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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Botanical symbols in two Javanese short stories

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ABSTRACT
Plants in environmental fiction can furnish a setting, organise a character's attention, and become the subject of competing claims about land. This study examined how botanical references acquire ecological meaning in two Javanese short stories, "Munggah Gunung" and "Njaga Alas," published in the 2023 anthology *Zamrud Khatulistiwa* and available on Indonesia's Buku Digital platform (BUDI). Qualitative close reading related the literal referents and connotations of nine passages to their narrative contexts, using Roland Barthes's semiotics and Greg Garrard's ecocriticism. In "Munggah Gunung," the dense forest, an unfamiliar plant, and a large tree give shape to situated learning through observation, naming, and bodily contact. In "Njaga Alas," the forest becomes the object of conflicting valuations. The promise of factory employment competes with accounts of the forest as a multispecies habitat and a national treasure, while communal planting frames recovery as a shared responsibility. Across the stories, the ecological force of botanical signs depends on who interprets them, what their interpretations make visible, and how the plot acts on those interpretations. The study offers a comparative account of botanical signification that distinguishes the ecological meanings available in literary texts from the responses of actual readers.

Keywords: botanical symbolism; ecosemiotics; Javanese fiction; plant representation; forest conservation

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INTRODUCTION

A forest can look dense to a child climbing a mountain, sustain a community of plants and animals, and appear available for industrial development to a local official. These descriptions name the same kind of landscape but assign it different roles and values. Fiction makes those differences available for analysis because the terms used to describe a plant or forest belong to a speaker, a scene, and a sequence of decisions. A child's question about an unfamiliar leaf, for example, calls for a different kind of explanation from a dispute about clearing forest land. The distinction matters in environmental literary studies because the presence of vegetation in a story tells us little about how the story asks its readers to understand it. The problem addressed here is how botanical details become evidence for particular ways of seeing and valuing an environment.

Research on plant representation in children's and young adult literature gives this problem a specific critical vocabulary. Guanio-Uluru (2023) distinguishes several dimensions of representation in the phyto-analysis map, opening plant-related passages to questions about the form and extent of agency a text attributes to vegetation. Jones and MacLeod (2024) show that even stories concerned with climate change can foreground human and animal consequences while giving plants comparatively little agency. Conversely, Guanio-Uluru (2024) traces how figurative relationships between young characters and vegetation carry meanings of hope in a novel by Maja Lunde. Hu (2024) examines how seed picturebooks negotiate hierarchies among humans and plants, while Møller-Olsen (2024) proposes companion plant reading as a way to attend to vegetal voices across literary traditions. Together these studies suggest that naming or celebrating plants and granting them a consequential role in a story are separate analytical questions.

A related strand of work asks what environmental stories offer readers and educators. Laliena and Tabernero Sala (2023) show how an ecocritical rereading can make environmental meanings available in canonical picturebooks. Goga et al. (2023) develop ecocritical dialogues as a teaching practice in which readers discuss textual and environmental tensions. Studies of ecological learning also differ in their evidence. Kachak and Blyznyuk (2025) examine fictional eco-activists and report dialogues with adolescent readers, whereas Bradfield et al. (2025) examine the ecological assumptions of picturebooks by analysing their representations of inhabited spaces. These studies clarify the difference between identifying an opportunity for ecological reflection in a literary text and investigating how a particular group actually responds. The present study addresses the first of those questions through textual evidence.

Indonesian literary research provides a further point of comparison. Sultoni et al. (2023) examine representations of ecological wisdom in Banyumas folklore. Habsari (2023) links the representation of environmental crime in Okky Madasari's children's literature to values of conservation and character education. Yusniar et al. (2026) use Garrard's ecocriticism to identify environmental issues in a collection of Indonesian children's tales, while Santoso et al. (2026) examine forest representations in Mochtar Lubis's fiction. Efendi et al. (2025) bring ecosemiotics to Indonesian literature by examining the interplay of landscape, culture, and ecological narrative. This body of work establishes the relevance of ecological wisdom, environmental harm, and landscape meaning. The question pursued here is narrower. How do specific words for plants and forests move from sensory description to ecological argument, and what changes when a botanical referent moves between description, dialogue, and plot resolution?

