

Ecocritical Reading of Land and Landscape in Muhammad Haji Salleh's *Rowing Down Two Rivers: An eco-consciousness approach*

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ABSTRACT

The Malaysian National Laureate Muhammad Haji Salleh has always been true to his green roots. Even when things are hard, he finds comfort and interest in Motherland's embrace. This paper is aimed to highlight the identity-land symbiotic interconnectedness in Muhammad Haji Salleh's selected poems through the lens of ecocriticism. In the selected poems we examined the concept of eco-consciousness with the purpose of to better understand how Muhammad Haji Salleh view the concept of personal identity as intrinsically tied to the natural world. Upon detailed analysis of the selected poems, it becomes evident that Muhammad Haji Salleh has never ceased preaching about the plight of the Malaysian land and landscape and the urgent need for worldwide attention. His poetry proves that he utilizes the land and landscape as an iconic form of aspiration and even ecocritically functional and through the application of the concept of eco-consciousness, the researchers conclude that while there are strong and deep connections between humans and their land and landscape, this does not change the fact that humans are more dependent towards nature than vice-versa. The researchers believe that reading more poems by Muhammad Haji Salleh and other Malaysian poets will produce a better and more thorough finding for future research on the topic of the inextricable connection between individual identity and the natural world. Thus, this study shows the implications of developing Malaysian ecocriticism as a means to read literature and to understand the significance of the land-identity attachment in the psyche of Malaysians.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, landscape, ecocentrism, interconnectedness, symbiotic, intrinsic.

INTRODUCTION

Ecocriticism as a branch in literary field serves as a looking glass which enables researcher to study closely the relationship between human and nature through literary pieces (Mishra, 2016: 168-170). James and Morel (2018: 355-365) in their article stated that ecocriticism, or the "study of human-nature relations in literature, film and other cultural expressions", has expanded and grown in terms of popularity and functionality, which places it in the frontlines of current trends in the study of literature in English. James and Morel (2018) also stated that the concept of ecocriticism is to idealize or lament nature that is present and preserved, or lost and destroyed forever. This research has opted for this green lens to study few selected poems by Muhammad Haji Salleh, a Malaysian National Laureate whose works mostly concern on the mutual relationship between humans and the natural world of environment. This multi award-winning National Laureate is a Ph.D. holder and is known nationally and internationally as a poet, critic, translator and editor. Known for his travels and wanders around the world as well, Muhammad Haji Salleh has written numerous poems and anthologies which revolve around the concept of nature, land, and landscapes.

Regardless of the fact that Muhammad Haji Salleh has not defined himself belonging to a particular literary movement; the themes he raises in his works are relevant to ecocriticism-based concepts such as the ecological identity, the human-land interconnectedness and ecological consciousness. In his poetry, constructing eco-images of land and landscape has been mainstreamed and centralized. To be precise, he represents the category of green land and landscape labelled as potential area of research via the employment of eco-images in his poetry. In that line, the current study, therefore, is aimed to negotiate the identity-land symbiotic interconnectedness in Muhammad Haji Salleh's selected poems through the lens of ecocriticism. The reviewed past research on his poetry shows clearly the originality of the current study in taking a fresh ecocritical reading of eco-images of land and landscape in Muhammad Haji Salleh's selected poems.

BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

According to Quayum (2020), majority Malaysian literature works revolve around few similar themes such as gender, ethnicity, multiculturalism, nationalism, transnationalism, hybridity, and diaspora. However, one thing noticeable when it comes to Malaysian Literature, despite of having different themes, the literary pieces are likely to contain the images of land and landscapes. These authors used nature as imagery, metaphor and at times, allegory to hide a deeper and much critical meaning and message. Few examples are highlighted here to prove the common pattern that emerges when it comes to Malaysian Literature. Shirley Lim is a well-known American author who was born in Malaysia whom specialized in poetry that includes Malaysia as the main setting in her various literature pieces. One of her famous poems is 'Mother', in which the poem talks about Lim's description and memory of her mother. The poem is rich with elements of nature as imagery and allegory in hiding her true feelings towards her own birth-mother. This can be seen in the stanza below:

*"In her grandfather's garden
Extraordinary fruit yearned:
Red-blossomed banana, yellow
Chempedak. She washed carefully
Eggshells to cap the spiky pandan.
Leached landscape bruised by sun,
He made it magical
With edible bushes"*

