



Literary Studies

# Narrative Functions of Ecology in The Novel *Aroma Karsa* by Dee Lestari

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## ABSTRACT

Nature and Literature have a related meaning relationship. Ecological aspects paradigmatically can have a role in telling the story of literary works. This study aims to determine the narrative functions of ecology in the novel *Aroma Karsa*. The method of this study is a narrative analysis with a literary ecology approach in the ontological, epistemological and axiological scope focusing on the characters' narrative functions. The data are obtained through the documentation process, which is in-depth reading; with the aim of identifying, classifying and categorizing the story based on the concept of the narrative function by Vladimir Propp. The results of the study identify four characters who ontologically have a strong relation to the ecological aspects of the story, namely; Sangyang Batari Karsa/Puspa Karsa, Jati Wesi/Randu, Tanaya Suma/Malini, and Raras Prayugung. Epistemologically, it is known that *Aroma Karsa* (1) builds perception of the cultural environment and ideal environmental criteria, and (2) enriches the ecological knowledge of the readers. Axiologically, *Aroma Karsa* mutually reveals the symbolic relationship of nature with the readers' cultural receptions related to myths, medications, fragrances, gender and cleanliness. There are 5 spheres of action (villain, hero, helper, false hero, princess) out of 7 with 24 supporting functions on 4 identified characters. The mechanism of narrative function uses special personage in the form of character condensation to convey the premise of the story. The mechanism of the narrative function is centered on Puspa Karsa who becomes the symbol of ecocentric narrative in the novel *Aroma Karsa*.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Literary work is a product resulted by humans. It is bound by multidimensional meaning experienced by the author. One of its dimensions is the ecological meaning around it which makes literature and the author are related to each other. Therefore, nature is often used as a setting or object of the story. Endraswara explains that literature was formed by the ecological environment, but literature did not place ecological environmental factor in a passive role, and literature would someday shape the ecological environment (Endraswara, 2016, p. 19). The human perception of experiences with its ecology is narrated through literary works which are then re-perceived by the readers of

these literary works. Nature and literature have an ecosystem of meaning, which is about the reflection of the relationship between nature (environment) and humans in literature and how nature inspires literary creation.

In Indonesia, the use of nature as a setting or object of story is a common thing to do. In the scope of contemporary novel works, some of them are; "Laskar Pelangi" by Andrea Hirata, Pandu Hamzah with "An Area That Doesn't Exist in Google Earth" and "Hujan di Bulan Juni" by Sapardi Djoko Damono. However, there are not many literary works that put ecological aspects as the characters, conflicts or central themes in a story. In other words, the ecosentrism in a popular literary work

in Indonesia is still minimally done.

At the end of the second decade of 2000s, one of the literary works that could be categorized as containing ecological aspects was *Aroma Karsa*. In 2018, Dewi Lestari (Dee) released the novel *Aroma Karsa*. Starting with the digital version through the *Bookslife* publisher and then the printed version through Benteng Pustaka publisher. The novel that was successfully sold for 10 thousand copies in the pre-order term before it was released in the bookstores was awarded as *Book of the Year* in 2018 by the IKAPI – Ikatan Penerbit Indonesia (Indonesian Publisher Association) (Agnes, 2018). *Aroma Karsa* is a phenomenal literary work which attracts many connoisseurs of Indonesian literary works.

