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Perceiving the Monsters' Portrayal of Scottish Kelpie and Indonesian Baru Klinting through Material Ecocriticism

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Abstract

Folklore does not only foster local wisdom, but also promotes sustainable eco-friendly tourism by embedding cultural beliefs that support nature preservation. Among the many elements of nature represented in folklore, water occupies a distinctive place, often represented in folklore through water-linked beings that embody both danger and protection. However, there has been limited research on how water monsters in folklore function as symbols of ecological awareness and preservation, which reveals the relationship between human and nature. This article addresses the gap by examining two children's stories adapted from Scottish and Indonesian folklore. This study employed a comparative qualitative textual analysis of two stories, The Secret of the Kelpie (2022) and Legenda Baru Klinting (2018). Material ecocriticism was used to provide the analytical framework, focusing on the concepts of agency, narrativity, entanglement, and non-linear causality. Relevant passages were coded and compared to examine how these narratives represent human–water relations and ecological responsibility. This research shows how Kelpie and Baru Klinting, as monstrous figures, embody ecological narratives through their forms, with water itself acting as a non-human entity and meaning maker. At the same time, cultural objects such as iron and lesung function as protective symbols used to ward off evil spirits. From an educational perspective, the interaction between humans and nature in these stories teaches children to recognize the hidden dangers beneath the water. In a broader context, the findings suggest that folklore can serve as a medium for preserving awareness of the aquatic environment.

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Introduction

Folklore has long conveyed cultural values, moral teachings, and people's relationships with the natural world (Leonard & McClure, 2004; Diko, 2024; Goraya et al., 2025). Nature myths in these traditions can support environmental learning by encouraging imagination, storytelling, and playful exploration among young learners as such narratives shape how children perceive the world and their relationship with it (Sintonen, 2020; King et al., 2024). In children's literature, they often appear as fantastical narratives featuring mythical creatures that reflect social fears, hopes, and awareness of the environment (Jumiati et al., 2021; Sureshkrishnan, 2023). Among these beings, monsters frequently symbolise cultural anxieties (Erle & Hendry, 2020), ecological disruption (May, 2021), and human interaction with nature (Asma, 2009; Kaukio, 2023). Research on monsters in children's folklore has mostly addressed moral or psychological themes (Maynes, 2020; Lewin 2020), while their ecological meaning, particularly for environmental education, has received little attention. Folklore, both the oral and written version, can serve as a medium for raising ecological awareness, since its narratives often convey lessons about the relationship between humans and nature (Ismail, 2024; Sintonen, 2020; Weinstein & Koolmatrie, 2025). Yarova's (2019) analysis demonstrates how its tree-monster conveys the interdependence of humans and the natural world. She shows that the figure acts as storyteller, healer, and guide, helping children develop environmental awareness in a subtle, non-didactic way. In addition to that, recent research highlights that storytelling, folklore, and myth can be more effective than fact-based approaches in helping children engage with ecological knowledge, while also shaping how people relate to and behave toward natural environments (Hunter, 2020; Hopper et al., 2019; Hallam, 2019)

Beyond that, broader perspectives also view nature as both a blessing and a greater power, which means nature needs reciprocal respect and sets boundaries for human action (Flint & Jennings, 2020; Hunter, 2020; Sintonen, 2020; Weinstein & Koolmatrie, 2025). Such beliefs are frequently personified though supernatural figures including gods, goddesses, fairies, and even monsters (Leonard & McClure, 2004). These characters play crucial role in shaping the understanding that humans are not the only beings with power (Flint & Jennings, 2020), and they often act as messengers of moral responsibility to nurture the nature (Hilmi et al., 2024; Hunter, 2020; Weinstein & Koolmatrie, 2025).

Building on this insight, it is important to ask how other folkloric creatures convey similar warnings or values. While such creatures are tied to many natural elements, water occupies a distinctive place. In many myths, water appears as both life-giving and destructive. It has long held a central place in mythmaking across cultures, from early human narratives to ancient and religious traditions shaped by the need for access to water (Witzel, 2015). Water can represent creation and renewal, but it is also linked to chaos and death (Leonard & McClure, 2004). Because of this dual role, water carries a liminal quality, standing between life and death, the known and the unknown, and never fully within human control. For this reason, folklore often places monstrous beings in watery settings, where they embody both the promise and the danger of the element. Across cultures, aquatic creatures have long been imagined as mirrors of human fears and responsibilities (Ignatova, 2022). Examples such as the Japanese Kappa, the Scottish Selkie, and European Mermaids show how water-beings are at once alluring and perilous. Many traditions use these figures to highlight the consequences of arrogance or exploitation, presenting water not only as a source of life but also as a force of destruction (Ignatova, 2022; Leonard & McClure, 2004). In this way, stories of water-linked monsters express the awareness that water sustains and destroys, while also offering a means of moral reflection and ecological teaching (Ignatova, 2022). Given that, this research focuses on water-linked monsters to examine how their narratives frame the relationship between humans and nature, particularly water.

