

The Literary Ecocriticism In The Romantic Period Poem “Nachts” By Joseph von Eichendorff

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Abstract

Literary works can be a portrait of phenomena that occur in the surrounding nature, both as appreciation and criticism. This research aims to identify the spirit of the times in the poem "Nachts" written in 1826 by Joseph von Eichendorff during the Romantic literary era. In addition, this research also reveals the conception of nature and criticism of natural conditions given by the author. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with a mimetic approach, in which the poem "Nachts" is analysed as the main data source. The results show that this poem reflects human interaction with nature and contains criticism of environmental damage that is relevant to current conditions. In addition, this poem highlights the characteristics of the Romantic era such as appreciation of natural beauty, tranquillity, and self-reflection.

Keywords: *Ecocriticism, Environment, Literature, Language*

Introduction

The greenhouse effect was first introduced to the public by Joseph Fourier, a French scientist, in 1824. The greenhouse effect is a natural process that makes the Earth a habitable place for humans because it essentially involves the warming of celestial bodies caused by their composition and atmosphere. This process occurred naturally until the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century. With the onset of the Industrial Revolution, the use of fossil fuels as an energy source began. The increasing consumption of fossil fuels each year is a tangible factor leading to the acceleration of the greenhouse effect (Sa'adah et al., 2017). This acceleration has turned the greenhouse effect into a new problem for humanity, as it rapidly increases the Earth's temperature and causes climate change.

Climate change on a global scale impacts seasonal variability, affecting various sectors. Unpredictable seasonal changes lead to extreme and prolonged heat, potentially causing droughts. This significantly impacts the agricultural sector, resulting in decreased crop yields or even crop failures (Hidayati & Suryanto, 2015). The heatwaves not only affect agriculture but also have severe health implications, potentially leading to fatalities. On April 25, 2024, 30 people in Thailand, two people in India, and two children in Palestine died due to heatstroke (Alam, n.d.). Besides the heat causing droughts and heatwaves, heavy rainfall can lead to floods and landslides. In Indonesia, according to BNPB data in 2019, 95% of the disasters were hydrometeorological (Tanjung et al., 2020). Climate change not only affects humans but also leads to the extinction of various flora and fauna species (Surakusumah, n.d.).

Nature and the environment forced humans to adapt their ways of survival, and it was from nature that humans created their own civilization and culture (Keai, 2021). The way humans survived during the time is captured in literature through various literary works. Through literature, various phenomena that happened were captured and made into a work of literature. Based on existing environmental conditions, various types and styles of literary works have been created. This reflects the influence of the connection between the creators of literary works who cannot be separated from environmental factors (Larasati & Manut, 2022). Environmental conditions have an impact on the style that is created at a certain time, so that the characteristics of a literary era are formed. It is also common for literature to be present as a criticism of a phenomena that have happened at that time (Anwar, 2019). For example, during the Baroque literary period in Germany, literary figures criticized the gap that existed between the rulers and the commoners. In the Renaissance era, writers created work that contained criticism of the doctrine and the power of the church at that time. This is a real example of "mimetic" conception of Plato, where literary works are present by portraying the value of people's lives through the author's views and describing the existing social conditions (Zahron et al., 2023).

The critique provided by literature is not limited to social environmental conditions; literature also shares its perspectives on nature. Literary works place the environment in an important position. Recently, the term "green literature" has emerged to describe this phenomenon, where literary works carry environmental themes with specific criteria, such as depicting a love for the Earth (Wiyatmi, et al., 2021). However, long before the term "green literature" became popular in the current era, the German Romantic era had already embraced the theme of love for nature. In the German Romantic era, the view of nature was more than just a backdrop in literary works. Nature held aesthetic value and depicted the mood of that era. This significant role of nature captured the attention of the renowned German writer, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Goethe, a poet who lived through the German Romantic era, believed that humans could coexist harmoniously with the surrounding environment (Purnamasari & Amrullah, 2023). Goethe also asserted that every phenomenon occurring in nature, if observed correctly and accurately, would lead to new understanding. If we fail to comprehend the meaning of a particular phenomenon, we need to learn to refine all our senses to observe and analyze it, and the information gathered will guide us to the intended meaning of the phenomenon (Seamon et al., 1998).

The Romantic literary era began in the late 18th century as a response to the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. The shift from the agricultural revolution to the industrial revolution had a significant impact on the societal conditions of that time. People moved from rural areas, leaving behind their farmland, to cities because the Industrial Revolution provided job opportunities and technological innovations (*The Romantic Period*, n.d.). Consequently, Romanticism emerged as a critical reaction against industrialism, social norms, aristocratic politics, and a call to pay more attention to nature. The Romantic era marked the beginning of the development of a literary movement that critiqued environmental conditions. This is supported by Jonathan Bate's statement in Garrad (2014), which asserts that the counter-revolution during Romanticism inspired the birth of a movement known as ecocriticism.