Another example of the use of land and landscape in Malaysian Literature in English would be a short story entitled "The Blood-Thirsty Vegetables". This short story is taken from the Book entitled "Malaysian Fables, Folk Tales and Legends" (2012) where it contains stories written by Malaysian authors under Silverfish Malaysian Classics. The tales written inside are the products of the authors who turn their imagination into words in this book, designated their ideas and storyline, thinking and alerting themselves to write and focus on Malay readers and audience as their target. This short story tells a story about a conflict between three vegetables which are Jagong, the maize-plant, Dagon, the liane, and Gadong, the jungle yam. The conflict started when these three vegetables had an argument on which is the most important vegetable that should exist to sustain mankind. The theme of this short story is that selfishness benefits nobody yet the author has done a creative and excellent job in using the elements of nature as the main characters in this story.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Looking at Muhammad Haji Salleh's numerous activities and accomplishments, many in-depth research works have been carried out up till the year 2022. Local and international academics continue to be interested in peeling back the layers of his writings and deciphering the meaning and idea behind them, much like an onion being peeled. This part of the study attempts to explore prior research that were

conducted based on Muhammad Haji Salleh's work, from the viewpoints of three distinct fields of study: postcolonial studies, historical studies, and as well as ecocritical studies.

Previous Postcolonial Studies on Muhammad Haji Salleh

In the 1990s, Malaysia started to evolve under the auspices of late-capitalism and globalisation. At the same time, the government began to understand the significance of English as an international language of technology, banking, and trade. In addition to continuing to implement policies that prioritise Malay and Bumiputera languages, the government had taken steps to increase the use of English at the national level. These steps include, among others, incorporating local anglophone literature into the English curriculum for secondary schools (Chin 2007, 268). In the past, only a few Malay authors created works in English, the most notable of whom being the poets Muhammad Haji Salleh (b. 1942) and Salleh Ben Joned (1941–2020) however things have been changing ever since with the birth of numerous Malay authors that produces English literary pieces such as Tash Aw (b. 1971), Zen Cho (b. 1986), and Hanna Alkaf (b. 1985).

Meanwhile, Yaapar (2013) has done extensive research on one of Muhammad Haji Salleh's poems, which is *Si Tenggang*. Yaapar's research is a critical examination of the character and vision of the poet in his attempt to establish his identity and perpetuate the Malay language and literary legacy, visible from his works and efforts since the 1970s. It is an exposure of the laureate's reasons behind his creation. These qualities perfectly encapsulate the post-colonial need for identity formation, which serves as the primary focus of this article's overall subject. An in-depth analysis of motivation, migration, and identity creation as a tactic to reclaim resources - both real and intangible - from the colonisers is provided by the "empire writes back" method. As a result, the discussion sheds critical light on the conditions and influences that shaped Muhammad Haji Salleh's works, as well as on the role that he played in maintaining the Malay language and literary heritage. Yaapar's 2013 research concluded that Salleh's works clearly reveal a range of initiatives, including the poet's quest for identification as an individual, the maintaining of the literary legacy, the search for Malay literary poetics, and the battle to defend the Malay language which is being gradually confined.

Historical Studies on Muhammad Haji Salleh

In 2010, Yahya, Wan, Barani, Forough; Termizi, Ali, Rahman & Abd in their paper entitled Cultural Identity Past and Present: Poetic Imagination of Muhammad Haji Salleh stated that poetry is a medium through which humans channel their feelings and attitudes. The reader travels through the domain of poetry and embarks on a journey in search of his own soul and identity as he is transported to the world of the poet, whether that place is real or a figment of imagination. Muhammad Haji Salleh's poetry properly depicts this symbolic image of life as a linear motion, portraying the past and present within the context of a nation's cultural and social history. The reader is provided with an understanding of Muhammad Haji Salleh's melancholy, the origins of which lie in his earlier experiences as a colonial subject, via the use of initiative, creativity, and synthesis in his poetic pictures. His split awareness, which he maintains between the present and the past, is of critical significance in determining the person and the cultural background. The character he creates in his poems is acutely aware that in order to discover his "self," he must first come to terms with his past. This research is an effort to examine Muhammad Haji Salleh's poetry via a logical and analytical evaluation of his poetic pictures.

