



## **ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN THREE POEMS: *EARTH POEM (2008), DAFFODILS NO MORE (2005), AND ACIDIC SNOW (1990)***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Skripsi ini merupakan analisa dari tiga puisi berjudul *Earth Poem*, *Daffodils No More*, and *Acidic Snow*. Topik yang dibahas adalah bagaimana kerusakan dan kehancuran lingkungan diakibatkan oleh aktivitas manusia. Permasalah dari kajian ini adalah bagaimana aktivitas-aktivitas manusia melalui eksploitasi dan polusi berakibat pada penurunan nilai-nilai lingkungan. Tujuan dari analisa ini adalah untuk mengetahui sejauh mana elemen puisi (irony, paradox, repetition, tone, dan speaker) berperan dalam mengungkap kerusakan lingkungan yang diakibatkan aktivitas manusia. Analisa dilakukan melalui interpretasi teks dan dikaitkan dengan konsep *Ecocriticism* dari Garrard, Glotfelty, Kerridge, dan Buell. Hasil dari analisa ini menunjukkan bahwa aktivitas manusia yang merusak lingkungan merupakan dampak industrialisasi. Mereka melakukan eksploitasi terhadap unsur – unsur di lingkungan dan sumber dayanya, dan hasil dari eksploitasi ini menghasilkan limbah yang dapat mengakibatkan polusi.

Kata Kunci: aktivitas, lingkungan, ecocriticism, eksploitasi, polusi

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Human beings and nature are two things that cannot be separated. Human beings are part of the nature and their lives depend on it. They need everything in the nature that gives significant contribution to keep their lives. They are dependent on the nature since it provides them with food, shelter, water, air, soil,

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energy, medicines, fibers, raw materials, and many other things. Having taken a lot of benefits, human beings are, therefore, responsible to keep the balance of the nature in order to keep supporting their lives. If nature is destroyed, it means the end for all living organisms, including human beings.

Nature is also defined as environment. According to Encyclopedia Britannica (2010), environment means the surrounding where the complex of physical, chemical, and biotic factors regulates the form and survival of any ecological community. Plants, animals, and insects are parts of environment that give significant contribution for human beings to survive. Air, water, land, climate, natural energy, and other things in surroundings are also parts of environment that influence the continuity of human beings' existence. Moreover, the environment maintains atmospheric composition and protects all kinds of life on earth from harmful effects of solar radiation. However, the complex organization in environment can turn into a disruption by the sustainable reduction of the environmental values. This condition is called environmental degradation.

According to Environmental Encyclopedia (2003), environmental degradation means the reduction and damage to the environment by natural or anthropogenic causes, while anthropogenic in Allaby (2010) is defined as human being's actions on nature; induced, caused, or altered by the presence and activities toward nature. In this analysis, environmental degradation refers to human beings' activities that destroy and corrupt the environment through exploitation and pollution.

Environmental degradation can be caused by exploitation of the environment done by human activities. The greediness of human beings can be seen through over consumptions of the natural resources. Human beings have overused the resources without thinking that the resources can be depleted. They also destroy the environment to expand their residential and industrial territory. Furthermore, they contaminate the environment. The development of human technology and industry has caused damage to the environment as they produce harmful waste and smoke.

One of the causes of exploitation and pollution toward environment is industrialization. As a result, it triggers the development of technology and revolution of industry. Human beings need the natural resources as raw materials to produce new helpful tools. They use the natural resources continuously and make them deplete. Moreover, the industry and technology produce harmful waste that contaminates the environment. In addition, the increasing of population enforces people to dwell a new potential areas. As the impact, they clear the forests area. They also cut forest for building materials.

The three poems entitled *Earth Poem* by Peter Wuteh Vakunta (2008), *Daffodils No More* by Gordon J.L. Ramel (2005), and *Acidic Snow* by Kenton

M. Stewart (1990) reflect the issue of Environmental Degradation. Environmental degradation refers to the degrading and reducing of environmental values as the impact of people's activities. These three poems represent the activities that lead to the degradation and reduction of environment prompted by advancement of technology and industry on industrialization. Industrialization makes people begin to extend their industrial and manufacture activities for a further stimulus of social and economic development. It leaves the impact to be the most significant causes of environmental degradation.