This research focuses on two folklores from Indonesia and Scotland, based on both practical and purposive considerations. Practically, the selection reflects familiarity with Indonesian folklore alongside an academic

background in English literary studies. Beyond this, the choice is guided by a shared focus on water-centred narratives, particularly those set in lake environments. Scotland is selected for its distinctive yet less frequently discussed water folklore, represented by Kelpie, while Indonesia offers a rich context of sacred water landscapes, as reflected in the legend of Baru Klinthing. To maintain a clear and coherent scope, the study concentrates specifically on lake-based stories. Lakes are chosen not only for their narrative relevance, but also because they are less commonly examined compared to oceans or rivers, despite their strong presence in local belief systems and storytelling traditions.

Within these narratives, nonhuman entities play an important role as active agents rather than passive elements, shaping the direction and meaning of the story. This shared feature allows the two folklores to be compared not simply based on geographical difference, but on how water and its associated entities are understood and represented. In Scottish folklore, water is often associated with danger and unpredictability, whereas in Indonesian folklore it can function as both destructive and protective. At the same time, these stories are treated as illustrative case studies rather than representative models of all water-related folklore. This distinction is important to avoid overgeneralisation and to maintain a focused and in-depth comparative analysis of how human–nature relationships are constructed.

The story of Baru Klinting from Central Java, Indonesia, tells of a dragon who once transformed into a child to test the kindness of villagers. After being mistreated and humiliated, Baru Klinting caused a massive flood that resulted in the creation of Lake Rawa Pening. Rich with moral undertones and environmental symbolism, the tale warns against arrogance, injustice, and the failure to respect nature, with the flood serving not only as a supernatural punishment but also as a reminder of disrupted ecological balance. In the same vein, Kelpie from Scottish folklore is a legendary water-dwelling horse said to lure unsuspecting children to their deaths, a darker tale that illustrates the dangers of wild and untamed waters. While Kelpie has been reimagined in children's literature as a misunderstood being or a symbol of psychological depth, both Baru Klinting and Kelpie's stories share a strong association with water, danger, and moral instruction. They emphasize the importance of humility, empathy, and respect for the natural world.

From this perspective, both Kelpie and Baru Klinting can be perceived as animal-like beings rooted in oral tradition, used to impart ecological warnings and encourage ethical behaviour. Examining how cultural worldviews shape the portrayal of these creatures and how their stories are adapted in children's literature to fulfill educational purposes is therefore essential.

To guide the analysis, this research adopts material ecocriticism, a framework that examines matter both within text, as represented in narratives, and as text, as an active and meaningful presence in the world (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014). This approach focuses on the interconnectedness relationship between human and non-human elements, showing how both are involved in shaping meaning rather than existing separately. It also highlights the idea of a shared life between human and nonhuman beings, which becomes especially relevant in the context of current environmental concerns. In this research, material ecocriticism provides a way to understand how elements such as water, landscape, and nonhuman creatures are not simply background settings, but active agents within the narrative. Through this lens, traditional folklore can be read as a space where these material elements participate in shaping the story and its meaning, rather than merely supporting it. In folklore, such ideas appear through natural elements and nonhuman beings whose physical forms embody cultural values and ecological concerns. Through this lens, this study considers Kelpie and Baru Klinting as material agencies whose narratives highlight the peril of water and the destructive nature of greed. In this way, folklore functions not only as cultural heritage but also as a channel for environmental understanding, especially when retold for children or a younger audience.

These creatures are not merely fictional characters, but symbolic representations

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(Iovino & Oppermann, 2014) of each culture's relationship with nature, especially with water, a recurring and powerful element. Through retellings and adaptations, their stories convey ecological values that are shaped by local beliefs. Folklore in this form serves not only as entertainment but also as a vessel of historical memory, moral guidance, and cultural identity (Hunter, 2020). By focusing on these monstrous figures, this research aims to examine how different cultures encourage children to respect the natural world, acknowledge its danger, and reflect on the consequences of human behaviour.

