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## AN ETHOLOGICAL-HYDROGRAPHIC READING OF THE ECOLOGICAL LITERACIES OF SELECTED PHILIPPINE ECOPOEMS IN ENGLISH

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### Abstract

This paper examines five Philippine ecopoems written in English published in the anthology “Sustaining the Archipelago: An Anthology of Philippine Ecopoetry” (2017). It provides special emphasis on the ecopoems dealing with animal representations, behavioral processes, and water shedding light on their agencies and symbolic representations from the purview of material ecocriticism. The ethological approach to the ecopoems displays the loquacious nature of the consciousness of the animals. This is a means of highlighting the dynamism of their orientations and dispositions that can also be instrumental in framing the ecologies of connections and disconnections transpiring within the human and non-human realms. The hydrographic reading of the poems captures how the ecocritical tendencies of the poets provide a representation and poetic appraisal of the ecological, symbolic, and cultural significance of water in the Philippine ecopoetic locale. These readings offer an intensified and specific view of the intricacies of the non-human entities that also comprise the layers and factions of life in the biosphere. The analysis also considered the ecological literacies of the poets as they give their readers an understanding of the particularities of our biology. This paper leans on the ideas of material ecocriticism expounded by Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino.

**Keywords:** ecocriticism, ecological literacy, ecopoetry, ethology, hydrography

### Introduction

In the late eighties and nineties, a young revisionist critical trend, movement, and school of thought called “ecocriticism” rose to prominence, modifying the way places, settings, and environments are viewed and scrutinized in literary and cultural studies (Paswan, 2019). Echoing Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) in their landmark anthology titled “The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology”, ecocriticism is a means of “greening” the approaches used in the study of literature (p. xviii). Expanding our post-structuralist notions of worlds and



environments, literary worlds and imaginations become anchored on various ecological concerns such as geography, topography, environmental justice, flora and fauna, climate change, biological relations and processes, animal discourse, natural occurrences and resources, and even affections and repulsions toward places brought by disasters, calamities, the perils of anthropocentrism, and environmental degradation. Literature becomes highly critical of the creation and sustenance of places and spaces and how they are shaped by various ecological concerns and factors. Such a hallmark is regarded to be trans-disciplinary in nature as literature becomes a suitable tool for perusing all kinds of environment be it economic, social, political, religious, racial, historical, and psychological (Parashar, 2020). Grounded on these theoretical perspectives, literature becomes a remarkable purveyor of the twists and turns taking place in the biosphere, markedly eroding the boundaries between the cultural and natural (Clark, 2019). With ecocriticism progressively disclosing the union of opposing vistas between the anthropocentric and ecocentric domains, we can espouse the image of literature as a partaker and referent to the various issues and discourses affecting the environment (Asenath & Santhanalakshmi, 2021). This is the reason why ecocriticism renders literature a pedagogical tool, raising one's awareness about the environment and the attendant issues plaguing it.

One of the specific genres that partakes in this discourse is ecopoetry, a multifaceted genre that places a premium on the environment and its concomitant complexities. A part of its multifarious identity is the understanding and fellow feeling that it gives to all living creatures, the platform and voice that it provides to nature and its natural resources. In "Poets Rooted in Nature: An Ecopoetry Anthology", Chen et al. (2024) further break down this delineation of ecopoetry stating that it can still be operationally understood perceptively from the vantage points of different themes ranging from the appreciation of nature, the generation of ecological cognizance, the safeguarding of environmental justice, to the discourse on sustainability and the current crises brought by the consequences of anthropocentrism (p. 2). For these themes to be visible in print, ecopoetry must be strongly foregrounded by a writer's awareness of the environment, which in ecocritical discourse is called "ecological literacy."

Nourished by interdisciplinary perspectives, ecological literacy espouses systems thinking and holism, making them cardinal components in understanding and advancing the discourses of environmental sustainability (Murray & Poto, 2024). The term "literacy" pertains to the competence and proficiency that one can gain from a range of activities that enhance one's understanding of the issues and problems bombarding the environment. It is concerned with espousing an affectivity that can advance visible and distinctive possibilities teeming with affordances that speak of the conditions of the environment or even save the environment from the problems continuously destroying it. For this to transpire, it entails entering a profound relationship with places and their attendant constituents with ecological literacy, believing that places are entities to be studied, to study with, and learn from. It is this liaison that is integral to the concept of ecological literacy (Woods et al., 2024).