Yahya (2000) in his research entitled *Si Tenggang's Homecoming: Negotiating Tradition and Modernity* attempted to comprehend how Muhammad Haji Salleh negotiates the experience of modernity by drawing on his travels to metropolitan areas in the West, as well as the reality of his own tradition, which he ultimately finds himself returning to. The *Travel Journals of Si Tenggang II* (1979), which is an example of such a negotiation between the traditional and the contemporary, is the main corpus of the research. The original Si Tenggang fled his family, travelled to faraway regions, amassed wealth, and returned home with it. He was unwilling to accept his poor roots though, and publicly rejected his elderly mother out of humiliation. Consequently, he died tragically as a result of his mother's curse. Meanwhile, the contemporary Si Tenggang II (a metaphor for Muhammad Haji Salleh himself) left Malaysia in 1970 to pursue a Ph.D. in the United States, and when he returned to his homeland in

1973, he was eager and ready to impart the riches of his experience by writing travel diaries and many poetic items.

Ecocritical Studies on Muhammad Haji Salleh

In a paper published by Zainal (2021), the study revolves around Tasik Chini, located in the state of Pahang and is Malaysia's second biggest significant natural lake comprised of freshwater. In his paper, Zainal presented how local poets such as Muhammad Haji Salleh and Zawiah Yahya have addressed the issues of Tasik Chini in their works. The poems included in this study are united by a pervasive sense of loss, which is coloured by sentimental romanticizations of the lake, fixed obsessions with paradise lost, and insistent imagery and laments of environmental destruction. These poems are also framed with intimations of the poets' personal familiarity and loving attention to the lake ecology, as well as the damaging effects that human-induced changes have had on the lake. As a result, the poems that were chosen serves as an impassioned call to action to rescue Lake Chini, furthering the mission of protecting the lake and bringing it back to life.

Kim presented a paper in Wuhan, China in 2008 on Visions of eco-apocalypse in selected Malaysian poetry in English: Cecil Rajendra and Muhammad Haji Salleh. The author explores the apocalyptic visions of the two Malaysian poets who write in English, with an emphasis on environmental calamity and environmental wastelands in the paper. Muhammad Haji Salleh's vision of a divided world is based on the slow loss of the Malay people's specific ecological expertise and tradition. Despite the fact that each poet examines the concept of the end of the world from their own unique angle, it is abundantly clear that both are deeply concerned about the effects that is quickly changing the Malaysian landscape would have on the country's ecology and culture. Overall, Salleh's image of the apocalypse is a powerful warning about the peril that will not only damage the natural world and societies that rely on its continuous existence, but also the distinctively Malay awareness of nature. The Malays, people who have inhabited the land and seascapes of the Malay Archipelago and lived traditionally by the rhythms of the natural world for centuries, and the question of Malay identity and heritage, which is inextricably linked with the identity of the earth, are the poetic preoccupations of Muhammad Haji Salleh.

RESEARCH MATERIALS & METHODOLOGY

Research Corpus- *Rowing Down Two Rivers*

This research on selected poems of Muhammad Haji Salleh is conducted by analyzing it through the green lens of ecocriticism. Muhammad Haji Salleh is a poet who writes in two different languages: Malay and English. The National Laureate attributes his bilingual writing proficiency to the discovery of dual "rivers" within him, flowing freely without any restriction. One river symbolizes his talent in writing and producing English poems, while the other river symbolizes his deep love towards his birth land, Malaysia, which enables him to write fine and great-quality Malay poems. *Rowing Down Two Rivers* is a book published in 2000 by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Publication. It is a collection of 148 Muhammad Haji Salleh's original English poems, along with translation of selected Malay poems. Researcher has chosen the book as the main corpus of this research and after careful consideration and analysis, researcher hand-picked six most suitable stanzas from six different poems that best illustrates and represents the concept of land and landscapes on par with the aim of this research article.

Theoretical Framework

Mazel (2001) in his book entitled *A Century of Early Ecocriticism* summarized that ecocriticism is "the study of literature as if the environment mattered" (p. 1-2). Ecocriticism is valued greatly as its emphasis is on the beauty, aesthetic and the power of nature to people and society around the world. The three concepts under the umbrella of ecocriticism are ecocentrism, interconnectedness, and ecological