In term of exploitation, the impacts of industrialization represent the acts of people to explore the nature for more resources and assets. This issue is reflected in the first and second poems. Through irony and repetition, the first poem represents human beings' greediness towards the natural resources. Raising the needs to be fulfilled enforces human beings to overuse the natural resources without thinking that the resources can be depleted. They also put other living organisms in danger that lead toward the extinction of many non-human species. The irony and paradox in the second poem reflects the impact of expansion done by human beings. They clear forest to expand their production areas. They indirectly destroy the natural ecosystem.

In term of pollution, the exploitation is resulting in people contaminate the environment through industry and technology. This issue is reflected in the first and third poems. The irony and repetition in both of the poems reflect how their activities contaminate the nature that ended with the destruction of global environment. They have done the irreparable damage to the nature. Their industry and technology produce harmful waste and smoke. They release the wastes and smoke to the environment and contaminate air, water, and land. They foul the atmosphere and cause the climate change and global warming.

There are two studies which give contribution and inspiration to this analysis. The first is a study entitled *Environmental Degradation: Issues and Concerns in Rabindranath Tagore's Selected Poems* by Archana Bhattacharjee (2013) which investigates the impacts of interconnection between human being and nature. Bhattacharjee analyzed Rabindranath Tagore's poems entitled *The Tame Bird was in a Cage* and *I plucked you Flower* to reveal the issue of environmental degradation and its effects related with human activities and culture. The analysis deals with the concept of Ecocriticism by Rueckert and Glotfelty. She uses poetical elements such as diction and imagery to help analyze this poem. The study focuses on the condition of nature related with human activities and culture development. The result of the study shows that human beings have the habit of destroying something to create another. Moreover, the study also shows that human beings have to act in order to save the environment from the threat of degradation.

Another study that gives contribution to this analysis is an article entitled *Environmental Terrorism in Peter Wuteh Vakunta's Green Rape* by Gamal Elgezeery (2014). Elgezeery analyzed three poems by Vakunta's anthology book of poems *Green Rape: Poetry for the Environment* (2008) such *Cataclysm*, *Ecotage*, *Eco-Terrorism*, and *Genocide*. The study deals with the concept of Environmental Terrorism and Eco-Terrorism by Michael Gold-Biss, Timothy Schofield, Peter Gleick, Ganna Kharlamova, and Simon Berkowicz. Elgezeery uses poetical elements such as diction, speaker, irony, symbol, and metaphor to help analyses the poems. He explains that Vakunta's choice of synonymy words such as "eco-terrorism", "environmental terrorism", "ecotage", and "genocide" to show a wide range of the terrors done by human being upon the environment. The result of this analysis shows human beings' practices of terrorism toward nature. He divides these terrorism practices and acts into three main categories: the outcomes of wars, corporate or industrial, and unhealthy human lifestyles.

This analysis is aimed to reveal the activities done by human being that cause the environmental degradation. The analysis of the three poems uses the Ecocriticism approach. According to Garrard (2004), Ecocriticism explores the ways in which the literature imagines and portrays the relationship between human being and the environment in all areas of cultural production. In line with it, Glotfelty (1996) explains that Ecocriticism investigates the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Furthermore, Kerridge in Garrard (2004) explains that the Ecocriticism tracks the environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place in a great many cultural spaces. This is the idea of how the nature is represented related with the human cultural development.

In *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), Glotfelty and Fromm introduced three points of Ecocriticism. The first point is the image of the nature. It examines the idea of how the literature represents the display of the nature and how human being treats it. The second one makes an effort to promulgate environmentally enlightened literary works by examining and identifying the works which manifest ecological awareness. This argument investigates the human beings' awareness reflected in literary works to treat nature wisely. The third is being carried out under the term of deep ecology, which explores the implications that its radical critique of anthropocentrism might have for literary study. These three points help to analyze the issue of environmental degradation.

Since this analysis uses Ecocriticism, it also investigates the concept of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. Buell in his *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005) describes that anthropocentrism is human presupposition that their needs is in higher priority as they claimed they are more superior to those of

nonhumans, while ecocentrism is the view that ecosphere interests have more importance than any individual species interests.

