

Ecocriticism Concepts in *The Voices of Marrakesh: A Record of Visit* by Elias Canetti

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ABSTRAK

Bidang studi sastra ekokritik telah secara konsisten berkembang seiring dengan pemahaman yang semakin mendalam tentang hubungan antara manusia dan lingkungan alam. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis hubungan manusia dengan lingkungan yang digambarkan di travel writing berjudul *The Voices of Marrakesh: A Record of a Visit* karangan Elias Canetti, menggunakan kerangka ekokritik Greg Garrard. Terdapat beberapa konsep utama ekokritik seperti pollution, pastoral, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animals, dan the Earth. Representasi ini dieksplorasi melalui analisis konten kualitatif dalam tulisan perjalanan, sebagai salah satu bentuk sastra. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan representasi terbagi menjadi tiga data utama yaitu pastoral, wilderness, dan dwelling. Manusia dan lingkungan alam memiliki keterikatan yang kuat berdasarkan pengalaman budaya, emosi, dan tempat.

Kata kunci: ekokritik, manusia, lingkungan alam, tulisan perjalanan

ABSTRACT

The field of ecocritical literary studies has consistently advanced alongside the deepening comprehension of the link between people and the natural environment. The research aims to analyze the representation of human-environment relationships depicted in *The Voices of Marrakesh: A Record of a Visit* travel writing by Elias Canetti, employing Greg Garrard's ecocritical framework. Several key concepts of ecocriticism are presented such as pollution, pastoral, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animals, and the Earth. These representations were explored through qualitative content analysis in travel writing, as one of the forms of literature. The result of this research shows three representations concerning pastoral, wilderness, and dwelling issues. The interconnection between human and natural environment is portrayed as being strongly influenced by cultural, emotional, and spatial experience.

Keywords: ecocriticism, human, natural environment, travel writing

A. INTRODUCTION

Nature is a valuable treasure for humanity. Over the years, the world has undergone significant changes that can impact both nature and ecosystems globally. An ecosystem is made up of animals, plants, and microorganisms living together in their natural environments. Nature should not be separated from the habitation of humans. Eco-literature is a literary genre that prioritizes environmental and natural issues, explaining the relationship between

humans and their environment, as well as the impact of human activities on the planet (Glotfelty, 1996). Eco-literature encompasses a wide range of literary forms, including novels, poetry, essays, and works of nonfiction, which explore themes such as environmental degradation, the destruction of nature, and climate change.

The representation of nature in literary works explores how nature is depicted through various narratives. Numerous representations of nature exist, informed by ecocriticism theory. As a literary theory, ecocriticism emphasizes an ecological perspective in analyzing literary texts. Ecocriticism refers to literary critique that is influenced by ecological or environmental consciousness (Garrard, 2004). Glotfelty (1996) adds that ecocriticism as a theoretical approach that examines the relationship between literature and the physical environment by evaluating texts and the ideas they convey. The terms "eco" and "critic," derived from the Greek words *oikos* (house) and *kritis* (judge), reflect the roots of ecocriticism as a concept that originated from environmentally focused research known as green studies (Glotfelty, 1996).

Ecocriticism research predominantly exists within written literature. This theory examines the relationships between nature and culture, particularly with cultural objects like language and literature. This idea seeks to elucidate the diverse representations of nature in literary works. Glotfelty (1996) characterizes ecocriticism as the study of the interaction between literature and the natural environment, focusing on the evaluation of texts and the ideas within them. Numerous prior research has been undertaken utilizing ecocriticism (Asenath & Santhanalakshmi, 2021; Oktaviani, 2022; Purnomo, 2024; Yustisiana & Sari, 2024). Despite the limited research conducted, there has been little investigation into how the environment and non-human life are represented in travel literature that focuses on specific landscapes or regions. Ecocriticism, which integrates literary analysis with ecological perspectives, is most applicable to writings where the landscape, including natural features and human impacts, serves as a pivotal character and fosters significant interactions among the author, characters, and their surroundings (Garrard, 2004). Through the lens of ecocriticism, this paper aims to explain the representation of human-environment relationships depicted in *The Voices of Marrakesh: A Record of a Visit* travel writing by Elias Canetti.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theories used to support the researchers in analyzing the data include ecocriticism and the concepts of ecocriticism. The following sections provide a more detailed explanation of these theories.

