Jakarta: Grasindo.
- Dobie, A. B. (2012). *Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism* (3rd ed.). Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Glotfelty, C., & Fromm, H. (Eds.). (1996). *The ecocriticism reader: Landmarks in literary ecology*. University of Georgia Press.
- Maarif, S. D. (Jan 20th, 2022). Sinopsis Novel 5 CM dan Biodata Pengarangnya. Retrieved June 25, 2022 from <https://tirto.id/sinopsis-novel-5-cm-dan-biodata-pengarangnya-gnWl>