Moreover, this analysis practices the concept of Ecocriticism through observing the concept of industrialization to expose the issue clearer. According to Hewitt (1992), industrialization can be defined as a constant process of technical and social change in purpose to increase society's production by comprising the sector of mining, manufacturing, and energy. Blending it with the Ecocriticism approach, the sense of anthropogenic is examined by investigating the impacts of development of technology and industry toward the way the society thinks about nature. The sense of anthropocentrism makes people craving for more energy. In other words, Ecocriticism views the issue of environmental degradation through the concept industrialization on affecting human beings' recognition of the nature.

## **B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The analysis of the three poems entitled *Earth Poem*, *Daffodils No More*, and *Acidic Snow* focuses on text-based interpretation. It means these three poems are analyzed by exploring the poetic elements within the works; irony, repetition, paradox, tone, and speaker. Furthermore, the analysis is based on the concept of Ecocriticism by Garrard, Glotfelty, Kerridge, and Buell.

## **C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This section analyzes the three poems: *Earth Poem* (later will be mention as EP), *Daffodils No More* (DNM), and *Acidic Snow* (AS) to reveal the issue of environmental degradation. In addition, the analysis uses poetic elements such as irony, repetition, tone, and speaker in to reveal the issue. The three poems represent the people's activities that lead to the degradation and reduction of environmental values as the impact of industrialization. The activities are done through exploitation and pollution.

### **1. Exploitation**

Throughout exploitation, the impacts of industrialization have prompted people to treat the environment just for their individual advantages. This issue is reflected in the poem EP and DNM. In EP, through irony and repetition, it represents human being's greediness toward the nature. Raising the needs to be fulfilled, they overuse the natural resources without thinking that the resources can be depleted. It is reflected in the following quotation:

It's amazing  
How many people don't know  
That natural resources can be depleted.  
That's because they don't know  
That many of earth's  
Resources are non-renewable.  
(EP: stanza 2)

The quotation above reflects that the natural resources are in the edge of exhaustion. The speaker in this poem is a person who witnesses the destruction of the nature caused by people's activities. He/she stresses that people need to take care of the nature in order to save humankind from extermination. The tone used in this stanza is sarcasm. It is reflected through the utterances '*It's amazing*' which teases people for their unawareness that overuse the natural resources. The repetition has a role to reveal how people ignore the facts that their unfriendly activities are the most significant causes which destroy the nature. The utterances '*How many people don't know / that's because they don't know*' are repeated in the entire stanzas to show that this poem seriously criticizes people for their ignorance. The verbal irony shows the words '*don't know*' refers to how people do not care for the destruction they have made. They have developed their knowledge and technology without awareness towards the nature. They keep treating it haphazardly. The statement '*that natural resources can be depleted*' shows how people overuse the natural resources regardless that the resources can be exhausted. Their anthropogenic senses make them expect the nature as the main provider of resources to fulfill their needs, thus, they keep using the resources excessively. Their greediness drives them to keep getting advantages from the nature and ignoring the impacts of it. Moreover, the statement '*are non-renewable*' shows the resources are not capable of being regenerate. People ignore the facts that the depletion of natural resources can influence the continuity of their existences. They will have no resources available when all of the resources have been overused. Furthermore, running down of natural resources can cause the imbalances of earth structure. It can trigger disasters on the earth, such as landslides or soil erosion.

People indirectly destroy the natural ecosystem. Since their presence in the natural environment, they have caused imbalance in the ecosystem. It can be seen from the quotation below: following quotation:

But what I found was barbed-wire fence  
protecting repetitious fields  
that offered up in self defense  
statistics on their better yields  
with ne'er a thought towards the cost;  
that fragile beauty we have lost.

(DNM: stanza 3)

The quotation above reflects that people destroy the natural ecosystem by clearing the forests and verdant areas. They replace it with new buildings to establish industrial areas. The tone used in this stanza is disappointment. The expression *'but what I found was barbed-wire fence'* shows the disappointment to see how the natural ecosystem has been changed. The situational irony in this stanza refers to greediness of people to keep gaining advantages by exploiting the nature. The word *'barbed-wire fence'* represents the zones of manufacturers or factories. It is added by the line *'that offered up in self-defense / statistics on their better yields'* to show people keep expanding their industrial areas to raise their income. It means more wild and green areas will be occupied. Ironically, the statement *'with ne'er a thought towards the cost'* reflects that people neglect the fact that the destruction of natural environment can affect their lives. They have knowledge to improve the quality of their lives. However, they do not care that the nature has significant contribution for them to provide foods, raw material, and even shelter.