The framework uses ecosemiotics to bring two analytical questions into contact. Maran (2023) situates ecological meaning within the relationships that bind cultural sign-making to living environments. In literary analysis, that orientation directs attention both to what a word or image signifies and to the ecological relationships it represents. Barthes's (1972) account of signification distinguishes the first-order sign from the cultural meanings built upon it. A reference to a large tree denotes a recognisable feature of the setting. The action of resting against it can give that feature connotations of support and relief. Myth is a more specific claim about signification. It becomes relevant when a cultural interpretation is presented as self-evident, as when the value of conserving a forest is tied to a seemingly obvious duty of national belonging. A detail can support an ecological connotation without supporting a reading at the level of myth.

Garrard (2004) provides a complementary vocabulary for examining environmental assumptions. Wilderness is used here as a way of representing a landscape as relatively independent of human control, with attention to where a text unsettles that representation. The trope of earth provides a broader horizon for asking how local environmental relations are linked to shared ecological conditions. In these stories, the mountain is near a home and its plants are familiar to the father, while the forest under threat is close to a village whose inhabitants depend on its future. The analysis therefore examines how the texts represent encounters and dependencies at these sites. It treats claims about the wider environment as interpretive implications grounded in those encounters, rather than assigning each plant reference to a predetermined trope. Zhang's (2024) ecosemiotic account of nonhuman selves in Princess Mononoke further helps distinguish an interest in

more-than-human meaning from evidence that a particular text represents nonhuman perception.

The study examines “Munggah Gunung” by Titis Awahita Sudiharjo Putri and “Njaga Alas” by Runa Chaira’ Nur Pramana. Both are Javanese short stories from the regional-language anthology *Zamrud Khatulistiwa* (Pramana, 2023; Putri, 2023). Their shared attention to vegetation makes comparison possible, while the different narrative situations give plant signs different work to do. The study has two objectives. The first is to explain how selected botanical references acquire ecological meanings through description, dialogue, and action. The second is to compare how those meanings frame human obligations toward vegetation and the habitats it sustains. The contribution lies in the comparison of two processes of signification. A plant can make a habitat perceptible through an embodied encounter, and the meaning of a forest can become a matter of public argument when characters disagree over its use. Reading these processes together connects the close analysis of individual signs to the ethical positions made available by a story.

METHOD

The study used qualitative interpretive close reading. The corpus consisted of two published Javanese short stories from *Zamrud Khatulistiwa*, an anthology of regional-language fiction issued by Indonesia’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2023. “Munggah Gunung” appears on printed pages 215–219 and “Njaga Alas” on pages 254–257. The digital edition of the anthology is available through the Buku Digital platform (BUDI) of Indonesia’s Language Development and Cultivation Agency and through the ministry’s institutional repository. It makes no inference about the effects of the hosting platform or the reading behaviour of its users. The two stories offer a focused comparison because each gives trees, plants, or forest a sustained role in the events it depicts. The first approaches plant life through a mountain walk and exchanges between a child and a father. The second connects plants and forest to a conflict involving a child, her mother, a local official, and village residents.

The unit of analysis was a botanical reference together with its immediate narrative context. References included individual plants, observable plant features, trees, and forest understood as a habitat structured by vegetation. The analysis also retained dialogue about the forest where a line clarified its changing value in the plot. This allowed the interpretation of a plant-related sign to incorporate what characters saw, what they said it

meant, and what they subsequently did. The corpus supplied nine focal passages for the comparative reading. The three passages coded MG concern the dense forest, an unfamiliar plant with shining leaves, and the large tree against which the father rests. The six passages coded NA concern trees and flowers, the forest as national treasure, the report of a factory proposal, the local official's defence of it, Sekar's account of the forest as habitat, and Bu Karthi's proposal to replant it. The units are illustrative passages within two stories. Their distribution does not establish the relative frequency of these patterns in the anthology.