Methodology

This study employs a comparative qualitative textual analysis to examine how two stories of water-monster folklore present material agency and shows the relationship of human and water. The focus is on Kelpie from Scotland and Baru Klinting from Central Java, Indonesia. Given the diversity of oral versions, which vary across time and community, the analysis does not rely on oral performances but on documented versions of these stories. Since textual analysis was employed, children's books entitled *The Secret of the Kelpie* by Lari Don (2022) and *Legenda Baru Klinting* by Taru and Idawati (2018) became the reliable sources for this research. These were chosen because they place a water creature at the centre of the narrative, are directed to children or young readers, and are available in reliable editions that represent their respective traditions. Focusing on children's literature is also relevant to the analytical framework of this study. As noted by Nodelman (2000), children's texts often operate through a balance between narrative pleasure and didactic purpose. This characteristic allows the stories to not only entertain but also shape how relationships between humans and the natural world are understood. Other versions of the folklore are excluded from the analysis, particularly those that do not centre on the creature or are not directed at children, such as representations of kelpies as working horses.

To prepare the data, the book of *Legenda Baru Klinting* (2018) was read first in the original language, Indonesian, and later all quotations presented in this article were translated from Indonesian into English by the authors, with attention to retaining nuance. Meanwhile, the excerpts cited from *The Secret of the Kelpie* (2022) remain faithful to the original text, originally in English. The Kelpie story was available in audiobook form and was transcribed, with accuracy checked through repeated listening. The resulting textual data consisted of the narratives of both stories, including their intrinsic elements. The analysis was framed by material ecocriticism, particularly the concepts outlined by Iovino & Oppermann (2014). Four key ideas, agency, narrativity, entanglement, and non-linear causality, guided the reading of the texts. Agency refers to the idea that not only humans could also do some actions but also nature. Narrativity shows how materials tell stories. Meanwhile, entanglement showcases the interconnectedness between human, nonhuman, and nature. Ultimately, non-linear causality is the complexity of cause-effect. As mentioned in Iovino & Oppermann (2012), materials save an elucidation when it is transformed into a text, proposing diffuse agency as an active object despite being inanimate, non-linear causality as disjointed cause-and-effect chronology, and eliminating humans as the meaning-makers.

Each text was read several times, and passages relevant to these four ideas were identified and recorded in a table, noting page number, exact wording, and initial interpretation. This coding process allowed for systematic comparison of how the narratives frame human–water relations. Following the coding stage, the material was considered both within and across the two stories to identify points of alignment and divergence in their treatment of agency, entanglement, and ecological responsibility. Interpretations were then checked against existing research on Scottish and Javanese folklore, as well as research in material ecocriticism. Potential implications for the use of folklore in early environmental education were also considered as part of the interpretive process. The research demonstrates how material ecocriticism can be applied to comparative folklore studies, showing how children's retellings of monsters articulate ecological ethics and human–nature relations across cultural contexts.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the analysis of the two chosen folklores, the Scottish Kelpie and the Indonesian Baru Klinting, through the lens of material ecocriticism. First, the discussion begins with a closer examination of each monster's portrayal in relation to shape and water, since physical forms and environments represent cultural values and ecological concerns. Second, the discussion highlights the similarities and differences using comparative analysis. The methodology is utilized because this study views Kelpie as the peril of water and Baru Klinthing as the destructive nature of greed. The section concludes by considering the broader educational implications of these portrayals, particularly their role in shaping ecological awareness in children's literature.

1. Shape

In folklore, shapes do not serve as aesthetically pleasing nor eye-catching ornaments, rather they carry a whole story on their own. As found in the quote below, Kelpie's monstrous nature is concealed behind the perfect form of a beautiful white horse, sturdy and gallant, with a long, soft mane. This physical appearance, which is pure and majestic, is often used to describe the good character, such as purity and innocence of other horse-like creatures like unicorns, Scotland's national animal (Eason, 2007), making it serves as a deliberate disguise and indicating the creature's predatory strategy.

> "A horse! I found a beautiful white horse!"
> Her sisters and brothers rushed out of their hiding places to look.
> The most perfect horse they'd ever seen turned towards them and snickered softly. (Don, 2016, p. 6)

The shape of the monster is not grotesque or terrifying in the conventional sense; instead, it is alluring and inviting, especially to children. This subversion of the expected monstrous form demonstrates how danger in folklore is often masked in beauty, developing a sense of confusion between the notions of reliability and safety (Piatti-Farnell & Peaty, 2021). From a material ecocriticism standpoint, the Kelpie's body functions as storied matter (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014): its physicality carries a warning embedded in the landscape itself. The smooth exterior hides ecological threat, the symbol of nature's most appealing forms can also be the most treacherous, especially when misunderstood or approached without caution.