The exploitation also appears in the poem DNM. The role of irony helps to uncover the issue. The exploitation describes in this poem related to human beings' presence in the wild and green territory. It reflects the impact of expansion done by people. People indirectly destroy the natural ecosystem. It can be seen from the quotation below:

A poet could not help but sigh  
 On seeing how the world is changed  
 And ask himself, or God on high  
 why humankind is so deranged  
 it can destroy, for such poor ends,  
 the world on which its life depends.

(DNM: stanza 4)

This quotation shows the complaint of the speaker towards people for destroying the nature. The tone used in this stanza is anger. It indicates the anger to people for their roughness in treating the nature. In this stanza, speaker reminds people that their lives depend on the nature. He/she stresses that their activities of destroying the nature can put their lives in danger of extinction. The utterance *'on seeing how the world is changed'* strengthened the fact that the balance of the nature has been interrupted. By using paradox, it represents that people must think that they are the most contributor in damaging the nature. It is reflected by the expression *'and ask himself, or God on high'*. People believe that the damaged nature can present many problems. Paradoxically, they neglect that they have roles in eradicating it. They ignore the facts that their activities corrupt the natural environment. The word *'deranged'* shows that people are senseless. They have never thought that the destruction of nature can lead to the end of the world.

Disruption of the complex organization in the nature can trigger disasters such as flood, landslides, and even dryness. It is supported by the last two lines of the stanza *'it can destroy for such poor ends / the world in which its life depends'* that reflects the existence of human beings is influenced by the condition of nature. From the speaker's perspective, it is showed that people's ignorance of the nature is also means to put their lives in danger. The role of situational irony reveals that people have triggered their own extermination. It is reflected by the words *'poor ends'*. If the nature is destroyed, it is also they will not able to meet their needs.

To sum up, both of the poems reveal the issue of environmental degradation in term of exploitation. The speaker in both poems is assumed as a proficient person who recognizes that the destruction of the nature can endanger human beings; existences. He/she warns people that their ignorance will make them lost the nature which provides their needs. The dominant tone used in these two poems is sarcasm, disappointment, and anger. It teases people for their unfriendly activities towards the nature. However, it shows the disappointment to the people who do not care for the impacts of their activities. Furthermore, it shows the irritation toward the people that their activities have caused various losses and damage to the nature. Combination of the verbal and situational irony uncover that people do not care for the impacts of their activities toward nature. They need everything provided by the nature in order to keep living. However, they never feel satisfied and keep exploiting it to earn more benefits. Related to the Ecocriticism approach, it can be seen how human beings' anthropogenic behaviors are the most significant causes of the environmental degradation. They place their interests above the nature and portray the nature as the main sources for their needs that can be exploited. They overuse the natural resources just for their advantages. They destroy the natural ecosystem and make non-human creatures hard to survive.

## **2. Pollution**

Through pollution, people contaminate the environment through industry and technology. This issue is reflected in the poem EP and AS. The irony and repetition in both of the poems reflects how people's activities contaminate the nature and lead to the destruction of global environment. Their industry and technology produce harmful waste and smoke. They release the wastes and smoke to the environment and contaminate air, water, and land. They foul the atmosphere and cause the climate change and global warming. It is proved in the stanza below:

It's unimaginable  
How many people don't know



That human beings and the natural  
 World are on a collision course.  
 That's because they don't know  
 That Man's activities often inflict  
 Irreparable damage to Mother Earth  
 Cause climate change  
 Aggravating global warming  
 (EP: stanza 5)

The quotation above describes how people cause irreparable damage to the nature. Since they cannot be separated from the nature, they are in the condition of interdependent. The tone used in this stanza is sarcasm. It is reflected by the words '*It's unimaginable*' which show that people carelessly destroy the nature in which their lives depend on. Here the speaker emphasizes that the condition of interdependent between human beings and nature has turn into a collision. It means one side not only takes benefits from another, but also causes destruction to it. It is described in the utterance '*That human beings and the natural world / are on a collision course*'. This stanza used the verbal irony. It is reflected by the statement '*collision course*' which explains how this state of interdependency has changed into a clash. People damage the nature by their reckless activities, and the nature exterminate them by disasters. It is strengthened by the lines '*That man's activities often inflict / irreparable damage to Mother Earth*', which explain how people activities can impose perpetual damage to the nature. The damage which is done excessively cannot be repaired. Indeed, it also means the destruction for humankind. Furthermore, damaging the earth by excessive harmful activities, people have fouled the atmosphere. It is showed by the lines '*cause climate change / aggravating global warming*'. In fact, the climate change and global warming will occur when the air is polluted. The advancement of knowledge in one hand may protect the earth from destruction. Ironically, the industry and technology become the most significant causes of air pollution, as they produce and release poisonous smoke to the air.