Augmented by the foregoing themes and issues addressed in ecopoetry, this genre offers possible ways for its readers to experience the biosphere—the very surface of the earth where all life exists, the sum of all ecosystems (National

Geographic Education, 2025). It shows how the art of poetry can be animated by the abundance of diverse ecological moods, resulting in the diversity of environmental representations captured in the pages of the ecopoem. In relation to this, ecopoetry also allows its readers to comprehend and engage the identified and alien issues pertaining to the environment. This engagement is the reason why it is believed that ecopoetry brings us into the intricate sphere of the environment itself, letting us experience it on both comprehensive and micro levels. It is a genre that allows us to better understand the elaborate and intricate workings of our biology and ecology (Chua, 2017). Readers see that this genre of poetry is encompassed by a range of activities and outcomes which include: expanded knowledge about environmental issues and concepts, cognitive and socio-emotional way of analyzing the position of mankind in the modification of the environment together with their role in countering the damages and repairing the environment, interest in knowing about the importance of developing responsible behaviors in safeguarding the environment through critical systems thinking and collaborative communication leading to a more sustainable community (Kaya & Elster, 2019).

According to Frantz et al. (2025) in “Ecocentrism vs. Anthropocentrism: To the Core of the Dilemma to Overcome It”, anthropocentrism is cemented at the core of moral concern dominating logos since the era of modernity, with it situating humanity as the principal agent of value, axioms, and moral reasoning. This anthropocentric paradigm became the central impetus for understanding environmental issues and problems such as pollution, environmental degradation, and disasters (p. 449). By contrast, the ecocentric stance posited by ecopoetry departs from the strictures of the human perspective, placing a premium on moral consideration of ecosystems. This is a foundational viewpoint that must be underscored in ecopoetry as it lays down the platform for accentuating the intrinsic worth of all living creatures as well as the non-living components of nature. It espouses a biocentric view that acknowledges the value of living and non-living entities cognizant of their right to exist separately outside of the human domain (Frantz et al., 2025). This is a means of confirming that ecocriticism is characterized by a special kind of “intellectual hybridity” navigating the spaces among the scientific, empirical, and ideographic (Clark, 2019).

This paper also stands as a response to the remark and challenge advanced by the ecocritical scholar Timothy Clark (2019), in which he said that the environment is a challenge in ecocritical discourse because it is effectively everything (p. 111). The broadness of this everything is a challenge that is continuously being specified by ecocritical scholars and critics. This is also the reason why we align the ecocritical tendencies espoused in this paper with the positions upheld by material ecocriticism. Invoking the definition of material ecocriticism posited by Iovino and Oppermann (2014) in the book “Material Ecocriticism”, material ecocriticism is defined as the ways and logos in which material forms such as living bodies, biological entities, organisms, landscapes, organic and inorganic matters, toxic substances, chemicals and natural things interrelate with each other and with the human or anthropocentric domain.

The interrelation that takes place is an important element to note in material ecocriticism as it is instrumental in the generation of discourses and meanings that can crystallize into perceptive and variable affective stories about the environment (p. 7). The framework of material ecocriticism also provides the avenue to

reimagine and redefine literature as an ecological undertaking. In this literary ecological imagination, human perspective is placed with an encounter with the narrative agencies of non-living entities, animals, and matters generating material-discursive phenomena in the forms of literature and other cultural creations, including literary criticism (Iovino & Oppermann 2014). The result is a biocentric view that clearly discloses the ecocritical dictum that the stories of the human and non-human domains are clearly connected to each other. Such is the connection that is also destabilized by the workings and perils of anthropocentrism and the unpredictability of the consequences of ecocentrism.