Romantic literary works are often associated with literature that glorifies the love of nature, freedom, and feelings. But more than just a love of nature, the romantic genre implies how nature should look to humans. Some of the great works of the romantic period are the painting "Wanderer above the sea" by Caspar David Friedrich, the poem "To Autumn" by John Keats, and the poem "Mondnachts" by Joseph von Eichendorff.

Eichendorff was a well-known German writer of the romantic era. The work that made him popular for the first time was a novel called "*Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts*"

which tells about love and the desire to travel. Another of Eichendorff's popular works is a poem titled "*Nachts*". This poem is a short poem consisting of only two stanzas, but it provides a typical message of the romantic period for its readers. In addition, the author's conception of nature conveyed through the poem "*Nachts*" is quite contrasting with the reality of the present. Serenity, freedom, and interaction with nature seem to be difficult to find these days. This is an important thing to learn from Eichendorff's poem. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a study to look at the elements of romanticism in the poem and the author's conception of nature from an ecocritical perspective.

There have been various studies on Eichendorff's work before. Karen Priskila (2017) researched the spirit of the romantic era in the poem "*Sehnsucht*". In the study, Karen revealed that the poem has a strong image of the suffering suffered by my character caused by longing. However, the longing that causes the suffering is not the longing for fellow human beings. It is a longing for a better life. Other studies of Eichendorff's poetry do not only focus on literature. In Aini's research (2023), she intervisualised Eichendorff's poem "*Nachtzauber*" with the latest technology of artificial intelligence. The interesting thing about Aini's research is that the AI art generator is able to present visualisations of the interpretation of literary works. Although the results obtained from the AI art generator still depend on human creativity in assembling various elements, it is still a step forward in the process of learning literature.

Based on some of the studies above, researchers found the similarities in research in the form of the soul of the romantic era through Eichendorff's poetry. However, the relevant research mentioned above has not discussed Eichendorff's conception of nature and the criticism he wants to convey through the literary works that Eichendorff has written. Therefore, this research was conducted to examine a poem from the German Romantic literary era entitled "*Nachts*" by Joseph von Eichendorff. This research focuses on the soul of the romantic era contained in the poem "*Nachts*" and reveals the conception of nature and criticism of natural conditions conveyed by the author.

Method

This research uses descriptive qualitative methods. According to Rifai (2021), qualitative methods are methods that focus on symptoms that occur in society, be it social or cultural symptoms. Bogdan and Taylor (in Sulisty, 2023) reveal that qualitative methods are research procedures that produce descriptive data from observations made on humans. Qualitative methods use interpretation and a natural approach to subject matter, therefore qualitative research seeks to interpret a phenomenon according to the perspective of the community under study (Hasan et al., 2023). Therefore, qualitative methods allow researchers to obtain an emic perspective (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Literary ecocriticism is a branch of literary criticism that provides a perspective of understanding between literature and ecology (Wiyatmi, et al., 2021). Ecocriticism is a multidisciplinary science that studies the relationship between humans and non-humans, the history of human culture as a whole, which requires critical analysis of the human term itself, performing critical analysis of humans and the environment (Baso et al., 2022). The purpose of literary ecocriticism is to solve a real and urgent ecological problem by using literary works with environmental concerns as a medium (Larasati & Manut, 2022).

Amady (2015) revealed that the emic perspective is the point of view of the owner of the culture that is constructed based on their understanding. In an effort to see the connection of the soul of the era of the romantic era in the poem "*Nachts*", an emic perspective is needed in this research. The soul of the times which is a description of the situation and conditions of society at a time becomes the identity of a time (Krause, 2019). The approach used in this research is the mimetic approach. Mimetic was first proposed by

Plato, who argued that works of art are imitations of nature. According to Abrams (in Siswanto, 2008), the mimetic approach is a literary study approach that focuses on the relationship between literary works and the reality outside the literary work. The mimetic approach connects what is written in literary works with phenomena that occur in life.

According to Wiyatmi (2021) literary ecocriticism is one of the literary branches of literary criticism that provides a perspective of understanding between literature and ecology. Ecocriticism is a multidisciplinary science that studies the relationship between humans and non-humans, the history of human culture as a whole, which requires critical analysis of human terms themselves, conducting critical analyses of humans and the environment (Baso et al., 2022). The purpose of literary ecocriticism is to solve a real and urgent ecological problem by using literary works with environmental concerns as a medium (Larasati & Manut, 2022).