The environmental degradation in term of pollution also appears in the third poem, AS. In this poem, the speaker is an expert of ecology who observes that the snow has turn into acidic caused by pollution. Moreover, the repetition, irony, and tone are used to expose the issue. People's industry and technology produce harmful waste and smoke. They release the wastes and smoke to the environment and contaminate air, water, and land. It is reflected in the following quotation:

I looked out in wonder at new fallen snow  
 then thought to myself, it's acidic you know.  
 This wonder, this cleanser, this skier's delight,  
 this mantle of brightness, this purity white,

this wintery thing that sets children aglow  
hides one little thing, it's acidic you know.

(AS: stanza 1)

The quotation above describes that people have polluted the environment through industry and technology. Here, the speaker declares the ironic condition about the snow which contains dangerous matters. The tone used in this stanza is disappointment. It is showed by the line *'I looked out in wonder at new fallen snow'*. Through repetition, the statement *'it's acidic you know'* is mentioned six times in the poem to stress that the snow become dangerous for it is poisonous. The word *'new fallen snow'*, reveals the fact that the air and water have been totally polluted with hazardous wastes and smoke. Through situational irony, it can be seen that the expectation about the pure and white snow has turn badly to contain toxic. This condition is caused by the air and water has been polluted and then contaminates the substances of the snow. Industry and factory have significant roles in producing wastes and smoke. Furthermore, the words *'wonder'*, *'cleanser'*, *'delight'*, *'brightness'* and *'purity white'* reflect the expectation that the snow is clean, pure, and uncontaminated. Ironically, it contains poisonous matters. It means the snow becomes dangerous for any living organisms, including for the people.

In conclusion, both of the poems reflect the issue of environmental degradation in term of pollution. In both of the poems, the speaker emphasizes that people with their unfriendly activities have caused many bad changes to the nature. The combination of verbal and situational irony shows people's ignorance for the fragility of environment they have destroyed. The dominant tone used is sarcasm and disappointment, which used to mock people for their unfriendly activities. Moreover, it reflects the disappointment towards people for their unaware activities which lead to the pollution of the environment. Related to the Ecocriticism approach, it is reflected that people play the most significant role in destruction of environment. Their activities have the major contribution in contaminating the environment. Their industry and technology produce harmful waste and smoke. They foul the atmosphere and cause the climate change and global warming.

#### **D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

The analysis found out that in term of exploitation, the impacts of industrialization make people treat the environment just for their advantages. They place their interests above the nature and portray the nature as the main sources for their needs that can be exploited. They overuse the natural resources just for their advantages. They cut forests to expand their living areas. They

destroy the natural ecosystem and make non-human creatures hard to survive. In term of pollution, it shows that people contaminate the environment through their technology and industry. They release the wastes and smoke to the environment and contaminate air, water, and land. They foul the atmosphere and cause the climate change and global warming. Moreover, the issue also can be found in the reality. It can be seen that some disasters which occur around the world such as landslide, flood, dryness, or overheat are the results of disruptions in the natural complex organization. This condition shows that the nature has been damage globally. In one side, people's activities have caused terrible damage to the nature by misusing it. The natural resources begin to exhaust caused by overusing. Certain species of non-human creatures are threatened to be extinct. Even, there are some species which have extinct caused by people's illegal hunting. In another condition, the people's activities leaves the bad effects as their dangerous wastes can contaminate the nature. It leaves the nature becomes badly distorted. The temperature of the earth is drastically raised up.

**Note:** This article is written based on the Ilham Rahman Putra's thesis under the supervision of Dr. Kurnia Ningsih, M.A., 1st advisor, and Desvalini Anwar, S.S., M.Hum., Ph.D., 2nd advisor.

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