### ***Animalia in ecocriticism: The ethological mode***

Veering away from the premium given to humans and anthropocentric stances and discourses, animals and animality operate as major paradigms in ecocritical studies. This falls within the ambit of ethology, a specific branch of zoology, referring to the scientific study of animal behaviors in their natural conditions. With the Philippines possessing a diverse array of both flora and fauna, animals and their agencies also play a big role when it comes to actively shaping the environment, fostering the discourse on ethical sensibilities toward the non-human domain. A part of the area that must be seriously scrutinized is the interaction between humans and non-animals, illustrating how humans affect animal lives, their agencies and representations, and how culture itself is interwoven in the stories and lives of such organisms. In this light, our examination of ethological representations in ecopoetry captures how an organism perceives and shapes the world. We attempt to provide an examination of how animals, by virtue of their ethology, serve as active participants in their environments, going beyond mere passive representations. In order to achieve this, ecocritical thought considers the actuality of animals – how they are complex, intricate biological species armed with their own history, geography, and morphology (Chaudhuri & Hughes, 2014). Animal discourse is concerned with the actuality of such connections and interconnections as well as the meanings that can be generated from the process (Kashlan, 2016).

Responding to the broadness of the animal discourse in ecocritical scholarship posited by Slovic (2014), the analysis is also aligned with the tradition in environmental humanities called “Critical Animal Studies.” In consonance with the foregoing, our ethological analysis of the ecopoems explores the concepts of humans and animals and their emplacement in ecocritical discourse with emphasis on the material and emblematic offshoots of their representations. The hybridity that such analysis offers is vital in understanding how ecocriticism paves the way for a positive and successful cross-disciplinary collaboration between literature and natural sciences (Garrard & Gordanpour, 2025).

### ***Aqua in ecocriticism: The hydrographic mode***

With the Philippines being engulfed by principal bodies of water such as bays, gulfs, seas, rivers, and lakes, we can also view water as a potent paradigm in Philippine ecopoetry. Ecopoetic discourse sees it as emblematically and substantially associated with almost all facets of life (Khalil, 2024). According to Gosselin and Bartoli (2022), the fundamental categories that have structured the horizon of human action are now shaken by other-than-human existents with whom we share a common condition (p. 15). Water is one of the earthly elements

that partakes in this discourse. Water becomes a resource that oscillates between the material and immaterial, concrete and symbolic domains of life. It becomes a powerful medium and an animate nonhuman entity with its agency operating on both topophilic, biophilic, and topophobic heights—a means of asserting how its fluidic nature both yields sustenance, regeneration, and destruction.

We shed light on how water becomes a natural authenticating element and tendency in ecopoetry, leaving various imprints in the individual and collective identity of humans. We show how water reconceptualizes and alters its powerful agentiality in various ways possible. Examined in the light of ecological literacy, water is not just a muted entity, as mentioned by Latour (2008). As a critical retort to this assertion, water can be regarded as a loquacious character on its own in ecocritical discourse. This is a departure from such traditional representations. From the ecopoetic perspective, representations and re-representations of water are means of generating new approaches concerning the nature of our reality and our consumption and engagement of it. This is made possible with the aid of material ecocriticism as seen in the deepening of the meaning of the entanglement between the human domain and water as living and animated matter (Khalil, 2024).

As an outcome of this perspective, water can also be seen as imbued with power as it becomes a vocal element that can create novel configurations and compositions of entanglements between the human and water domain, inspiring new forms of action, imbuing people with a sense of responsibility and duty towards it. This entails knowing its nourishing and destructive capacities as one of the principal elements creating the environment.

## **Method**

In this paper, we analyzed five poems taken from the anthology “Sustaining the Archipelago: An Anthology of Philippine Ecopoetry” (2017). We used the critical research design in intellectualizing the respective ecological literacies of the poems, disclosing how they gave credence to the assumptions of ethology and hydrography in ecocritical thought. Published by the University of Santo Tomas Publishing House and edited by the environmental humanities and Philippine ecocritical scholar Rina Garcia Chua, the collection comprises 151 poems from over 80 poets clustered in various themes that affirm the fluidity and variability of the trajectory of ecocriticism in the Philippines. The poems are thematically organized in a manner that best captures the richness of ecocritical discourse in the Philippines. The anthology employs places, flora and fauna, disasters, species, environmental justice, and environmental disasters as thematic guideposts.

The first three ecopoems analyzed in this paper are heavily laced with animal references. These poems are “Who Mourns the Death of Ants?” by Myrna Peña Reyes, “Din and the Dugong” by Arnold O. Aldaba, and “Octopus” by Joel Donato Jacob. The rest are ecopoems that foreground the distinct agentiality of water. These poems include “Of Fish Ponds and Rivers” by Edgar B. Maranan and “Oh, Naga’s River” by Jay Salvosa. As ecoliterate works, they all convey their own respective awareness of their environments. This is the ecocritical mindfulness that enabled them to place themselves in their own distinctive environments and talk about the problems and issues affecting the connections and disconnections between nature and culture.