1. Ecocriticism in Travel Writing

Ecocriticism is a literary theory that examines the relationship between literature and the natural world, focusing on how literature depicts the environment, how humans engage with nature, and the ecological challenges it raises. Junaid et al (2024) add that the relationship between nature and literature has led to the development of literary ecocriticism, a field that examines how literary texts portray nature and the interactions among humans, animals, plants, and all forms of life. Ecocriticism encompasses environmental issues, cultural environmental concerns, and attitudes toward nature (Yustisiana & Sari, 2024). In conclusion, ecocriticism is a fundamental literary approach that examine the representation of nature and the complex relationship among humans, animals, and the environment in writings. It

highlights literature's function in reflecting cultural perspectives towards nature and enhancing awareness of ecological issues.

Travel literature is an expansive genre that comprises several writing types, such as travel memoirs, nature writing, outdoor narratives, and guidebooks, comprising both fictional and non-fictional works (Oktaviani, 2022). A function of travel writing is to delineate a physical journey from one location to another while documenting observations of both novel and familiar phenomena (Scheese, 2013, p.6 quoted in Crane, 2019). By applying ecocriticism, this analysis uncovers how the author Elias Canneti can uphold or contest prevailing perspectives on nature, landscapes, and the interaction between humans and nonhumans through his travel writing entitled *The Voices of Marrakesh: A Record of a Visit*.

2. The Concepts of Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism concepts deal with nature's appeal, human-nature relationship, environmental imagination, and sense of place (Yustisiana & Sari, 2024). Garrard (2004) introduces several key concepts of ecocriticism, including pollution, pastoral, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animals, and the Earth.

a. Pollution

Pollution derives from the Latin term *polluere*, meaning to contaminate or actions considered to facilitate the deterioration of nature (Saifulloh, 2019). It constitutes an ecological issue that does not specify a particular item or category of substances, but rather presents a normative claim indicating an excessive presence of anything in an inappropriate location or inside the suitable environment. From an ecocritical perspective, the situation demonstrates how science plays a dual role: it is both a contributor to environmental issues and a vital monitor of these problems (Garrard, 2004).

b. Pastoral

In his book *Ecocriticism*, Garrard (2004), citing Gifford's perspective, categorizes pastoralism into three primary significances. First, the literary tradition manifests as self-exile from urban environments to rural settings. Secondly, pastoral encompasses all literary styles that depict country living, often contrasting it with urban life, either implicitly or explicitly. Third, in a pejorative context, pastoralism is frequently linked to the romanticized ideal of rural existence while overlooking the realities of labor and struggle.

c. Wilderness

The term "wilderness" originates from the Anglo-Saxon phrase *wilddeoren*, in which *deoren* signifies animals inhabiting areas outside cultivated land (Abdullah & Muassomah, 2025). Saifulloh (2019) asserts that wilderness is frequently regarded as a sacred and authentic realm that represents ecological unity through symbiotic interactions among all ecosystems, while also prompting critical analysis. The concept of wilderness is subsequently described as a metaphor for nature in its purest state, free from human interference, while also highlighting its function in protecting habitats and providing spiritual refuge from the moral and material decay of urban life (Abdullah & Muassomah, 2025; Garrard, 2004; Güneş, 2017).

d. Apocalypse

The apocalyptic genre, derived from the Greek term *apo-captain* meaning "to uncover" or "to reveal," emerges after significant crises and generally depicts revelations about the world's end (Abdullah & Muassomah, 2025). Apocalyptic literature vividly portrays violence, destruction, and significant transformations in the modern world (Garrard, 2001). At the same time, it highlights urgent issues and offers profound insights into humanity, nature, and environmental sustainability, making it especially relevant during ecological crises (Garrard, 2004).