*Aroma Karsa* with its complexity not only spoiled the readers of literary works, but also researchers of literary works, especially those who are interested in literary ecology. *Aroma Karsa* is quickly becoming the object of several studies, such as; “Representasi Mitologi Gunung Lawu dalam Novel *Aroma Karsa* (The Representation of Mount Lawu’s Mythology in *Aroma Karsa* Novel)” which analyzes the content using literary anthropology. The result of the study shows that *Aroma Karsa* contains a description of myth and culture through four things, namely; (1) setting of the place or location, (2) techno-economic of the community as the owner, (3) sociology of the community as the owner, and (4) through cosmology (Annisa, 2018). Or “Hiperosmia dan Kekuasaan Perempuan dalam Novel *Aroma Karsa* (Hyperosmia and Women’s Power in Novel *Aroma Karsa*)” which through a qualitative descriptive method with a feminist approach shows the relationship of themes in the novel, which are; (1) hyperosmia condition which in the medical world is a disruption to the benefit of the character, (2) the female characters in the novel have the quality of determination and confidence to achieve and maintain power, (3) power and strong will that cannot be controlled can bring destruction in themselves and the natural environment, and (4) women have a destructive and monstrous feminine nature as well as nurturing nature (Intan & Adji, 2019). The other study is “Kajian Mitos dalam Novel *Aroma Karsa* (Myth Study in *Aroma Karsa* Novel)” which uses descriptive analytical methods to describe the myths in the novel by involving the cultural environment. The result shows that *Aroma*

*Karsa* uses a series of events, mimetes to strengthen the facts of the myth of Puspa Karsa as a sacred character. It also shows that the location of the Puspa Karsa park utilizes the cultural environment of the Central Javanese community which have a variety of myths in which the truth is still believed to be (Yunita & Sugiarti, 2019). In addition to the three studies, there surely are many other studies that use *Aroma Karsa* as the object of research, but as far as the author’s knowledge, there is no research that focuses on the narrative function of ecology with a closed ecosystem approach.

In the study of literary ecology with a closed ecosystem approach, the relationship between nature and literature still requires interpretation. If referring to the literary ecocritical understanding, then it is ontologically to understand the relation of aesthetic facts in literary works with nature. Epistemologically, it is to read these works as demands from the environment, then, axiologically, to reveal the symbiotic relationship between the environment and literature (Endraswara, 2016, p. 22). Related to these three things, among the ways to understand it is by conducting a narrative analysis of the novel *Aroma Karsa*

Narrative analysis is needed to understand *Aroma Karsa*, both in plot and in story as a whole. Story and plot are different. Plot is something that is displayed explicitly in a text. while the story is a chronological sequence of events that can be displayed in the text or not (Lacey, 2000, p. 16). Narration is thus the merging of various events into a story so that basically a narration of the story is a narrative structure.

One way to understand the narration of the story is to understand the narration through the narrative function. Propp explains that among the constant, there is always, in a story, a function of the character of the story in terms of how and by whom the function is fulfilled (Propp, 2009, p. 21). Therefore, this study uses the theory of narrative function by Vladimir Propp. Hsieh and Chang explains that Propp places the characters in a narration of a story to seven (7) categories, namely the villain, the donor, the helper, the princess, the dispatcher, the hero, and false hero (Hsieh & Chang, 2019, p. 136). Those seven categories have a ‘functional’ nature which means that the existence and actions as well as words in the story function as the stimulants for developing story plots.

In this study, the narrative functions of the characters in the novel *Aroma Karsa* becomes the primary data for understanding the ecological narrative. So, the results are expected to be a contribution to the study of literary ecology with a closed ecosystem approach, especially those that focus on the analysis of narrative functions.

## II. METHOD

This article is a study with a narrative analyst method. Dundes explains that there are at least two types of narrative analysis focus. The first one focuses on the sequence of elements of events in the text chronologically. This is called '*syntagmatic structural analysis*'. Whereas, the second one focuses on the pattern of narration (usually by looking at binary opposition) which is also called '*paradigmatic structural analysis*' (Dundes, 2009, pp. xi-xii). On this occasion, considering the complexity of the contents of the novel *Aroma Karsa* as the object of research, this research only focuses on the '*paradigmatic structural analysis*' to determine the ecological narrative patterns in the *Aroma Karsa* novel by Dewi Lestari.

The approach of this study is literary ecology with ontological, epistemological and axiological scopes from the ecological aspects of the novel *Aroma Karsa*. Endraswara explains that this could be done in three ways, one of which was evaluating texts and ideas in terms of coherence and usefulness in response to the environmental crisis. In other words, it is concerning on how the coherence of ecological values in the plot, the characterization, the narrative style and so on chosen by the author in the literary work which is being analyzed (Endraswara, 2016, p. 60). Therefore, the data of this study are obtained through documentation techniques.