> The beautiful horse began to change into something huge and ugly and hungry. Steam swirled from its nostrils, waves swirled round its hooves. Its head arched high above Flora and Fergus. (Don, 2016, p. 25)

The dramatic revelation of the Kelpie's true form through a violent transformation of its body is marked by this passage. The shift from "beautiful horse" to something "huge and ugly and hungry," furtherly in the book was illustrated to change its form into a giant horse with its mane shaped like raging waves and its fur glistening like fish scales, depicting natural disasters in water, emphasises the instability and deceitfulness of appearances. The monster's changing shape functions as a narrative device that disrupts the children's perception of safety and innocence. The physical descriptors tie the Kelpie's body to natural forces, particularly water and heat, thus suggesting that its monstrosity is not just physical but environmental (Kaukio, 2023). Kelpie becomes a fusion of flesh and landscape, a monstrous embodiment of the loch itself.

Similar to how the monstrosity in Kelpie's appearance tied physical characteristics and environmental settings together, Baru Klinting also showcases his important role using the same approach. It reveals his true notion as the guardian of nature through his transformation, from a human-birthed dragon, "All of a sudden, Endang Sawitri got pregnant and gave birth to a dragon." (Taru & Idawati, 2018, p.1) into a disheveled boy after the villagers dismembered his body parts, "Seeing the child's unpleasant appearance, dirty and smelly, the villagers then extricate him." (Taru & Idawati, 2018, p.7). The Javanese culture itself believes that dragons are a symbol of protection and peace, and serve as guardians to sacred places (Eslit, 2023), in this case, the mountain. Similar to that, in Chinese culture dragons are also associated with their power to avert disasters (Ranjan & Zhou, 2011).

The next symbolism lies on Baru Klinting's dismembered body, which represents how the mountain lost its protector. This mirrors the ecological crisis when a mountain is stripped of its trees, losing both its ecological balance as a biodiversity haven and its sacred roles as the provider for all kinds of beings. In nature, deforestation in tropical forests such as those in Indonesia has significantly reduced canopy size and structure, disrupting the phosphorus availability and biomass recovery (land fertility). The weakening of canopy functions also reduces the land's ability to absorb heavy rainfall, increasing vulnerability to floods and landslides (Lawrence et al., 2007).

2. Water

Water plays a big role in both stories to showcase the crucial power and characteristics of nature. Throughout the story of Kelpie, there is a persistent narrative of monstrosity concealed beneath beauty. In Scottish culture, supernatural danger in water bodies is not a strange concept, but rather familiar, with the stories of Kelpies and water horses inhabiting the lochs and seas (Harris, 2009).

> "Every loch in Scotland, however beautiful, has its dark cold depths. And every loch in Scotland has its Kelpie. But it's easy to forget those dangers on a sunny afternoon." (Don, 2016, p. 1)

The use of contrast, "however beautiful" versus "dark cold depths," emphasises how lochs, despite their serene appearance, are associated with mystery and threat. Kelpie becomes a symbolic embodiment of this duality (Harris, 2009) which represents nature's unpredictability and its potential for harm (Ben-Amos, 1983). The final sentence of the quotation suggests a warning: human perception, often shaped by surface impressions, tends to overlook the deeper, more dangerous aspects of the environment.

Water conquers lives. For early man, it was lofty and perceived as an alive entity, as if it had a soul to voice its feelings, bestowing prosperity or bringing misfortune, such as floods and droughts. Geographically, the lochs in Scotland offer beauty, especially in ancient times (Mackinlay, 1893). This statement aligns with the idea of narrative agency in material ecocriticism of nonhuman things as a living entity to tell stories. Water-spirits gathered in rivers, lochs, or wells, and they influenced the activities beneath the water, both fast-flowing and calm. The Kelpie, with its loch habitat, both enhances the loch's beauty and epitomises its mysterious, dark, and deep qualities. Through the embodiment of Kelpie's habitat, water tells a story about the mystery behind its beauty as a tool to lure the children closer to the loch.

In contrast to Kelpie's story, where water is used as a literal part of the creature, Baru Klinting's story used water as a tool to punish, to assert power towards the antagonists (villagers).