In our ecocritical analysis, we considered the ecological literacy and affinity of the ecopoet and how it enabled him or her to present and dissect the environment and its concomitant issues and problems surrounding their environments. The ecocritical profiles of the ecopoets are mentioned in the analysis. Their ecoliterate leanings highlight the different occurrences, players, movers, and relationships being formed and shaped in the environment. The ecoliterate foreground of ecopoetry can be utilized as a critical tool to understand the intricacies and convolutions of the local environment. We use the ecological literacies of the ecopoems as a springboard to understand the complexities of their ethological and hydrographic foregrounds, crystallizing into various representations and reimaginings of animal and water agencies in ecopoetry.

These modes were specifically chosen with reference to the strong hydrographic and ethological leanings of the ecopoems published in the anthology. The analysis is an attempt to ecocritically intellectualize waters and animals as animating propensities and important elemental guideposts to consider in the reading of Philippine ecopoetry. The analysis also relates to the intellectual hybridity espoused by the ecocritical movement, threading the spaces among the scientific, empirical, humanistic, and ideographic, disclosing how literature can truly go across professions and disciplines. (Clark, 2019). It is also an attempt to decenter the human and anthropocentric means of looking at the hydrographies and ethologies enlivening the environment as reflected in ecopoetry. It is in this regard that ecopoetry reveals how literature becomes an instance of “storied matter” and “intra-action,” with the former showing how physical matters can be purveyors of cultural history and ecological thought (Srihari & Rao, 2021).

## **Findings and Discussion**

### ***Ethological ecopoetry: Animals and their communicative dispositions***

The Filipino American ecopoet Myrna Peña Reyes, known for her ecopoem “Hidden Lakes, Secret Rivers (The World of an Oregon Poet)”, is famous for using the English language in contending the first world environmental domain using her experiences and perspectives as someone who came from the third world. In her ecoliterate poems dealing with animals and other creatures in the environment, Reyes is ethologically literate as seen in the ecopoem titled “Who Mourns the Death of Ants?” The poem captures the particular scientific attributes of the ants being classified under the hymenopterous group in entomology—“neither monogamous nor adulterous” (Reyes, 2017, p. 32). As the poet further reflects on their specific ethological capacities and mindful of how she treats ants as well, Reyes praises their industriousness and their specific disposition as one of the copious and lavish insects in the environment. These lines frame this particular ethological mode of the poem:

I spray-bomb, squash and drown,  
Bold roconnoiterers who venture far  
not for pleasure or adventure  
(sexless colonial hymenopterous),  
but to procure provisions

for their dwindling ganary;  
or perhaps to spot another site  
to move their overcrowding formicary? (p. 32)

The poem is also noted for how the poet ponders how the ants will soon perform their ethology of being decomposers with them feeding on organic waste such as dead bodies (Montreal Space for Life, 2024). This ecoliterate affinity of Reyes serves as a specific springboard to engage how both nature and culture can coalesce in recognition of their own teleologies—the teleology of living and expiring on the part of man, and the teleology of ants serving as environmental decomposers, augmenting how ecocriticism syllogistically makes sense of the death of mankind as captured in these lines:

Who notes their non-return,  
sends out rescue squads?  
What guardian, sibling, friend  
sheds lachrymose formic  
for scouts heroic?  
Who guards their memory?  
Who goes to ant heaven,  
hell, or purgatory?

And finally, when I am old,  
Bedridden, all alone,  
what forms will retribution take  
when they exact revenge on me?  
And who's to say  
I shouldn't worry? (p. 32)

The genuine labor of the subjects conveys the ethology that signals ecological work and health. With them working on soils and sediments, we see how the biosphere benefits from their actions. These include the legitimate work of enabling decomposition, helping plants to survive by gathering seeds, and making possible the circulation of rainwater. The material ecocritical background of the poem encapsulates smaller-life forms and their ethological competence. The representation of ants in this ecopoem is a testament to material ecocriticism's emphasis on agentic materialities, which reveals that human and non-human discourses are mutually constitutive.