Bowen explains that in the documentation techniques, the procedure includes finding/identifying, selecting/classifying, appraising (make sense of), and synthesising data contained in documents (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). Thus, the first step in collecting the data was in-depth reading; which aimed to identify the characters in the novel based on their relationship with ecological elements. Second, the identification results were then analyzed using the theory of narrative functions by Vladimir Propp in which the results became the classification of characters' functions. Then, the final step was to draw an elaborative relation

between the mechanism of narrative function and the ecological aspects in the novel *Aroma Karsa*.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Characters and Ecological Relations

Dee Lestari explained that she built the *Aroma Karsa* story through three premises, namely (1) the cosmic premise carried out by Sanghyang Batari Karsa and Wit Batari Jumantara Rekta (MPU Samarakandi) as a representation of virtue against sleaze. Furthermore, (2) the premise of the story which carries the theme of freedom versus confinement is spread on the main characters. Then, (3) the premise of the characters' traits centered on the theme of origin carried by the character of Jati and Suma (Lestari, Di Balik Tirai *Aroma Karsa*, 2019, pp. 122-126). With this knowledge, it is easier to focus on identifying people who have ecological relations. As it is known, *Aroma Karsa* has the complexity of the story by involving approximately 30 characters for all of the main characters, supporting characters or those who are just passing by. Focusing on taking into account the sustainable premise and ecological aspects, the results of the identification are:

Table 1: Characters and ecological relations in *Aroma Karsa*

Character	Ecological Relations
Sanghyang Batari Karsa/ Puspa Karsa	Is "someone" who is also a plant called Puspa Karsa (a kind of orchid plant)
Jati Wesi/ Randu	A perfume maker (made from ecology), a Banaspati, a foster child of Nurdin Soeroso, a milk-sister of Malini (an incarnation of Puspa Karsa)
Tanaya Suma/ Malini	An incarnation of Sanghyang Batari Karsa (Puspa Karsa plant), a child of Ambrik, a foster child of Raras Prayugung, a perfume maker (made from ecology)
Raras Prayugung	Puspa Karsa A grandchild of Janirah Prayugung, an owner of Kemara, obsessed with Puspa Karsa (plants)

Ontologically, these four characters in the story are all centering on Puspa Karsa who is described as an antagonist and also an orchid plant. Sanghyang Batari Karsa as Puspa Karsa, Jati Wesi as a seeker instrument as well as a protector of Malini/Suma who is an incarnation of Puspa Karsa, Suma/Malini as an incarnation of Puspa Karsa, and Raras Prayugung as a seeker of Puspa Karsa. As the center of the stor, Puspa Karsa is associated with two things, which are an orchid plant and a myth.

This second coherence is then used as an object of rationalizing the story.

Epistemologically, the readers of the story, through these four characters, are required to understand two things; (1) myth and cultural environment. Lestari explained that, as an author, she used the kingdom of Majapahit as her fiction background (Lestari, *Di Balik Tirai Aroma Karsa*, 2019, pp. 57-65). Aroma Karsa built a new legend about Alas Kalingga, Dwarapala and Puspa Karsa based on the existing cultural environment. Not only that, Aroma Karsa also built an ideal environmental criteria. Through Pabrik Kemara illustration on page 198 with Bantar Gebang landfill on pages 11, 44 and others. It indicates that there was a demand to build environmental awareness for the readers. It shows that the environment filled with nature and refreshing plants are much better than a pile of garbage and a foul odor. The readers were brought into imagining about a clean and fragrant environment as the ideal environment. (2) Aroma Karsa novel also demands the readers to enrich their ecological knowledge. As it can be seen in the following sentence; “...mendarat di sebuah rimba tropis, menyibak hijaunya dedaunan yang bergantung di batang-batang kayu bersama benderangnya jeruk neroli. Dibalik itu, jati dapat melihat wajah-wajah mungil *phalaenopsis javanica* yang berbicara kemerahan dengan bibir ungu menantang. (...landed on a tropical jungle, cleaving apart the green leaves hanging on the logs along with the lit of neroli oranges. Behind that, Jati can see the small faces of reddish *phalaenopsis javanica* with challenging purple lips.)” (Lestari, *Aroma Karsa*, 2018, p. 61). The readers are given knowledge about where the neroli oranges grow and other names of the oranges. Another example is when there is an unfamiliar leaf name that sounds like the leaves of zodia (*Evodia suaveolens*) on page 157 which, turns out, to Indonesian people is better known as mosquito repellent plants. Furthermore is when the readers are presented with the names of orchids on page 315, which indirectly provides knowledge about orchid plants.