The reading and note-taking procedure began by identifying what each expression names and which character or narrative voice uses it. The next step was to interpret possible connotations against the surrounding action. A plant initially described as unfamiliar, for instance, acquires a more precise reference when another character names it. A character's description of a forest as unimportant acquires a particular force when read alongside the promised factory jobs. The ecological reading then considered what relations were foregrounded in each scene, including habitat, interdependence, human use, and restoration. At the level of myth, the interpretation looked for repeated language or narrative closure that turns a culturally specific valuation into an apparently natural obligation. This final step was applied where the sequence of the text sustained it, especially in the treatment of the forest as national treasure.

Interpretations were checked against the Javanese text, immediate co-text, and the subsequent development of the scene. The analysis distinguishes what is explicitly described from what can be inferred. For example, a forest's density supports a claim about how the story depicts its vegetation. It provides limited grounds for inferring either ecological integrity or the absence of prior human influence. Comparison across passages also helped test whether a proposed meaning was shared or contested. Protection is expressed as a duty by Bu Karthi, supported with ecological reasons by Sekar, and initially rejected by Pak Dhukuh. The two theoretical perspectives were used for complementary checks. Semiotics specifies how wording acquires cultural force, while ecocriticism asks what conceptions of environmental value that wording foregrounds. The comparison supports interpretation across two cases and leaves generalisation to further studies.

Javanese terms that were central to the analysis were retained and accompanied by contextual English glosses. The glosses were checked against the original wording and the surrounding narrative. For example, rendering "tanduran kang aneh" as "unfamiliar plant" preserves the narrator's perspective and limits the interpretation to what the passage

supports. Statements about medicinal uses and ecosystem services were attributed to the characters who voiced them. Citations use the printed page numbers of the anthology.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Learning to notice plants in "Munggah Gunung"

The mountain walk establishes the forest through a description of density and the presence of other species. The narrator calls the forest still dense, using *rungkut*, and associates it with snakes, birds, and other animals (Putri, 2023, p. 215) [MG1]. The literal referent is the wooded area of Mount Ampon. In context, the density of that area is significant because it is immediately read together with the lives it accommodates. The word "still" gives the description a temporal inflection. The forest is presented as continuing to have a quality that matters, although the narrative at this point supplies no history of what may have threatened it. The passage makes a wooded habitat intelligible by placing animal presence alongside vegetation. It thereby gives the forest more narrative specificity than a scenic description of a mountain would provide.

The setting also complicates a simple wilderness reading. The ascent begins near the narrator's home and involves ordinary arrangements such as buying provisions and leaving a motorcycle near the foot of the mountain. Dense vegetation and relatively familiar routes exist alongside each other. Garrard's (2004) wilderness trope helps locate the tension between an image of vegetation as independently sustained and a narrated landscape already connected to local human activity. The phrase describing density does not establish that the mountain forest is untouched. Instead, it allows the child narrator to encounter a place that is geographically close and still only partly known. This account of proximity is important to the story's ecology. Awareness begins with attending to relations in a place the narrator can enter, rather than with crossing an absolute boundary between human settlement and nature.

That contrast between familiarity of place and unfamiliarity of particular plants becomes explicit when the narrator notices a *tanduran kang aneh* with glossy, oval leaves (Putri, 2023, p. 215) [MG2]. The expression initially records the child's perception. Its effect depends on the visual particulars that justify stopping and looking, especially the light falling on the leaves. The father subsequently identifies the plant as lempuyang and connects it with a familiar medicinal preparation. The scene thus moves from shape and reflected light to a local name and a cultural practice. The unidentified plant is temporarily a sign of what the narrator does not yet know. Once it is named, it becomes a sign of how

much knowledge about the surrounding forest is already available in conversation with another person. The story assigns visual encounter and local knowledge separate roles in that movement.