The ecopoem titled “Din and the Dugong” by Arnold O. Aldaba highlights the ethology of a large marine mammal called the “sea cow” or prominently known as the “dugong.” The ecological literacy of Aldaba stems from the fact that he is an environmentalist. He was a recipient of the Masigasig Award from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for his efforts in linking the environmental activities and programs of Landbank with the causes of DENR. Stirred by his ecoliteracy, this ecopoem is a declaration of his commitment to be one with nature and his cognizance of how his special chemistry with nature has been interrupted by various “entanglements, mesh and gill nets, loss and degradation, and collision with boats” (p. 110). Based on the title, the poem speaks

of the subject's friendship with the dugong regarded for its friendly and charismatic disposition. Aldaba knows how to perfectly render the dugong as the emblem of nature's diversity and beauty. It is because of this representation that the subject respectfully learned how to establish a friendship with the dugong. The first lines of the poem emblematically declare the wonderful and potent ethology of the dugong as a wonder of nature. Aldaba recognizes this ethology at play when he makes the subject of his poem declare the special linkage with the dugong:

On a distant island keeps a secret,  
friendship with the rarest, faintest,  
the warm waters knowing no limits.  
Adventures uncovered the mystery  
and natural diversity of the home.  
Exposing the plight in harmony  
with nature for centuries, until now (p. 110).

The ethological mode of representation is evident in these lines from the poem. The lines declare the dugong's ethology with them engaged in adventures resulting in them to significantly contribute to the wonders of marine biodiversity. The adventures of the dugong are a testament to how important their role in the ecosystem is. They are basically known as ecosystem engineers (International Fund for Animal Welfare, 2023). Implicit in these lines is the pronouncement of the ethology that their behaviors are important in the maintenance of seagrass beds as they control the growth of plants. The wonder of their ethology is seen in how this action helps a wide array of sea species that depend on seagrass for sustenance and shelter. The dugong "exposes their plight in harmony with nature for centuries, until now" (p. 110). With them immersed in their adventures, we can also extract from the poem the fact that dugongs are outstandingly helpful in contributing to the totality of the well-being of the planet.

In a more scientific sense, dugongs are known for sequestering carbon necessary for the health of the planet (International Fund for Animal Welfare, 2023). The seagrass meadows that dugongs consume and maintain are prominent for effectively securing and storing carbon. The poem also affirms the intelligence that can be viewed as part and parcel of the dugong. This is an affirmation of the truth that dugongs are friendly and intelligent creatures with long memories (International Fund for Animal Welfare, 2023). The poem ethologically pronounces this clear and scientific fact pertaining to the dugongs. With them being intelligent creatures, the dugongs are also literate enough to know how anthropocentric activities also work, destroying the image of a perfect ecology.

The Anthropocene is a dynamic concept shaping the environment in various ways. In "Anthropocentric Attitudes in Modern Society", Gribben and Fagan (2016) see the Anthropocene as a powerful impetus yet free system that propels environmental degradation (p. 2). As a concept in ecocriticism, the anthropocentric discourse recognizes the freedom to commune with nature in the Anthropocene. Joel Donato Jacob recognizes this in his poem titled "Octopus." He is the author of "Wing of the Locust"—an environmentally conscious work and one that promotes love for nature as seen in the story of Tuan and his curvy voyage towards becoming a "*mambabarang*" or a malevolent sorcerer. The poem "Octopus" is ecologically

literate in the sense that it reveals fertile ideas that can be used to understand what the Anthropocene in ecocriticism is. This eco-poem specifically discloses the ethology of an octopus and how, from this representation, one can be flexible and pliant enough to immerse oneself in spaces and places. In the first lines of the poem, Jacob pronounces the peculiar ethology of an octopus, ruminating and even establishing a special linkage with this unique feature of the said marine creature. We can see Jacob affirming this in these lines from the poem:

Had you and I been octopi,  
my eyes would look upon that form  
and wonder, “how does it move  
when sinews are shackled  
by an imprisoned shell?”  
It is not aloft among its airs,  
rather resists upon ground  
for its gait and gyrations (p. 124).