consciousness. The practise of appreciating nature in its whole is ecocentrism. In 1990, it was founded that the notion of ecocentrism as a viable replacement to anthropocentrism promised remarkable alterations in the way that readers and researchers should grasp the nature of reality especially when it comes in the shape of literary works (Figueiredo & Marquesan, 2022). Ecocentrism brings forward the notion of nature being the centre and core and thus capable of standing on its own. Meanwhile, according to Lehtonen, Salonen, Cantell, and Riuttanen (2018), the concept of interconnectedness emphasises the importance of experiencing the world and people as interactive: acknowledging the interconnectedness of the environment and society, both locally and globally, and interpreting the larger reality as socially developed, as well as human nature and holistic understanding. In their study on murmuring, Siwi et al. (2022) apply an ecocriticism method, which investigates how literary works represent the interaction between people and environment. The findings of this study indicate that humans’ relationship with the natural world has a substantial effect on the ecosystem. Lastly, human ecological consciousness or environmental consciousness is the final concept of ecocentrism in this research. Gudmanian, Drotianko, & Shostak (2020) asserted that the major tool for overcoming destruction towards mother Earth is the transformation of society's consciousness towards its greening, with the aim of maximizing interconnection between mankind and natural world, the interconnectedness of material and spirituality as a genuine representation of our ethical responsibility and obligation towards the nature.

As noted previously, the theoretical framework of this research is built on ecocriticism, which acts as the primary analytical and interpretative tool for examining and interpreting selected poems of Muhammad Haji Salleh. This research applies the green lens to the study and analysis of nine selected poetries which are drawn from the main research corpus, *Rowing Down Two Rivers*. Upon careful evaluation and analysis, nine poems are selected that best show and depict the concept of land and landscapes in accordance with the research's objectives. The theme of land and landscapes in the chosen poem represents two distinct poetic devices: imagery and symbolism. Muhammad Haji Salleh's use of land and landscape as imagery and symbolism adds another depth of meaning to his exquisitely penned poems. Once researcher has chosen the poems to be analysed in this study, they are further categorised into three distinct categories that serve as the concepts for this study which are ecocentric and interconnected. The selected poems are analysed and classified according to their meanings and messages, which makes this research more organised and in-depth. In other words, this is a qualitative study involving textual analysis of a selected poem by Muhammad Haji Salleh through the use of ecocritical green lens.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Centralizing Landscape in Muhammad Haji Salleh’s poetry

In general, ecocentrism, as a concept, could be understood as the ecosphere is the mother and the core that births and sustains all living creatures. Ecosphere here could be further defined as the element in nature such as the flora, fauna, land, and landscapes. Due to this, experts agreed that another important value for ecocentrism is to value nature for nature’s own sake without having any other hidden motif; to appreciate and preserve nature not just because we are dependent and rely on it for survival. All stanzas are taken from the book *Rowing Down Two Rivers* which is the main corpus for this research. Upon detailed analysis of the selected poems, the table below summarised the findings:

	CONCEPT	POEMS	ECO-IMAGES	MESSAGES
	Centralisation of eco-	Shadow Play I (page 48)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Forest ● Leaves 	For the sake of sustaining the world, humans need to work on preserving the nature.

continued

1.	images of land and landscape	Night Rain (page 42)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Body of water (lake) ● Rain ● Leaves 	Mankind needs to rely on nature in order to survive in this world.
		Seed (page 52)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● River ● Earth 	Nature is the sole provider and sustains every living creature in this world.

More detailed discussions on the findings are as followed. In the poem entitled 'Shadow Play I', last stanza shares the idea of ecocentrism which can be traced in the following lines:

*In the forest leaves are heaped high
In the leaves a universe grows
In the universe there's forest
In the forest is the leaf (p.48)*

The lines above display that the poet presents a wonderful eco-image of the whole landscape that has been centralized. It is evident that he is stating that the leaves are the shell or the core to the whole universe which is filled with more leaves. The leaves here could be interpreted as the nature itself and in this poem, it is clear that even in the tiniest leaf holds the power to contain and sustains life. In order to sustain the universe, humans need to preserve the nature as the ecosystem will be disrupted if nature continues to be taken for granted.

Similarly, the poet's poem entitled "Night Rain" embodies the idea of centralizing the concept of landscape in the sense that it is the center of human hope and light as can be traced in the following lines of the poem:

*That extends from the darkness
To the periphery of consciousness -
I am crossing you in a ship of rain.
The patter on leaves gives voice to the movement,
Bringing me distant directions,
No shore
Twinkle at the end of sight,
On the dim fire of recognition. (p.42)*

