

HUMAN-NATURE INTERDEPENDENCE IN SCOTT O'DELL'S *ISLAND OF THE BLUE DOLPHINS*

By: Devi Arlianis,
Yogyakarta State University

Abstract

This research aims to show the natural problems faced by Karana and interdependence between human and nature in Scott O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphin*. The research is a descriptive qualitative study. The subject of this research is Scott O'Dell's novel entitled *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. The data are the sentences and the paragraphs related to the natural problems and interdependences between nature and human beings taken from the novel. The findings of the research show that: first, natural problems faced by Karana are namely animal threat, natural disaster, scarcity and bad weather; and second, the interdependence between human and nature is classified into two categories: human needs nature and nature needs human. Human needs nature exists in three ways, namely needing food, needing shelter and protection, needing natural materials to make life necessities. Meanwhile, nature needs human is depicted in two ways, namely needing human to recover from life-threatening conditions and needing human's awareness toward nature existence and its preservation.

Keywords: natural problems, human-nature interdependence, ecocriticism

INTRODUCTION

Nature has been an issue over the past few years. It really becomes crucial especially when several disasters happen, for example floods and storms. Unfortunately, most disaster cases are only treated if they have ruined or failed infrastructures. The numbers of curative cases were more than preventive ones. The problems of environment that grow worse every year represent the need of serious discussion on it. The discussion runs in various disciplines, including in literature. Moreover, literature can depict a community's life. It also contains values and inspiration. People can learn something through it. Literature can motivate the readers to do better things in their lives and also sharpen their

emotion and increase their knowledge. Thus, many literary authors concern about the ecological themes.

This action is in line with eco-criticism. Eco-criticism is defined by Glotfelty (1996: xviii) as "the study of relationship between literature and physical environment". It means that this criticism examines literature using the environment-centered point of view. Garrard (2004:6) emphasizes Glotfelty's statement by saying that the ecocriticism can bring the environmental problems into media and humans' culture. Garrard's statement means that the ecocriticism can help to define, explore and resolve the environmental issues into a wider area with wider perspectives. In addition, the word

ecocriticism is chosen as its name rather than other names because *eco-* in the word ecocriticism has broader meanings and area. It refers that ecocriticism “implies interdependent communities, integrated system and strong connections among constituent parts” (Glotfelty, 1996:xx). It means that the study includes the human and its connection with environment rather than only discussing about environment alone.

Humans, as the cause of environmental problems, should do actions to solve the environmental problems. That is why the ecocriticism is needed and essential in humans’ life. As Worster (In Glotfelty, 1996: xxi) said that “Historians, along with literary scholars, anthropologist, and philosophers, cannot do the reforming, of course, but they can help with understanding”. Therefore, even if it cannot repair the environment condition, it can give understanding and awareness to the society, especially to the reader. One of the authors that has been successful in delivering ecological themes in his work is Scott O’Dell. He expresses his love and concern towards the nature through his novel entitled *Island of the Blue Dolphins*.

As a result, there are some issues emerged in this novel which are interesting to be analyzed deeper, such as interdependence of human being towards nature, interdependence of nature towards human being and the natural problems that are faced by Karana in the *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Therefore, the researcher focuses on the main character, Karana and how her point of view is shaped in the novel. Characters are the

most prominent things in making the story alive. Karana is a round character. Luckens (1999: 88) stated that the round characters are fully developed. Luckens (1999:81-82) explained further that the characters can be analyzed by five aspects namely by actions, by speech, by appearance, by other’s comments and by author’s comments. In addition, according to Roberts (2003: 81), point of view refers to “a work’s mode of narrator, language, audience and perceptions of events and character”. The point of view used in the story can determine the position from which the readers are able to see and understand. Meanwhile, in Scott O’Dell’s *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, the point of view is first-person angle.

This research is aimed to show (1) the natural problems that Karana faces in O’Dell’s *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, and (2) the interdependence between nature and human beings in *Islands of the Blue Dolphins*.