Based on these reflections from the speaker of the poem, we can see how he has been enticed by the unique attributes of an octopus. From these lines, we can see their attributes made possible by their ethology as invertebrates. The lines declare the fact that they have no bones. A result of this is the possession of soft bodies. These ecoliterate lines assert that an octopus’s soft body can specifically and even impossibly fit into tiny crannies and nooks, provided that the holes are not smaller than the hard parts of its body. They are regarded as clever and sensible animals. They can manipulate rocks, open clamshells, and even potently dismantle the filtration mechanisms of an aquarium tank. These unique features of the octopus can also echo the activities and peculiar values system of anthropocentrism. Connecting these ideas with human-cultural ideologies, these are the features that also lay down the factors leading to environmental degradation and deprivation, mass destruction and extinction of nonhuman species, and maltreatment of enslaved animals. The freedom of the octopus affirms the freedom and flexibility that humans can have in engaging such activities.

The poem also becomes noteworthy for advancing a certain didactic cause when it comes to protecting the environment. Similar to the titular octopi, the poem declares we are free, fully capable of transformation, form, texture, and pigmentation (p. 124). This is an affirmation that we are also the anthropocentric instruments of change. The ethology of fitting can only happen if we are truly concerned about the health and welfare of our environment, resulting in the absence of toxic waste, pesticides, contaminants, and other capitalistic incursions. The notion of fitting moves in accordance with the environmental undertakings of cleaning the environment, prevention of pollution, ensuring chemical safety, protecting waterways, and enforcing the needed environmental laws. Jacob declares this reminder in the last lines of the poem. It is from here that we can see how the poem also has a clear didactic bent to it, giving the reminder that:

We do not destroy and remake  
where we cannot fit,  
because we can take all

of our selves past  
an eye of needle or storm (p. 124).

The representation of culture in this poem is distinctly ecoliterate. The lines show that the subjects are aware of the dual role that they can play in the biosphere. We can see here the imaging of culture as a faction that can be discerning and sensitive. The octopi in the poem and their ethological qualities also pave the way for the representation of humans participating in the discourse on the common good. The lines that teach readers how human and non-human interrelationships shape the environment can lead to the creation of sustainable communities in the biosphere.

***Hydrographic ecopoetry: The potent representations of water***

Banking on the concept of dark ecology pertaining to our dark and depressing experiences of the environment, rendering the environment perilous (Morton, 2016), we can also say that there also exists a bright kind of ecology, which is made possible in Edgar B. Maranan's poem titled "Of fish ponds and a river." In this poem, the dominant authenticating tendency is the hydrographic as it brings into the limelight the wonder and problem of the floods in the city of Malabon in the National Capital Region of the Philippines. Looking at its terrain, Malabon is prominent for being a flood-prone area because of its flat and low-lying landscape. Maranan declares his familiarity with the place, resulting in these lines in the poem to be evidently place-mutualistic in nature and outlook. The place and subject's experience with the place are bright and positive, making them count nature's cost:

The flood day came to Malabon, ponds and river rose  
God-like, offering the miracle of fish let loose upon  
a hungry land, while the owners counted nature's cost.

It was a once-in-ages feast of nets and basket traps,  
the hunger thinning out as folks scrambled for the fish (p. 37).

In these lines, it becomes evident that nature becomes the provider. The hydrographic element is both nourishing and destructive. The nourishing effect is seen in how the people enjoyed the fish summoned by nature, with Malabon City being crisscrossed with fishponds. The poem's hydrographic tendency reveals how the people are clearly attached to the history and practice in the place. The representation of the water can be perceived to be positive in outlook, with fishponds overflowing their banks. Fishes became free for all folks of the city as they chased these fish in the shallow waters of the backyard. However, the presence of dark ecology is still present in these rising waters of the city of Malabon. This is the reason why the representation of the waters as seen in the poem's hydrographic tendency is still representative of disasters. This is the reason why Malabon can also be the subject of one's aversion. With the ponds and rivers in Malabon described as "God-like" every time their waters will rise, we can see that the poem also clearly pronounces water's unique agency and how its fluidic nature can sustain, nourish, and destroy:

And how the God of time and tides made poor men glad  
that week of mercy floods, the ponds turned into seas  
where the water swirled, then surged, and eddied  
as though pristine, with the shit wiped off the deluged earth (p. 37).