The first tree lines of the poem could be interpreted as the darkness or hopelessness that is slowly lurking and creeping upon man's life. Deep down, everyone has their own fear and dark side, however, nobody is able to stop the darkness from approaching and spreading into one's life. The phrase 'ship of rain' could mean a vessel filled with tears, hardship and sorrow as the poet's believes that life is full of sadness. However, an element of nature is then being used in the stanza to signifies hope and light that is giving guidance to the ship even though the journey might seem endless with no light waiting at the end of the tunnel. Leaves which is classified as part of ecosphere symbolizes a ray of hope and it aligns with the whole concept of ecocentrism: mankind needs to rely on nature in order to survive in this world. Salleh has highlighted the same idea of ecocentrism in another poem entitled 'Seed' which reveals clearly the theme of centralized landscape in its human form of wishes and the natural forms of earth and the river as can be traced in the following lines of the poem:

*Let my sweat become your essence,
This water your life's river,
This Earth your space,
For I need you,
To mean for me. (p.52)*

In the stanza above, the poet conveys his wish for another person however in that wish, he included two elements of nature: river and Earth. These two elements are crucial and significant in every man’s life as there will be no life without them. This aligns with the theme of ecocentrism in which Mother Earth is the provider and sustains every living creature in this world. Further, these lines reflect Salleh’s sense of ecocentrism of the Malaysian landscape and reveals that human and nature are indivisible.

Human- Landscape Interconnection in Muhammad Haji Salleh’s Poetry

The term of interconnectedness is used in the current study to discuss the interlink between humans and their natural environment as manifested in Salleh’s selected poems. The researchers in the present study also attempt to look at how the natural environment could affect man-made concept such as home and dreams. The concept of interconnectedness remains mainstream throughout the poetry of Salleh whose green sense is rich and unique and deeply rooted in the Malaysian green landscape. Upon detailed analysis of the selected poems, the table below summarised the findings:

	CONCEPT	POEMS	ECO-IMAGES	MESSAGES
1.	Interconnection between humans and nature	No More the World (page 27)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bamboo ● <i>Cempaka</i> ● <i>Bidara</i> ● <i>Kenanga</i> 	Humans could not outrun nature even after death.
		A Heap of Words (page 33)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rivers ● Dunes 	Implementation of nature builds the identity and characteristics of the poet’s universe
		Welcome Home, Juita (page 35)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mango ● <i>Jambu</i> ● <i>Cempedak</i> ● <i>Langsat</i> 	Interconnectedness is applicable to man-made structure as well
		All along the Way (page 37)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nature 	Nature has raised him, helped him grow and at the same time, let him down.

His poems reflect his love and attachment to the green landscape of his homeland as can be traced clearly in the following excerpt of his poem entitled ‘No More the World’:

*Goodbye, my grandmother,
 You are cared for by your goodness,
 Looked on by your children and descendants who oversee your journey.
 The bamboo and the cempaka,
 The bidara and kenanga flowers (p.27)*

The words in the stanza above reveal the sense of sorrow yet bittersweet tone as the poet is expressing his grief upon the passing of his grandmother. The mentioning of trees and flowers as he describes his grandmother brought upon sense of paradise and in a sense, helps the readers to imagine grandmother as a kind, sweet, and delicate person who has endless love towards the Mother Earth. It was also stated in the stanza that in the end grandmother was buried which is a soft reminder for us readers that in the end, we will all return to where we came from, the soil. Therefore, it is evident that the concept of interconnectedness is very glaring in this stanza as humans could not escape from nature even after death. Similarly, the poet further expresses his sense of interconnectedness in the poem entitled ‘A Heap of Words’:

*Painted by the semantic spread
Facades of speech and the heart of words
All collected from time's shallow rivers
Soaked in the poet's songs
Or stranded on history's dunes.
Language constructs world,
Arranging itself
And giving hints of experience. (p.33)*

The above lines expose that the poet's universe is made up by words that are deeply rooted in his natural environment of Malaysian landscape to an extent that those words shaped and brought meaning to the entire world. Without words, the poet would be unable to describe and tell his story however, the poet uses images of land and landscape such as 'shallow rivers' and 'dunes of history' in order to provide elements of imagery to his poem and his universe. The shallowness of the river and the vast dunes of history helps the readers to imagine the world created by the poet and at the same time, to understand the underlying message of the poem. Ultimately, the implementation of nature in this stanza builds the identity and characteristics of the poet's universe which aligns with the concept of interconnectedness. Furthermore, Salleh's poem entitled 'Welcome Home, Juita' includes the evidence of human-landscape interrelationship as can be traced clearly in the following lines of the poem