Aroma Karsa as a work uses several ecological symbols related to certain perceptions, such as myths, medications, fragrances, gender, and others. For example, Aroma Karsa illustrates the fragrance of papaya flowers with the presence of ghosts in the following quote “ *Wangi bunga pepaya jantan*

*yang jika malam-malam begini sering disangka orang sebagai wangi kantil dan cepat-cepat mereka pergi sambil mengumamkan doa karena menyangka ada kuntilanak* (The fragrance of male papaya flowers, which at this time of the night is often mistaken by people as the fragrance of *kantil* and they quickly leave while muttering prayers because they think there is *kuntilanak*)” (Lestari, *Aroma Karsa*, 2018, p. 95). Another example is about medication on page 510 or the smell of pine as a smell of cleanliness on page 195 and even as a symbol of the masculine scent on page 134. Aroma Karsa mutually expresses the symbolic relationship of nature with the reception of the readers’ culture.

### **The Narrative Functions of The Characters in The Novel Aroma Karsa**

A character in a story has a function which then delivers an idea or event from one to another. The character becomes a part of the functional mechanism of a story. This mechanism then becomes the “specific” part of a story. Propp explains that a story has one ‘characteristic’ which then, componently, can be transferred to another story (Propp, 2009, p. 7). In the scope of this discussion, it can be interpreted that a specific narrative function mechanism can be used as a pattern for the formation of other stories. This specific function can be identified by means of classification. Propp mentions that a story has a variety of complexities, so the discussion needs to be divided by classification. A scientific description depends on the accuracy of the classification (Propp, 2009, p. 5). In this context, the narrative classification is built based on a framework of relevance between functions and ecological aspects. This can be done because, according to Wundt, researchers do not need to always describe the story in detail, but they can do it only in certain aspects. The descriptions can follow certain classification frameworks (Propp, 2009, p. 12).

This study is based on the identification of the premises and its relation to ecological aspects. Four (4) characters are found which then, if further classified using 31 Propp narrative function concepts, it is known that these four characters have five (5) main function categories, namely False Hero, Hero, Helper, Princess, and Villain, with 24 other secondary functions. Propp explains that the constancy of functions endures, permitting us to also introduce into our systems those elements

**Table 2: Category of narrative functions on 4 characters in the novel Aroma Karsa**

Character	Category	Narrative Function
Raras Prayagung	Villain	An Interdiction is addressed to the hero (2)
		The Interdiction is violated (3)
		the villain makes attempt at reconnaissance (4)
		the villain receives information about the victim (5)
		the villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or of his belongings (6)
		the villain causes harm or injury to a member of a family(8)
Jati Wesi/ Randu	Hero and Helper	the initial misfortune or lack is liquidated (19)
		the victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps his enemy (7)
		the hero leaves home (11)
		The hero is tested, interrogated attacked (12)
		The hero reacts to the actions of the future donor (13)
		the hero is transferred, delivered, or led to the whereabouts of an object of re- search (15)
		The hero is branded (17)
		the hero returns (20)
		the hero, unrecognized, arrives home or in another country (25)
		the task is resolved (26)
the hero is recognized (27)		
the hero is given new appearance (29)		
the hero found love (31)		
Tanaya Suma/ Malini	Princess	One member of a family either lacks something or desires to have something (8a)
		the hero is pursued (21)
		a difficult task is proposed to the hero (25)
		The hero is recognized (27)
Sanghyang Batari Karsa/ Puspa Karsa	Villain and False Hero	The false hero or villain exposed (28)
		A false hero presents unfounded claims (24)
		The false hero or villain exposed (28)
		The villain is punished (30)