Results

The results and discussion section will be divided into several segments. The first segment of the results and discussion is about the poem "Nacht" by Joseph von Eichendorff. This section includes the text of the poem and its translation, as well as an explanation of the structure of the poem. Then in the second segment of the results and discussion is the interpretation of the poem as a whole. The interpretation segment will also discuss the meaning of the symbols in the poem. Then the last segment of the results and discussion is the criticism that wants to be delivered through the poem.

The poem "Nachts" is a poem written in 1826 by Joseph von Eichendorff. This poem clearly presents the night time scene. The poem also has a strong impression of nature by taking place in a large field of grass. The poem consists of only two stanzas in total. Although it is not a long poem, it is a popular poem from Eichendorff, and even today it still exists along with other works. Here is the poem "Nacht" by Joseph von Eichendorff:

Nachts

<p>Nachts</p> <p>1. <i>Ich wandere durch die stille Nacht, Da schleicht der Mond so heimlich sacht Oft aus der dunkeln Wolkenhülle, Und hin und her im Tal Erwacht die Nachtigall, Dan wieder alles grau und stille.</i></p> <p>2. <i>O wunderbarer Nachtgesang: Vom fern im Land der Ströme gang, Leis Schauern in den dunklen Bäumen - Wirst die Gedanken mir, Mein irres Singen hier Ist wie ein Rufen nur aus Träumen.</i></p>	<p>Every Night</p> <p>1. I walked through the silent night, The moon crawls silently and serenely From the veil of clouds often, And to and fro along the valley Awoke the nightingale, Then all is once more grey and silent</p> <p>2. O mesmerising song of the night: From deep in the land of rivers, A quiet trill in the dark leafy grove of trees - Already my thoughts are running wild, My chaotic song lies here Like a serenade that only comes from a dream space</p>
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Discussion

The poem "Nacht" is a short poem, but it contains various symbols that require in-depth analysis in order to obtain the message and criticism that Joseph von Eichendorff wanted to convey. The first half of the interpretation of this poem will focus on the symbolic meanings contained in the poem. Then after the symbolic meaning of the poem is complete, it will proceed to the interpretation of the poem as a whole.

The poem takes the perspective of the first person singular (I) which is shown through the first line of the poem which reads "I walked through the silent night". Taking a first-person perspective is a characteristic of romantic poetry. The character "I" in this poem can be interpreted as a wanderlust who is travelling. The first-person singular perspective is symbolic of the alienation that characterised the Romantic period. The alienation caused by the loss of identity due to the major changes in their environment. The depiction of individual characters such as "I" will usually be followed by activities that indicate travelling such as walking, travelling, adventuring or other words that have the same meaning. This is because the Romanticism era is synonymous with literary works that tell stories of travelling. The journey told here is generally a journey in an effort to achieve longing (Sehnsucht).

The time setting of this poem is sufficiently illustrated from the title of the poem "Nachts" which means "At Night" so that it can be known if the time setting in this poem is at night. The night-time setting is symbolic of tranquillity, solitude, and freedom. Night-time can also be a satire of the situation at that time which was the beginning of the industrial renaissance. It is the situation during this transitional period that has a shocking effect on society. The daytime situation full of worldly hustle and bustle made night an inner escape for the people.

The last symbolic element that makes up Eichendorff's poem "Nachts" that will be elaborated upon before starting the interpretation is the nightingale or "Nachtigall". The nightingale is a migratory bird, which means that the nightingale will not spend its entire life in one area, but will move to a place that suits it better. In addition to being a migratory bird, the nightingale is a species that belongs to the family of nocturnal creatures. The naming of this bird is also related to the habits of the bird. "Nachtigall" or in English, "Nightingale" is derived from two words, "Night" and "Galan", which is an old English word meaning song. As the name suggests, this nocturnal bird often sings at night. Nightingales are associated with creativity, inspiration, natural beauty, and mystical powers. The nightingale does not only appear in romantic literature, the bird has appeared long before the romantic era. In Greek mythology, the nightingale is a bird that is considered to be the messenger of secrets and truths from the god Apollo. Later in Celtic folklore, the bird's song was a call from the spirit world. In Persian literature, the nightingale's song is a metaphor for longing for divine love. Based on its appearance in various cultures, the bird is a symbol of hope for renewal, strong purpose, and the release of sorrow.