The father's answer also sets a limit on how far the scene can be read as decentring human value. As the walk continues, the child asks about the uses of pace and Javanese tamarind, and the father explains possible benefits (Putri, 2023, p. 216). This is a form of attention to plant diversity, but it repeatedly uses human need to organise that attention. Jones and MacLeod's (2024) observation that the presence of plants need not entail strong plant agency is pertinent here. Guanio-Uluru's (2023) distinctions also help show why it matters whether a story gives plants a symbolic function, attributes effects to them, or imagines their perspectives. The encounter with lempuyang makes the child's knowledge contingent on the plant becoming visible at a particular moment. The story does not give that plant a perspective. It gives the reader access to the process by which an observed feature becomes a named and culturally interpretable part of a habitat.

The large tree at the top of the ascent shifts the relation from observation to bodily contact. The father leans against a *wit gedhe* and enjoys the mountain breeze after the climb (Putri, 2023, p. 216) [MG3]. The denotative detail is a large tree in a place where the walkers stop. The conjunction of leaning, probable fatigue, and cool air supports a connotation of respite. This reading is more specific than assigning abstract virtues such as patience or strength to the tree. The text makes bodily recovery possible in a scene shared with the tree, although it does not establish that the tree causes the breeze. The contrast with the plant-naming scene is instructive. The narrator does not need a species name to make the tree consequential. Its size and position make it available as physical support, so its importance emerges through use in the immediate scene.

The area around a tree later becomes a site where the child chooses to keep a distance after seeing what the narrator identifies as snake eggs (Putri, 2023, pp. 216–217). The story thus brings an experience of ease into the same environment as an encounter that calls for restraint. The analytical relevance of this episode lies in how it qualifies the idea of a harmonious forest. A single human response cannot exhaust what vegetation makes possible as part of a habitat. Møller-Olsen's (2024) attention to the literary practices through which vegetal relations become perceptible helps articulate this difference. "Munggah Gunung" depicts a child learning to register plants through several practices: looking at a leaf, listening to a name, recognising bodily support, and adjusting behaviour in

a shared setting. The signs together produce a narrative of situated attention, with some meanings tied to human use and others to forms of coexistence.

The father's later instruction about litter puts this situated attention into practical terms (Putri, 2023, p. 217). The child who can recognise plants and animals can still behave in ways that affect the place. The lesson about a wrapper comes after the forest has been made legible through diverse details. Consequently, the narrative shows both observation and conduct without assuming that the first automatically produces the second. The father's authority differs here from his role in the lempuyang passage. When he names the plant, he supplies knowledge the child requests. When he corrects the child's conduct, he invokes an obligation that the child had not acted on. This difference helps explain why the story can use familiar plants to develop ecological attention without treating every encounter as a lesson in conservation.

The terms used for the vegetation also matter to the interpretation. The broad referent in *rungkut* is the character of the forest's growth, whereas tanduran shifts attention to a particular plant within that environment. Wit gedhe singles out a tree through a feature that matters to an action. These differences in scale let the text alternate between a habitat, an identifiable organism, and a point of bodily contact. From a semiotic perspective, ecological meaning comes from the relation between such expressions and adjacent actions. From an ecocritical perspective, the same alternation makes it possible to ask what is knowable from a brief visit and what remains outside the narrator's experience. The mountain walk offers one way of knowing the forest, limited by the places the walkers reach and what they can see, recognise, or name.

Disputing the value of the forest in "Njaga Alas"

In "Njaga Alas," the first botanical signs are trees and blooming flowers that Sekar enjoys seeing (Pramana, 2023, p. 254) [NA4]. The passage explicitly connects looking at vegetation with Sekar's and Bu Karthi's affection for nature. In the next scene, movement and colour animate that affection: the wind moves the flowers in a way the narration likens to dancing, and Sekar remarks on the forest's beauty and coolness (Pramana, 2023, p. 255). The movement of flowers belongs to the physical event, while dancing is a figurative interpretation. The distinction keeps the passage from being read as a literal account of vegetal intention. It also identifies what the figure accomplishes. The comparison gives the forest a felt liveliness that becomes part of what the characters will have reason to defend after encountering the damaged area.