*This is our home,
A modest space,
But with good neighbours,
Therefore, it is as wide as a village.
You will grow up in the yard,
Under the mango's shade,
Picking jambus in the rainy season,
Caring and sacking the little cempedak,
And collecting the fallen langsat. (p.35)*

The above lines reveal Salleh's close attachment and rootedness to the landscape of his homeland where he was born and grew up as a true child of nature. The phrases 'you will grow up in the yard', 'under the mango's shade's', 'picking jambus in rainy seasons' evoke that humans and nature are closely interlinked and they are inseparable and interrelated. From the stanza above, we can see that Salleh welcomes a girl, presumably his daughter, to the comfort and sanctuary of their home. He describes the home as modest yet by having good neighbours around, it made their home feel as wide and free as the whole village. The presence of fruit trees in their yard gave us readers a sense of welcoming and comfort which is what mother nature has been all these whiles. These fruit trees gave the home a personality or characters which is what interconnectedness is all about. It is clear that the concept of interconnectedness is not only applicable to living things however, to man-made structure as well. Last but not least, the concept of interconnectedness is reflected in the poem entitled 'All along the Way', third stanza, page 37:

*All along the way nature distances itself
To deflate and inflate me
Through this silent and cold
Beauty at the end of the world. (p.37)*

The persona in the stanza above tell us readers that the Mother Earth has been responsible in raising him, helped him grow and at the same time, put him down. The phrase deflates and inflates could be interpreted as the persona's emotion that goes up and down, according to what nature is putting him through. Persona believes that the natural environment is responsible and affecting his mood. The last two lines signify the loneliness and passing of beauty that came along with old age. It is perhaps similar and connected with how our Mother Earth is getting sick and old day by day and is left with only little of its beauty to be admired by mankind.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of Muhammad Haji Salleh's poetry shows that he utilizes the land and landscape as an iconic form of aspiration and even ecocritically functional. The theoretical framework employed in this study is derived from the ecocritical theory of reading literature, and it is termed as an ecocritical framework as a new lens for analyzing eco-images in literary studies, a fresh perspective to Malaysian literature and a non-western viewpoint for reading Salleh's poetry. Based on this proposed framework and the analysis that has been carried out in the previous three chapters, clarifies how Muhammad Haji Salleh uses the land and landscapes as ecocritically functioning elements in his poetry by deconstructing the three facets. Based on evidence of how beautiful and fascinating nature is, how powerful and capable nature is, and how much nature has provided for mankind, the researcher concludes that elements of nature in these selected poems by Muhammad Haji Salleh are indeed ecocritically functional. Compared to other Malaysian writers, Salleh uses the land and landscape as an ecocritically functional element in the selected poems by embracing the idea of ecocentricity, which centralises rather than marginalises nature.

Besides, upon examining and applying the concept of interconnectivity, the researcher concludes that while there are connections between humans and nature, this does not change the fact that humans depend on nature more than nature ever does. The word "interconnected" here simply emphasises the fact that nature is a component of everything around us, including ourselves and in the decisions we make. Understanding this fact puts us to be more modest in God's cosmos and to realise our dependence on the natural world. We are made of clay and, in due course, shall return to the soil. Meanwhile, serves as a reminder that we truly exist among nature. Muhammad Haji Salleh's conviction in the concept of interconnection is evident in his want and hope for his own daughter to develop respect and have a close bond with nature. The concept of nature as home highlights the social and physical bond that exists between humans and Mother Earth. Finally, the third poem demonstrates the unity of man and nature by pointing out how similar our conduct and instincts are to those of the natural world. The last poem also emphasises the emotional bond we have with the planet by reminding us of the many lessons we may absorb and apply from nature if we are humble enough to ask Mother Earth for guidance.

The themes Muhammad Haji Salleh addresses in his writings are pertinent to ecocriticism-based ideas like the ecological identity, and the interconnectedness of humans and land, even though he has never claimed or identified himself as a member of any particular literary movement. He has mainstreamed and centralised the creation of eco-images of land and landscape in his poems. For future research, the same kind of research and framework can be replicated to examine how other Malaysian poets who use land and landscape to further their agendas and explore how they utilize them in their own ways. In addition to that, the ecocritical framework used in this study can be applied to examine the use of eco-images in Malaysian literary forms such as novels and dramas. Furthermore, since the field of ecocriticism is still quite new in Malaysia, it is researcher's hope that this work will be the first footstep and a research catalyst towards opening the field of ecocriticism in the southeast Asia and Malaysian literary academics.

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