From these lines from Maranan's poem, we see the affirmation of the truth of experiencing the dark setup of ecology. The Philippines is prone to natural disasters. The reason for this is the location of the Philippines being close to the equator and the Pacific Ring of Fire (Chua, 2015). With tragedies, casualties, and survival chronicled in ecopoetry, it can become the means to understand the history of disasters, as disasters are not just events that destroy places, spaces, and lives in specific locales. When speaking of disasters, we have to recognize the truth of dark ecology posited by Morton (2016). It is in dark ecology where we can see that ecological literature is enmeshed in pain, and in turn, is the one that also gives pain, resulting in the people being critical about their actions, rather than serving as only a futile and unproductive eyewitness to despair and destruction (p. 55). From these ideas, we can see that the interrelation of ecological thought reaches even the point of suicide on the part of the people who were able to experience nature's apocalyptic powers. Philippine environmentalisms have fueled and tempered the various experiences that come from natural disasters and catastrophes.

The poem "Oh, Naga's River" by Jay Salvosa is an example of an ecopoem that also clearly engages ecopoetic hydrography. Jay Salvosa is a teacher at Ateneo de Naga University and is also the head of the Ateneo Literary Association. As an ecopoet, the river of Naga in the province of Camarines Sur is a principal subject of his poetry. "Oh, Naga's River" is a poem that shows the problems plaguing its waters. The geographical, spatial, and hydrographic foregrounds of the ecopoem convey and articulate the complexities and problems particular to the materialities of anthropocentric survival and ecologies. As someone who advocates for the rehabilitation of the Naga River, Salvosa remarkably shows how the anthropocentric forces in the poem destroy the waters of the river. The river is known for prominently teeming with aquatic resources, with the people enjoying the resources given to them by the river. This view of the river was captured by the ecoliterate disposition of Salvosa. He was able to capture its regard and yearning for the unpolluted Edenic past of the river. This mythic regard for the river is a clear romantic animating tendency. With its wonderful resources sustaining the people of Naga, the river is integral to the place's cultural and historical growth (Cities Initiative Development for Asia, 2020). It is from here that the ecoliterate speaker in the poem proclaims the wonderful presence of the river in reference to how the people regarded the river on sacred and fervent grounds. The poem is evidently romantic as it is charged with emotionalism, yearning for the past, and nostalgia. On the part of the poem's speaker, this assertion is where we see the truths of topophilia and place-mutualism. The former discloses the speaker's love and special affinity with the place; the latter refers to connection, a beneficial kind of interaction between and among species. To quote these ecoliterate lines from Salvosa's poem:

There I dare to dream  
of crystal green—between sparse memories of a silken promise:  
this is where I shed a layer, where I defy the increasing dearth  
of our kin; the cycle of life shall go on & on & on & on & (p. 56).

From Salvosa's ecoliterate disposition, we can underscore the fact that place and space evidently become the ecocritical concepts that animate his work. In ecocriticism, the place or space being occupied by the subject can pertain to nature or earth itself. Place is regarded as the ecological abode of the self (Fritjof, 2009). We can also bring in what Wooltorton et al. (2020) said regarding place and what the regard to this concept can do to a person's ecological literacy. Having a sense of place is synonymous with the experience of revitalization (Wooltorton et al., 2020). It can revitalize not just one's relationship with the environment but also with the general way of life in a particular community or nation at large. This reference to the unification of the land is present in the poem of Salvosa. The poem becomes the perfect example to engage the concept of the so-called "place-based education," resulting in the understanding of one's direct organic environment and its role in shaping one's ecological disposition. Echoing Wooltorton and company, they will call this the ecological self (p. 7). The ecological self of Salvosa is evidently presented in the poem. The romantic lines confirm the presence of Salvosa's ecological disposition and self-unveiling in the poem.

In short, he stood as the eyewitness to the blatant desecration of the waters of the river and the place in general. As he ruminates on the place, it is noteworthy to see that he is also ethologically pronouncing the behavior of the sparrow reminiscent of nest defense—an original undertaking that makes the sparrow defend itself and wade through the anthropogenic pollutions plaguing the waters of the Naga River. This is expected from the sparrow as they are perceived to be highly aggressive creatures when assaulted or provoked. The reference to this scientific fact can be seen in the line "I witness a sparrow tangling against the threads of agitation / The sparrow perches on rust jutting out in the middle of the water, a sore patch of skin" (p. 56). This is the sparrow's response to the remarkable pollution of the water of the river. It attempts to flee the polluted waters. Salvosa uses these actions of the sparrow to further augment the strong place-based foregrounding of the poem. The actions of the sparrow can specifically declare the weight of the desecration done to the said body of water. This can be an indication that the place, originally perceived to be animate and wonderfully driven by its potent hydrographic features, is no longer organic in nature. The actions of the sparrow will compel the readers to understand the fact that place is not just a simple rallying ground. According to Chua (2014), place is a systematic, compelling, and complex whole that can best be understood by looking at its parts (p. 154). This is exactly what the poem does to the concept of place. The speaker identifies and reflects on the problems plaguing the river, the reason why the sense of interconnectedness with life in the poem is remarkably destroyed.