The sequence from flowering vegetation to a burned and stripped area gives that initial affection a narrative consequence. The loss matters because the story has first made the forest available to Sekar through repeated visits, visible plants, and the company of her mother. A reader can locate the change through the character's contrasting observations. This is more precise than claiming that floral imagery produces empathy. What the text shows is that Sekar has already become attentive to the place when she encounters the damage. Guanio-Uluru's (2024) study of figurative relations between plants and young characters is relevant here because the ecological significance of vegetation also emerges through its position in the unfolding narrative. In "Njaga Alas," however, plant imagery initially establishes an attachment that can be tested by damage and disagreement. That attachment prepares the plot's move from perception to an inquiry into responsibility.

Before the damage is discovered, Bu Karthi describes the forest as essential for living beings and calls it a *harta karun*, or treasure, for Indonesia (Pramana, 2023, p. 255) [NA5]. The forest remains a particular place the two characters can see. Through the metaphor of treasure, its worth is extended beyond their personal experience and connected to a wider collectivity. The appeal to the nation does important rhetorical work. It gives the obligation to protect a local forest a scale larger than the household and frames the landscape as a shared inheritance. At the same time, treasure is a language of possession and exceptional value. The dialogue therefore brings two arguments together: living beings depend on the forest, and the forest matters to a national community. The first makes ecological relations explicit. The second draws on a culturally recognisable way of assigning value.

The narrative repeats this national language when Sekar argues with Pak Dhukuh, and the closing address connects love of Indonesia with love of nature (Pramana, 2023, p. 257). The repetition supports a reading of myth in Barthes's (1972) sense. A cultural association between national belonging and environmental stewardship is treated in the closing address as an obvious consequence of caring about the country. The earlier quarrel shows that the value of the forest was contested within the plot before the narrator presents that association as common ground. This distinction is useful because a metaphor alone can express a character's view without naturalising it. In "Njaga Alas," the trajectory from Bu Karthi's lesson to Sekar's argument and the narrator's closing address makes the national framing more than a single expression of affection. It also shows how the story secures its preferred conservation ethic partly through human collective identity.

A different reading of the same forest emerges when Sekar asks Pak Joko about the burned area. He reports hearing about plans to build a factory in part of the forest and

directs her to Pak Dhukuh (Pramana, 2023, p. 256) [NA6]. His words locate the proposal without yet establishing who carried out the burning. Their importance is the shift they introduce. The damaged site is no longer only something Sekar has seen and suspects was deliberately burned. It is now connected to a plan, possible decision-makers, and a question about authority. At this stage the forest appears in reported speech as a potential location for industrial development. The report is an intermediate passage that makes the later competing valuations intelligible. Its indirectness also matters for interpretation. Sekar has to pursue the question across different speakers before she can confront someone who openly defends the change in land use.

When the women encounter Pak Dhukuh cutting a tree, his defence of the factory links the proposed development to jobs for villagers and culminates in the dismissal *Alas ora penting* (Pramana, 2023, p. 256) [NA7]. Literally, he says the forest is unimportant. In the sequence of his defence, the value of the forest is judged against an anticipated economic benefit. The promised jobs give that position a recognisable social rationale, even though the story ultimately favours conservation. Reading the scene as a clash between good and bad characters would overlook the competing standards of value made explicit by the dialogue. The official treats the forest as land whose significance depends on a future project. The women bring its current relationships and the consequences of clearing it into view. This exchange makes the forest a contested sign whose meaning has practical consequences for which actions appear defensible.

Sekar's reply moves beyond the beauty and coolness that had defined her own experience. She includes people, animals, and trees among the living beings for whom the forest matters and describes it as a place where animals and plants can reproduce or grow (Pramana, 2023, p. 256) [NA8]. On the following page, she adds ecological functions such as limiting erosion and flooding and supporting soil fertility. These are the reasons the character gives in the story. The list changes the scale of what is being valued. Where the promise of employment foregrounds one future relationship between industry and residents, Sekar's language foregrounds relationships that already exist and that forest clearing would alter. Her argument combines effects relevant to residents with the continuing lives of other species. In this respect it exceeds her earlier aesthetic pleasure without relinquishing human concerns altogether.