e. Dwelling

Dwelling signifies a lasting state that embodies the deep connection between humans and a landscape influenced by memory, inheritance, mortality, rituals, daily life, and work (Garrard, 2004). According to philosophers such as Heidegger (1971), dwelling is not merely about spatial occupation; it also encompasses cultural, emotional, and ecological connections with the land (Garrard, 2012). In literary studies, portrayals of dwelling underscore the relationship between characters and their environments, viewing them not as conquerors or outsiders, but as integral members of an ecological community, thereby enhancing the comprehension of place-based identity and environmental ethics.

f. Animals

Animals are an integral part of nature. Both animals and humans should be afforded equal rights within the singular entity known as life, without any distinction between the two. It is essential to recognize their shared existence. Garrard (2004) argues that the inhumane treatment of animals is analogous to slavery. This perspective suggests that the ability to experience suffering, rather than just the capacity for rational thought, serves as a moral foundation for existence. In addition, it is also emphasized that how animals are represented and treated mirrors the larger relationship between humans and nature, as well as its effects on ecological balance (Garrard, 2012).

g. The Earth

As stated by Garrard (2004), it is essential for ecocritics to understand that the term 'earth' is evolving; it now represents not only the physical ground below us but also the larger life context, the biosphere. This transformation calls for a reading approach that is more politically involved, one that resonates more with social ecology and Cultural Studies than with deep ecology or traditional literary analysis (Garrard, 2004).

C. METHOD

This research employed a qualitative method that begins with assumptions, a worldview, the potential application of a theoretical framework, and the exploration of research issues related to the significance that individuals or groups assign to a social or human problem (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To be more specific, qualitative content analysis was a relevant design since it represents a systematic and rule-governed nature, focusing on the analysis of

textual data to elucidate the meaning of qualitative material in a structured and replicable format (Schreier, 2012). In relation to ecocritical research, qualitative content analysis was suitable as it allowed the researchers to interpret the environmental representations and cultural significances inherent in literary texts, providing insights into the construction and comprehension of nature, place, and ecological issues through language.

The data were extracted from relevant passages of the primary source, specifically the travel writing *The Voices of Marrakesh: A Record of a Visit* by Elias Canetti. It was published in 1967 containing fourteen chapters. The researchers collected the data by reading the travel writing titled *The Voices of Marrakesh: A Record of a Visit* by Elias Canetti multiple times, paying close attention to the relevant passages to identify the central issues. They established criteria for documenting the data to maintain focus and consistency by filtering the passages related to the ecocriticism concepts proposed by Garrard (2004). Finally, it was essential to review the classified data to gain a general understanding and identify recurring issues before conducting the analysis.

Schreier (2012) argues that qualitative content analysis comprises the systematic coding and categorization of textual data to identify patterns and interpret meaning within a particular context. To conduct content analysis for qualitative data, the researchers determined the unit of analysis, which can include words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs within specific passages. Following this, they created a structured system to categorize content based on pre-existing theories (i.e., ecocriticism concepts by Garrard, 2004) and highlighted the relevant text segments. The identification of themes and patterns was developed from similar codes. Finally, conclusions were drawn according to key themes, supported by quotations or examples from the texts, and the results were linked to the theoretical framework.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the research findings and discusses them concerning the representation of human-environment relationships illustrated in Elias Canetti's travel literature, *The Voices of Marrakesh: A Record of a Visit*. Utilizing qualitative content analysis as outlined by Schreier (2012), the findings are organized thematically to highlight how the selected passages reflect the ecocriticism concepts proposed by Garrard (2004), including pollution, pastoral, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animals, and the Earth. Each theme is supported by the excerpts from the data and interpreted in light of existing ecocriticism theory.