The interpretation of the poem will start from the first line of the poem. The first line not only serves as the opening sentence, but also gives a strong picture and impression related to the message he wants to convey in the poem. "I walked through the silent night," can be interpreted as the spiritual journey of a wanderlust who is in the process of searching for inner peace. The atmosphere described in the night is a quiet night, a night that is so longed for after a day full of material affairs. Then continued with the second line of this poem reads "The moon crawls silently and serenely". The second verse of the poem is a sign of the weather that night. The weather on that night is allegedly windy which is then reinforced by the next verse "From the veil of clouds often,". Based on the

second and third verses of the poem, it is indicated that the night was cloudy and windy with the moon shining several times and then being covered by clouds that were blown away by the wind. When looking at the first two lines of the poem, a conclusion can be drawn about the atmosphere that Eichendorff is describing. The construction of a calm night atmosphere with a little windy, that's more or less the atmosphere described. After knowing the situation on that night, Eichendorff gives a signal to complete the atmosphere he has built with the continuation of the last two verses of the first stanza "Awoke the nightingale," and "Then all is once more grey and silent".

The second stanza of the epic tells the story of the odyssey's inner struggle. With the start of the second stanza using "O mesmerising song of the night:" and followed by "From deep in the land of rivers," is a lyric dedicated to the nightingale that has been told in the previous stanza. The mesmerising song refers to the nightingale's chirping, but the distant place of the river country is still a mystery. "A quiet trill in the dark leafy grove of trees -" up to this lyric, the poet still gives the spotlight to the nightingale, the vibration of the trees caused by the nightingale moving at that moment. The next lyric until the end of the poem is a lyric that focuses on the wanderer. The wandering mind is a condition caused by the industrial revolution at that time. The Industrial Revolution had a serious negative effect on psychology (Obschonka et al., 2018). Negative effects such as neuroticism, anger, and anxiety (*Industrial Revolution*, 2017). Mental instability can be one of the references for the meaning of this lyric. The last two verses of the poem are the babbling and daydreaming of the wanderlust. The wanderlust is mumbling about what he is thinking and seemingly hears a call from someone or just the beautiful sound of a nightingale. But if this is interpreted as a call from someone, then this seems to be a serious impact of the mental damage of the "I" who is experiencing delusions.

Daily realities can be mirrored and expressed through literature (Sukma Aji & Arifin, 2022). This is also the case with this poem by Eichendorff. This poem is an image as well as a reflection of Eichendorff's views on the phenomena that occurred at that time. In addition to being a reflection, the literature also acts as a method for delivering criticism. Eichendorff's criticism is directed at those who are in power at that time. To the owners of companies that use fossil fuels for their fuel and also to politicians whose decisions affected many people.

A satire that Eichendorff provides through his poem is the use of "Night" as a depiction of serenity and freedom. A strong satire for the daytime conditions that are full of work pressure, even the sky does not look like it should due to industrial exhaust fumes. This makes night an escape for the people of the romantic era. The coming of night makes people momentarily detached from the hectic industry, people can reunite with their families, can think about their lives, and people can see the stars. However, today the irony is that there is a term "light pollution" that causes the contrast between the dark sky and the light sources in the sky to decrease. This results in fewer stars that can be seen (*Polusi Cahaya | Observatorium Bosscha*, n.d.). Besides the appearance of sky objects, this effect also affects the behaviour of animals that are distracted by the use of synthetic light (Utami & Ramli, 2022).

Not only is the night a satire of the conditions that were around at the time of the writing of the poem "Nacht". The symbolic nightingale that appears is a sign that humans do not only live on this earth, humans must also live together with other creatures. The nightingale's tiny body size is a representation that many small creatures are threatened by coal mining at that time coupled with land clearing and the effects of pollution caused by industry. The nightingale in this poem represents two meanings. The first meaning is a spiritual and aesthetic symbol of the nightingale's sacred symbolism, and the second meaning is a critique of the environment. Through the nightingale, Eichendorff reminds

humanity of its boundaries. Today, the nightingale has experienced a 90% population decline over the last 50 years (*10 Amazing Facts about Nightingales and the Best Places to See Them*, n.d.). Although the research has only been conducted in the last decade, Eichendorff has given an early warning to the general public through his poetry.

Conclusion

This research examines the poem "Nachts" through the perspective of ecocriticism to reveal the soul of the romantic era as well as the conception and criticism of nature conveyed by the author. Using a descriptive qualitative method and a mimetic approach, this research highlights how this poem reflects human interaction with nature as well as criticism of the current state of nature. The poem "Nachts" features an evening setting with an atmosphere of calm and freedom, showing the close relationship between humans and nature that characterised the Romantic era. The character "I" in this poem, a wanderer walking at night, reflects the desire to wander and find tranquillity in nature. The presence of the nightingale adds a dimension of natural beauty and creativity.

The main conclusion of this study is that the poem "Nachts" not only expresses love for nature, but also criticises the changes in nature due to the industrial revolution. The poem invites readers to reflect on the importance of maintaining harmony with nature, which is becoming increasingly relevant in the context of current environmental issues. This poem shows how romantic literature can be a powerful medium of social and environmental criticism..

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