which are grouped around the functions. How does one create this system? The best method is to make up tables (Propp, 2009, p. 88). Therefore, this study compiles an analysis of the category of 4 characters' function into tabular form, please pay attention to table 2.

Propp explains this main function as a category called the sphere of action, which is the joining of functions into a function (sphere) which, further, he divides it into 7 categories; villain, donor, helper, princess, dispatcher, hero, false hero (Propp, 2009, pp. 79-80). However, as explained in table 2, this study only found 5 out of 7 categories of sphere of action.

The categories in the table show the functional distribution of each character in the story. For example, the character Jati Wesi as a hero and also

a helper. In the story, Jati's ability to smell becomes something unique and recognized. The nickname "rat nose" is the way the story puts the function of Jati as a helper that delivers the function of Jati as a hero. The hero function is emphasized by revealing that Jati is a "Banaspati" named "Randu" who in the story on page 422, 561 of Aroma Karsa is the guardian of Dwarapala/Alas Kalingga. Jati develops after page 562 and on page 563, the hero function is revealed that he was a Banaspati who was sacrificed to accompany and guard Malini (an incarnation of Puspa Karsa). The complexity of Jati Wesi becomes what Propp calls as special personage, that is, a character who does have a liaison function so that he can have more than one function.(Propp, 2009, p. 80).

This special personage is also found in Tanaya

Suma, who is also Malini, a child from Dwarpala. Suma is categorized into Princess function who finds love and gets help. Her role as Malini and Suma is in that scope. What is then interesting is that Suma and Malini are Puspa karsa. The function then changes to false hero and villain. Propp explains that the change in this function is a part of the notification form to synchronize one function to another as a motivation for the actions of other characters (Propp, 2009, pp. 71-73). Suma, Malini and Puspa Karsa's incarnation have different functions and roles because, if referring to Puspa Karsa's description on pages 419-422, she has a detrimental effect, while Suma's description is far from damaging effects. In the story, the contradictive function of Malini's impact as Puspa Karsa's incarnation with Suma is not shown any further, only in the last parts of the story.

These characters with more than one characterization in literature are usually called condensation characterizations. Freud explains this concept of condensation as combining several hidden thoughts in one single image or by piling up several thoughts in one image (Milner, 1992, p. 27). This study, thus, concludes that Aroma Karsa uses a special personage in the form of characters' traits condensation on the mechanism of the narrative function for the narration of the story. Aroma Karsa, which the story is centered on the search for Puspa Karsa, an orchid plant bound to the fictional legend of the flower goddess who is created and then transformed into a human being, is the main ecological (ecocentric) relation of the story.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

In the above explanation, it is known that the ecological aspects in the story have several functions, namely; fragrances, medication, mystics, cleanliness, and gender. These aspects are conveyed dominantly through the sensing plot towards the scent. The scent or aroma becomes something symbolic for the ecological aspects of the story. The symbolization dominantly follows the storyline through 4 characters; Jati Wesi, Tanaya Suma, Raras Prayangung, and Puspa Karsa. Four (4) characters who, when referring to the results of the analysis using Propp's narrative function theory, are having 5 spheres of action with 24 supporting narrative functions. Special personage in the form of characteristic condensation in two characters (Jati Wesi and Tanya Suma) is also performed as a mechanism of the narrative function of the story. The mechanism of the narrative function is centered on Puspa Karsa as the center of narration. Puspa Karsa becomes the symbol of the ecocentric narration in the novel Aroma Karsa.

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