This research is significant to (1) the English Literature students who are interested in eco-criticism study and (2) the environmental communities who are caring to be more aware towards their environments.

THE RESEARCH METHOD

According to Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009: 7), qualitative research is a research which produces narrative or textual descriptions of the phenomena under study. It means that the phenomena which can be classified as narrative

or text are analyzed using the qualitative research. As this research used sentences and paragraphs in O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphins* as the data, this research applied the qualitative approach. In other words, this research was a descriptive qualitative study based on the phenomena. In addition, the data or phenomena in this research were explained further in the narrative and descriptive way.

The main source of the data is Scott O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphins* which is one of teenage novels. The data are from all the words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs related to the natural problems faced by Karana and the interdependence between nature and human beings found in the novel.

As stated by Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009: 211), "the researcher's interpretation is, therefore, only one of many possible valid interpretations of a given text". It means that the best instrument for a qualitative research is the human or in a precise way is the researcher herself. It was expected to attain the deep analysis of the research. The primary instrument of this research is the researcher herself who used her capacity to interpret and analyze the data. The researcher interpreted and analyzed the data related to the interdependence toward nature and human being as presented in the story according to the researcher's knowledge that was supported by the eco-criticism theory. The second instrument used in this research is the data table. There are two data tables which help the researcher to work and interpret the data.

In collecting the data, the researcher made some steps. First, the researcher read the novel, *Island of the Blue Dolphins* carefully and thoroughly to attain a better understanding. Then, the researcher collected the data related to the topic of "interdependences between nature and human being shown in *Island of the Blue Dolphins*", and "natural problems that are faced by Karana in *Island of the Blue Dolphins*" by making some notes in the form of sentences and paragraphs.

The steps of the data analysis are explained as the following: (1) making some notes of the data related to the objectives of the research: natural problems faced by Karana and the interdependence between nature and human being shown in the novel; (2) reading and re-reading the whole data and arranging them into two major categories related to the objectives of the research; (3) categorizing data in those two tables which were related to the objectives of the research; (4) sorting the categorized data; (5) analyzing and interpreting the relevant data based, and (6) applying the measure of trustworthiness of the relevant data by peer debriefing/ triangulation.

In addition, in order to validate the data, the researcher was helped by her first and second supervisors and two friends from the same program study.

THE RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings show that Scott O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphins* contains natural problems and the interdependences between human and nature. The further explanations are shown in the following.

The Natural Problems Faced by Karana

Natural problems are the symbol of the way nature and human beings are interdependence one to another. Moreover, the natural problems brings major influences on humans and humans have crucial part in making and worsening natural destructions. These problems found in the novel are broken down into four categories, namely animal threat, disaster, scarcity and bad weather.

The existence of animals cannot be separated from human life. In this novel, these animals which most of them are not tame portrayed in wilderness or the Island of the Blue Dolphins. Karana, as the major character in this novel who lives alone in the island, is presented facing natural problems which come from the animals such as wild dogs and red foxes.

The existence of wild dogs creates problems for Karana to cope with because they try to attack her.

I thought that it was a sound made by the wind, but when we came closer **I saw dozens of wild dogs scurrying around through the huts.** (O'Dell, 1960: 41)

These wild dogs try to steal foods like abalones and fish from humans. As people move to another island, the dogs become fierce and be able to attack human or others. Karana's brother,

Ramo, is one of the victims of those fierce wild dogs. Therefore, the wild dogs become the menace for Karana who lives alone in the island.

The disaster is also portrayed in O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. In fact, it becomes another natural problem faced by Karana in the Island of the Blue Dolphins. This natural disaster called earthquake happens in the island and leads Karana into several problems.