The dialogue also redistributes interpretive authority. Pak Dhukuh first dismisses Sekar's right to advise an adult, but her explanation persists and the narration subsequently portrays him reconsidering his actions (Pramana, 2023, pp. 256–257). His

change of position depends on what the child makes publicly intelligible about the place. By locating the turn in a confrontation, the story distinguishes knowing an ecological relationship from having the authority to act upon it. Kachak and Blyznyuk's (2025) work on young fictional eco-activists provides a point of comparison for Sekar's role. Here, her initiative is sustained by her mother's support and becomes consequential through argument with an adult official. The character's success within the fiction can be analysed directly. Whether adolescent readers identify with Sekar or adopt any of her views would require evidence of reception.

The proposed replanting makes a further change in what the forest signifies. Bu Karthi asks that trees be planted again so that the damaged forest can recover and become *ijo royo-royo*, or lush green, once more (Pramana, 2023, p. 257) [NA9]. The green forest is envisaged as a future condition. The proposal is followed by an account of villagers planting trees with Sekar, Bu Karthi, and Pak Dhukuh. The text depicts collective planting and anticipates ecological recovery. A reading at the level of connotation can treat greenness as hope for regeneration, while preserving the difference between an action undertaken and an outcome still to come. Hu's (2024) attention to hierarchies in seed stories is relevant to that distinction: foregrounding a human act of planting can express care while leaving open the processes by which vegetation grows and a habitat re-forms.

A further difference between the opening and the confrontation lies in what the forest's continued existence is taken to require. The early encounter presents trees and flowers as things that can be visited and admired. Once the story makes the cause of damage a matter of inquiry, protection comes to require an answer to the official's promise of employment. Sekar offers that answer by bringing together several timescales: the immediate damage visible to the characters, the continued reproduction of plants and animals, and the future conditions of the village. The eventual planting has a different temporal status again. It is a present action intended to make a future forest possible. Reading the sequence this way shows how narrative order gives the same botanical referent several ethical demands, from attention and restraint to speaking publicly and joining in repair.

The resolution also makes the narrative's ethical emphasis clearer. Pak Dhukuh participates after acknowledging damage, while the villagers join in the work of planting. Responsibility is thereby extended from the person challenged in the dialogue to the community that participates in the response. The story resolves the immediate moral conflict through shared work. It leaves the employment question largely outside the

resolution and provides little narrative time for the later development of the planted site. Those absences limit what the ending can establish about conflicts between conservation and development. They also sharpen what it does establish as a literary construction: recovery becomes imaginable when an official's authority can be redirected and when the forest is acknowledged as a place whose future is shared by several kinds of inhabitants.

Comparing botanical signs across the stories

Both stories begin with settings in which vegetation helps characters recognise a place. The difference lies in how they develop that recognition. In "Munggah Gunung," a child learns from a sequence of encounters, and the father is an important source of names and knowledge about plants. In "Njaga Alas," Sekar begins with affection for the forest and an obligation articulated by her mother, but she eventually supplies the ecological explanation that challenges an adult's position. The contrast concerns the direction in which knowledge moves. It also concerns the scale of the ecological problem. A leaf, a large tree, and the density of a mountain forest organise what can be noticed during a walk. A forest threatened by a factory organises a dispute about the effects of decisions on an inhabited landscape.

This comparison contributes to literary plant studies by separating three things that can otherwise be conflated. The first is the perceptual salience of a botanical feature, as when sunlight draws attention to an unfamiliar leaf. The second is the practical or ecological relation represented by the narrative, as when a tree supports a resting person or a forest gives animals and plants a place to live. The third is the cultural judgement made in response to that relation, as when characters describe the forest as treasure, deny its value, or propose a collective duty of repair. These distinctions allow the analysis to recognise more-than-human dependence without attributing consciousness or intention to every narrated plant. They also connect the literary detail to the way ecological obligations are framed and debated in each plot.