The hydrographic tendency of the poem can no longer be heard lucidly. Naga River's hydrographic identity has already been silenced by the activities of the Anthropocene. The river no longer proclaims its beautiful and wonderful nature of being the wellspring of resources for the people. We can see Salvosa further making the river stand on its own in the poem. This is Salvosa's way of showing how the

place has already been polluted by the “industry’s web”, “plastic ghosts and silicone slab”, “rusty wheels and the song of metal” (p. 56). These are clear references to anthropocentric activities.

The concepts of place and the ecological self-ruminating on the destroyed organic connection with the river, have been destroyed by the poem’s strong anthropocentric leaning. The hydrographic bent of the ecopoem declares this remarkable degradation of the environment. If one will further engage this personified depiction of the river in the poem, Salvosa’s ecological affinity is also potent enough to make us realize the weight of other activities that destroyed the river. These can include unfettered quarrying, unsound farming activities along the hillsides, and the very denudation of the remaining forest cover near the main waters of the river, destroying the vitality of the river.

### **Conclusion**

Ecopoetry is a genre that goes beyond mere descriptions of nature and environs by virtue of the ecological literacies animating the foreground of the ecopoems. These ecopoems are works that make readers experience and engage the environment, as seen in how they can expand readers’ comprehension of various environmental concepts and issues, complemented by a perceptive and socio-emotional way of understanding the position of mankind when it comes to the issues affecting the environment. This entails looking at their anthropocentric dispositions of being environmental interrupters and how such dispositions also served as counter-discourses to the damages experienced by nature. These ecopoems are not just created to aesthetically describe the natures and environments and their concomitant glories and destructions. Armed with their ecological literacies, the ecopoems also partook in the discourses and act of promoting responsible behaviors in safeguarding the environment made possible through critical systems thinking and collaborative communication, linking their works to the discourse on sustainability (Kaya & Alster, 2019).

The presence of the ecological literacies of the ecopoets also served as an important substantiating element that gave rise to the two ecocritical tendencies and modes explored in this paper, namely the ethological and hydrographic, making possible the notions of ethological and hydrographic ecopoetry. As reflected in the analysis of the ecopoems, ethological ecopoetry visibly provided imagined and reimagined human-animal relations, offering ecocritical ruminations of interactions between the two species. This is an attempt to show how ecopoetry can also lean on the idea of interspecies in animal discourse. This take on interspecies is a means of deriving an intense interest in the lives of both animals from both the human and non-human worlds. The reality of such connections and interconnections, as well as the human-animal meanings that can be generated from the process, are factors that are clearly expounded in ecopoetry. Ecopoetry provides a springboard to pursue the concepts of humans and animals and their emplacement in ecocritical discourse with emphasis on the material and symbolic offshoots of their representations. The hydrographic nature of ecopoetry illustrated the dynamic agency of water and how it can leave various imprints on the individual and collective identity of humans. In this view, water, an essential earthly element, stood as the very resource that wavers between the concrete and emblematic domains of life—a powerful non-human element that stirs biophilic and topophobic

ecocritical outlooks, validating the perspective that its fluidic powers make possible discursive sites of nourishment, rejuvenation, and obliteration.

These verifying ecocritical modes further unveiled how ecopoetry can participate in the discourse on material ecocriticism, illustrating how material forms, organic and inorganic matters, interrelate with each other and the anthropocentric realm crystallizing into stories about the environment. The strong premium given to ethology and hydrography analyzed in the foregrounds of the ecopoems is a means of recalibrating the definition of ecocriticism viewed in the light of anthropocentrism and the challenge of its disciplinary broadness, its strictures resulting in the inert reification of earthly elements in ecocritical discourse, and with the field being effectively everything about natures and environs.

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