Slowly the earth began to move. It moved away from my feet and for a moment I seemed to be standing in the air. Water tipped out of the basket and trickled over my face. Then the basket fell to the ground. Not knowing what I did, thinking foolishly that another wave was upon me, I began to run. But it was a wave, a wave of earth, and it rippled under me along the cliff. (O'Dell, 1960: 169)

The above quotation explains that the earthquake is a kind of natural disaster which is so scary and occurs unpredicted. The quotation also explains that the earthquake is so big, makes the earth move so sudden and triggers terrible feeling. This disaster does not only make Karana scared which is proven that she tries to run away from the cave fastly, but also it makes her has to face several difficulties. It happens as the disaster makes Karana's shelter destroyed and ruined. It destructs her cave and appliances such as plates, water baskets and weapons.

Another problem which is faced by Karana in living in the island is called scarcity. One of examples of the scarcity is the lack of water. When Karana is sick, she has limited amount of water in her basket. Her condition does

not allow her to move and get the water from the nearest spring. There is no one to help her.

For five suns I could not go out because my leg had swollen so badly and I had no herbs with which to treat it. I had enough food to eat, but on the third day the water in the basket ran low. Two days later the basket was empty. It was necessary then for me to go to the spring in the ravine. (O'Dell, 1960: 86)

Water is a very essential aspect in human life especially Karana who needs water to drink and to do some other activities such as hunting foods and taking a bath. However, this novel is also portrayed that this essential thing can be so rare in the Island of the Blue Dolphins.

Hence, the scarcity conditions lead to the obstacle and hardship which are felt by the main character. Karana faces the difficulties in dealing with the nature and its components. Since, for some reasons, nature and its disaster are confessed as the most sacramental things or the "King" which cannot be avoided by human beings. Nature is angry not because it is a God, but nature is in anger as the direction of its God. In this case, as closely related to the branch of eco-criticism, the humanities study like philosophy, religion, and anthropology are trying hard to give their hand in echoing eco-criticism study.

Meanwhile, living in a small island called the Island of the Blue Dolphins means dealing with bad weather. One of the bad weather conditions can be seen in the following quotation.

There were few storms that winter and rain was light and ended early. This meant

that we would need to be careful of water. **In the old days the springs sometimes ran low and no one worried, but now everything seemed to cause alarm.** Many were afraid that we would die of thirst. (O'Dell, 1960: 30)

The existence of storms and less rain in the winter makes the people in Galas-at worry. It happens as the spring as the water resource does not run well. It will threaten their lives as finding the drinking water can be so difficult. The bad weather makes people cannot live comfortably. They need to prepare themselves when the winter comes and find a solution to make the spring run well in the cold weather.

The Interdependence between Human and Nature

The interdependence between human and nature is divided into two categories, namely human needs nature and nature needs human. The first is that human needs nature existing in three ways, namely needing food, needing shelter and protection, needing natural materials to make life necessities.

Foods are the essential things for humans to keep them alive. Nature provides these things for them. In the story, Karana can achieve food from many sources in various forms. She may eat vegetables, fruits and roots. She may gather abalones and shellfish from the sea to fulfill her need for foods. This condition is reflected in this statement below.

At last I gave up looking for him and **began to gather abalones for winter.** The red shell holds the sweetest meat and are the best for drying, though the green

ones and the black are also good. Because the red ones are the sweetest, starfish prey upon them. (O'Dell, 1960: 116)

As Karana lives alone in wilderness, she needs shelter and protection from both animal threat and bad weather condition. Fortunately, the nature helps her in order to achieve them. The nature provides safe caves and other things which are beneficial to protect her from several unwanted things.

While I was living there I decided that I would make the cave into another house, where I could stay should again get hurt or sick. And this I did as soon as I was strong and could walk. (O'Dell, 1960: 88)

Karana makes the cave like her own house which can protect her while she is sick and from bad weather and animal treat. Moreover, the cave gives Karana some spaces to live on her own, to store her belongings and to lay down her body from tiredness.