The comparison refines the application of Garrard's (2004) tropes. The mountain's apparent wildness is qualified by its proximity to settlement, the father's plant knowledge, and the traces of human activity. In "Njaga Alas," the local forest is bound to household experience, official decisions, employment, and the lives of other species. It cannot be adequately understood as a self-contained space outside society. Read through the wider ecological horizon of earth, both texts make relations among plants, people, and animals visible at a local scale. The stories give no basis for treating their landscapes as direct allegories of a planetary crisis. Their value for ecocritical reading lies in how small

decisions and descriptions allow broader relations of dependence to be discussed without losing the specificity of place.

The evidence also distinguishes care for plants from a fully ecocentric viewpoint. In "Munggah Gunung," medicinal uses remain a recurring reason for paying attention to plants, alongside curiosity and bodily experience. In "Njaga Alas," the value of the forest includes nonhuman life, yet the plot relies on national belonging and collective action by people to frame its conservation. The texts bring human and nonhuman interests into relation through different means. The comparison with other accounts of forest representation, including Santoso et al. (2026), lies in the attention given here to the shifts in valuation within and across scenes. The result is a description of how environmental meanings are made persuasive through the narrative, including where a human-centred reason for protection remains in view.

The two readings also clarify when the idea of myth adds explanatory value. The connotation of respite arises from a particular body and tree in a particular scene. The forest-as-treasure formulation, in contrast, recurs in dialogue and gains normative force when the conclusion of the story addresses its audience. Analysing both instances as equivalent expressions of environmental awareness would obscure that difference. A method sensitive to narrative position can describe how a plant reference becomes meaningful locally and when repeated wording establishes a more general cultural account of why a place deserves care.

For literary education, the texts provide material for the ecocritical dialogues described by Goga et al. (2023) and the kind of environmental rereading developed by Laliena and Tabernero Sala (2023). A discussion of "Munggah Gunung" can compare what the child observes before and after a plant is named. A discussion of "Njaga Alas" can compare the criteria used by Bu Karthi, Sekar, and Pak Dhukuh to value the same place. The same passages also support asking what is left out when the plot resolves the dispute through replanting. These are implications of the available textual contrasts. The corpus comprises two works in one anthology, and the interpretation relies on selected passages and contextual glosses. Claims about the wider anthology, regional fiction more generally, or the educational effects of the stories require additional evidence.

CONCLUSION

Botanical signs acquire ecological force through the relations in which a story places them. In "Munggah Gunung," the progression from noticing vegetation to naming plants

and experiencing physical support makes the forest perceptible as a place of situated learning. In “Njaga Alas,” the shift from aesthetic attachment to public argument makes the forest a contested site of ecological, economic, and national value. The recovery proposed at the end gives conservation the form of collective responsibility, while the national-treasure metaphor helps present that responsibility as a shared obligation. The comparison shows how plant references become consequential through a combination of wording, narrative position, and the authority of the characters who interpret them. Bringing semiotics and ecocriticism together makes it possible to distinguish the cultural meanings assigned to vegetation from the ecological relationships represented in the plot. This distinction supports close reading and discussion of environmental fiction, especially where the same landscape can be valued for different reasons. The contribution is grounded in two Javanese short stories and concerns textual affordances for ecological reflection. Reader responses and the transferability of these patterns to other stories remain questions for further research.

DECLARATIONS

Ethical considerations

The study drew exclusively on two short stories from a publicly available anthology. The analysis relied on published literary passages and credited the authors of both stories. The study involved no human participants or collection of personal data.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

The review version reports the use of Google Gemini to assist with journal formatting. OpenAI ChatGPT assisted in drafting revisions, organising the literature discussion, checking source references, and refining the presentation and synthesis of interpretations from the published texts. The authors are responsible for verifying the evidence and approving the final analysis and manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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