In *The Voices of Marrakesh: A Record of a Visit*, Elias Canetti deftly articulates ecocritical consciousness through his meticulous study of the environment, non-human entities, and the urban ecology of Marrakesh. By employing vivid imagery and contemplative narration, the text prompts readers to recognize that landscapes and non-human beings serve not only as mere backgrounds to human experiences but are fundamentally intertwined with them. This understanding resonates with ecocritical issues regarding how literature can confront anthropocentric perspectives and inspire a reconsideration of the ethical aspects of human-environment interactions. The following addresses three representations of human-environment connectedness: pastoral, wilderness, and dwelling, examined through the lens of ecocriticism theory.

1. Issues Related to Pastoral

Pastoral literature emphasizes that humans should see themselves not as owners of the land but as caretakers responsible for respecting and caring for the environment and other living things (Garrard, 2004). It often portrays nature in ways that encourage ecological responsibility and protection. The author describes in one scene in which he attempts to observe the camel market, an experiment that offers associations with a more traditional and animal-centered environment. However, this attempt ultimately leads to disappointment and dissatisfaction. The passage reads:

Data 1

I came into contact with camels on three occasions, and each occasion ended tragically. **‘I must show you the camel market,’ said my friend soon after my arrival in Marrakesh.** ‘It’s held every Thursday morning by the wall near the Bab-el Khemis. That’s right on the other side of the city – I’d better drive you there.’ (Canetti, 1978, p.9).

In this passage, a pastoral atmosphere began with the author’s arrival in Marrakesh. Unlike the structured, industrial, and often isolating environments of modern cities, Marrakesh is a city that is deeply intertwined with the natural and animal world. This affirms the idea that pastoral is commonly interpreted as an escape from the bustling city life to the tranquil countryside, or as a method for people to channel their emotions onto the natural world (pathetic fallacy) (Gutzwiller et al., 1998 cited in Abdullah & Muassomah, 2025). The author’s journey to Marrakesh led him to discover a sense of peace and stability in nature, allowing him to appreciate the interconnectedness of all living things (Erviana & Triyani, 2025). Furthermore, animals such as donkeys and camels embodied the relationship between humanity and the natural, rural landscape, rather than as modes of transportation or labor as demonstrated in the following excerpt.

Data 2

Thursday came and we drove there. We had started late, and by time we reached the large open square by the city wall it was already noon. The square was almost empty. At the far end, about two hundred yards from us, stood a group of people, we could see no camels. **The little animals these people were occupied with were donkeys, and the city was full of donkeys anyway; they carried all the burdens and were so badly treated we certainly had no desire to see any more of it.** ‘We’re too late,’ said my friend. ‘The camel market’s over.’ He drove into the middle of the square to convince me that there was really nothing more to be seen. (Canetti, 1978, p.10).

Upon his arrival, the author anticipated to see camels, rare animals mostly found in the Middle East, which symbolize exoticism, wildness, and rural life, as per his friend’s invitation. However, this desire was hindered by urban realities: the late hour, the vacant market, and the high number of donkeys. These animals that, while still part of the animal world, are portrayed as mistreated and overworked, indicating a fallen or degraded pastoral environment.

2. Issues Related to Wilderness

According to Garrard (2004), wilderness is a form of nature that is thought to be untouched by human activity and serves as a symbol for ecological preservation and purity. It is purposefully kept up to protect biodiversity and offer a sanctuary for people looking to escape

the material and moral stresses of urban life. Elias Canetti shared several compelling experiences in his book, *The Voices of Marrakesh: A Record of a Visit*, that imply a deep connection between humans and the nonhuman world. One notable instance occurs in the city during an unexpected encounter with a distressed animal. The author recalls:

Data 3

The air around the camel was charged with fear, most of it coming from the camel itself. The drover ran with it for a bit and snatched up the rope as it trailed along the ground. The camel leaped sideways into the air with an undulating movement but did not break loose again; it was dragged along farther. A man we had not noticed appeared behind the children standing around our car, pushed them aside, and explained to us in broken French **“The camel has rabies. It is dangerous. It is being taken to the slaughterhouse.** One has to be very careful.” He pulled a serious face. Between each of his sentences we could hear the animal’s shrieks (Canetti, 1978, p.10).