She needs necessities which are available or proper to store water, cover her body and protect her from animal threats. Those things are tight basket, clothes, and arrows.

For cooking seeds and roots I wove a tight basket of fine reeds, **which was easy because I had learned how to do it from my sister Ulape. After the basket had dried in the sun, I gathered lumps of pitch on the shore, softened them over the fire, and rubbed them on the side of the basket so that it would hold water.** By heating small stones and dropping them into a mixture of water and seeds in the basket I could make gruel. (O'Dell, 1960: 77)

Meanwhile, nature needs human depicted in two ways, namely needing human to recover from life-threatening conditions and needing human's awareness toward nature existence and its preservation.

Animals, as the representation of the nature, need human in some certain situations especially life-threatening conditions. Human can act as a helper or life savior for the animals in those conditions. One of the examples refers to the way Karana save some wounded animals. Thus, she tries to help the otter by making a pool where this otter can live safely. Furthermore, this otter's wound can be healed time by time.

The otter did not try to swim away as I drew near and reached over the side of the canoe. They have large eyes, especially when they are young, but this one's were so large from fear and pain that I could see my reflection in them. **I cut the kelp that held it and took it to a tide pool behind the reef, which was sheltered from waves.** (O'Dell, 1960: 147)

In O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, Karana, a twelve-year-old girl is portrayed as a human with eco-critics' perspective. She has awareness that nature and human is interdependent one to another. She understands that she need to care with other natural aspects. She can utilize the nature without destructing the environment and minimizes harmful actions. She also helps other creatures and befriends with them. This earth-centered awareness is needed by the nature and its aspects which one of them is animal in order to maintain its sustainability. This condition can be seen through the below quotation.

After the summer, after being friends with Won-a-nee and her young, **I never killed another otter.** I had an otter cape for my shoulders, which I used until it wore out, but never again did I make a new one. **Nor did I ever kill another cormorant for its beautiful feathers,** though they have long, thin neck and make ugly sounds when they talk to each other. **Nor did I kill seals for their sinews,** using instead kelp to bind the things that needed it. **Nor did I kill another wild dog, nor did I try to spear another sea elephant.** (O'Dell, 1960: 156)

CONCLUSION

The researcher finds that O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphins* contains the portrayal of human-nature interdependence. The human-nature interdependence is broken down into two classifications in line with the research objectives: the natural problems faced by Karana and the interdependence between humans and nature.

The first finding is that Karana faces many problems in the novel which are classified into four categories: animal threat, disaster, scarcity and bad weather. Thus, this kind of novel represents children with numerous natural problems.

The second one is that there are two major classifications to show the interdependence between humans and nature found in the novel: human needs nature and nature needs human. The way human needs nature found in the novel exists in three ways namely needing food, shelter and protection; and natural materials to make life necessities. Meanwhile, the way nature needs human found in the novel in two means, they are

needing human to recover from life-threatening conditions and human's awareness toward nature existence and its preservation.

These findings can be seen as the evidence that this novel is capable to provide an amazing story which combine literature and environment. Thus, this novel can be a sourceful text for its reader, especially children to learn to appreciate the nature and wilderness. Karana, as the major character, becomes the one who loves nature and befriends with animals. It shows that humans need and depend on nature for every single need and activity. Humans should not forget to nurture the nature. Thus, this novel can be a perfect example for great literature with eco-criticism study.

REFERENCES

Printed sources:

- Garrard, Greg. 2004. *Ecocriticism*. New York: Routledge.
- Glotfelty, Cheryl and Harold Fromm. 1999. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens and London: The University of Georgia.
- Luckens, J. Rebecca. 1999. *A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature. Sixth Edition*. New York: Longman.
- O'Dell, Scott. 1960. *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. New York: Yearling Book.
- Roberts, Edgar V. 2003. *Writing about Literature*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Vanderstoep, Scott W. and Deirdre D. Johnston. 2009. *Research Methods for Everyday Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.