The above passage highlighted that the camel, a domesticated animal, became a symbol of risk and unpredictability. Its diseased condition transformed it into a figure of wilderness, characterized by fear, resistance, and uncontrollable movement. From an ecocritical perspective, this moment illustrated how wilderness is often shaped by crisis. The man's warning, "It is dangerous. It is being taken to the slaughterhouse," revealed society's tendency to control or eliminate wilderness, especially when it conflicts with urban or civilized life. This tendency aimed to suppress or expel the wild, particularly when it manifests in violent or diseased forms.

Building on the aforementioned excerpt, the idea of wilderness is then explained as a symbol of nature in its most untainted form, untouched by humans, and it also emphasizes its role in safeguarding ecosystems and offering a spiritual escape from the moral and material decline of city living (Abdullah & Muassomah, 2025; Garrard, 2004; Güneş, 2017). Furthermore, Canetti’s writing connects with the wilderness, not by means of broad landscapes, but through the existence of a lone animal whose pain reveals how thin the boundary can be between the human and the wild.

3. Issues Related to Dwelling

In relation to the idea of dwelling ecocriticism, it has been found that environmental factors and historical experiences have played a significant role in shaping how human civilization perceives nature as a place to reside. Dwelling contains more than simply a physical living area; it involves memory, ancestral history, mortality, ritual, daily life, and labor (Garrard, 2004). It provides a basis for personal development and future planning, deeply linked to human advancement. The following passage portrays recurring moments of spatial return, emotional impact, and focus on cultural symbols to convey a deep sense of place.

Data 4

I found parting from it so difficult that every five or ten minutes I would come back. Whenever I went from then on, whatever else **I explored in the Mellah, I kept breaking off to return to the little square and cross it in one direction or another in order to assure myself that it was still there. I turned into first one of the quieter streets in**

which there were no shops, only dwelling-houses. Everywhere, on the walls, beside doors, some way up from the ground, large hands had been painted, each finger clearly outlined, mostly in blue : they were for warding off the evil eye. I was the sign I found used most commonly, and people painted up for preference on the place where they lived (Canetti, 1978, pp. 45 - 46).

In this excerpt, when exploring the Mellah, the author frequently returned to the same small square, which represented more than a tourist's curiosity. It resembled a developing bond and fostered a sense emotional security. His struggle to leave and his longing to revisit highlighted the notion of dwelling as a form of connection. The landscape is not solely a passive environment for human activities; it actively engages in the lives of its inhabitants, influencing their experiences, memories, and identities (Abdullah & Muassomah, 2025; Ervina & Triyani, 2025; Garrard, 2004). In addition, the transition into more tranquil residential streets, characterized with dwelling houses that are culturally preserved, was notable. The blue-painted hands served as a cultural symbol of protection. The author's observation towards the area linked his experience to the space, intertwining belief and tradition.

E. CONCLUSION

Utilizing ecocriticism, the travel writing *The Voices of Marrakesh: A Record of Visit* by Elias Canetti reveals the relationship between humans and the environment, as reflected in pastoral, wilderness, and dwelling concepts. The representation of pastoral theme, featuring animals like donkeys and camels, conveys critical perspective on daily life and its challenges. The concept of wilderness is highlighted through the portrayal of distressed animals, emphasizing nature's unpredictable and frequently threatening independence when compared to human society. Ultimately, the concept of dwelling emerges through the close depiction of lived environments in the Mellah, where architectural elements and symbols such as the painted hand embody both cultural identity and ecological integration. These themes reveal that Elias Canetti's travel narrative goes beyond simply documenting a visit, encouraging readers to reflect on the cultural, emotional, and spatial experience. The findings of this research emphasize the importance of interpreting travel literature not solely as mere documentation but as texts rich in environmental awareness.

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