> "You have no idea who I was, do you? I am Baru Klinting, the dragon that you took from the forest. I came here to test you, asking for food, yet none of you do so. Now it is the time for your punishment!"... as he unplucked the stick, there was a huge stream of water coming down flooding the whole village. (Taru & Idawati, 2018, p.12)

As he was enraged by the villagers' demeanour who were so greedy and selfish, Baru Klinting punished them by summoning a flood to the village. We may tie this narrative to connect folklore with real-world environmental consequences, as Baru Klinting is the protector of nature, hence we can qualify him as equal to the roles of trees in real life. This furtherly showcases the massive exploitation that always comes hand in hand with natural disasters like floods. This aligns with material ecocriticism's view that matter carries narratives (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014) that here, water is not just a setting but an active participant in shaping myth and ecological caution and consequence.

3. Nonhuman Actors as Meaning Makers

a. Narrative Agency

In material ecocriticism, narrative agency refers to the capacity of matter and nonhuman entities to "tell stories" through their forms, transformations, and effects (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014). Rather than being passive

scenery, natural elements, such as water, animals, or landscapes, participate actively in shaping events and meanings. This challenges the anthropocentric view that only humans create change. It, instead, emphasises how the nonhuman world communicates cultural and ecological messages. As Oppermann (2014) explains, matter itself emerges "in meaningfully articulate forms of becoming that can be interpreted as stories matter … filled with narrative agencies that restore the world's immanent capacity of enchantment and creativity." (p. 30)

A site of narrative is one of the elements of material ecocriticism. The narrative of Baru Klinting is set in the drowned village after Baru Klinting had intended the curse. From the perspective of a site of narrativity, this setting encompasses elements of the birth of a new ecosystem. The massive flood, the wooden mortar, and the supernatural force of Baru Klinting's curse play the role of materials that contribute to the emergence of a lake. The set of those materials not only acts as inanimate objects but also as a narrative embedded with abundant symbolism. Based on the theory proposed by Iovino & Oppermann (2012), those materials shaped the setting of the occurrence within the narrative.

> The burst of water flew like a jet. In the blink of an eye, the water burst transformed into a massive flood. The villagers ran away to save their lives. But it was too late. The whole village has drowned beneath the massive flood. Mbok Rondo was the only villager who remained safe. When the massive flood came, she got into a wooden mortar. As requested by Baru Klinting. (Taru & Idawati, 2018, p. 15)

As depicted in this quote, the main protagonist is the environment. Its agency is exhibited through the catastrophic flood. The monstrous body of Baru Klinting becomes a material manifestation of nature's exploitation since it was a dragon at first, then changed into a human-like creature. The flood is a tool for punishment and material responses to human greed after Baru Klinting was mistreated by the villagers. When the burst of water and the later flood create a new lake, or should be considered a new ecosystem, as mentioned above, it further shows how the natural world possesses the power to react and reshape itself in response to human actions.

Mapping the identical setting, Kelpie brought the water environment called loch in the Scottish area. The water as a material is not portrayed as a static object. Instead, it surged as if it followed Kelpie, which shifted into a way more terrifying horse. This is a powerful demonstration of the "thing-power" that philosopher Jane Bennett (2010) discusses in her work. Bennett challenges the anthropocentric view that only humans possess agency. She, instead, argues that all matter, human and nonhuman, is a vibrant force with the capacity to affect and be affected.

> "It's a kelpie!" she shouted. "Remember the old stories? It's tricked you onto its back, now it's taking you into the loch to drown you and eat you!"
> Fergus was still trying to turn the horse away from the loch, but his hands were tangled in its mane. (Don, 2016, p. 14)

Aside from the similarity of setting and other animate elements, Kelpie and Baru Klinting brought the same magical curse related to supernatural phenomena. Both the loch from Kelpie and a massive flood in Baru Klinting drowned the disobedient ones. The reckless villagers in Baru Klinting, along with the carelessness of the children in Kelpie, who rode the horse without thinking twice, reflect water as a perilous natural material if humans dare to act carelessly with nature, emphasising the relationship between both mythical creatures and the human characters is constructed through bodily interaction, deception, and confrontation, but with two different intentions; to protect and to warn.

This motif of drowning or flooding as punishment reflects a widespread cultural function of water spirits as active agents that invoke moral and ecological boundaries. In Scottish tradition, tales of Kelpie and its close counterpart, the Each-Uisge, often describe victims being dragged beneath the loch after becoming trapped in the creature's mane, a detail reiterated in later folkloric dictionaries (MacKillop, 1998). Scholars note that these narratives functioned pragmatically as

cautionary tales to keep children away from deep water, while also embedding a moral lesson in the figure of the water horse (Harris, 2009).

In contrast, the legend of Baru Klinting sees water not as a deceptive lure but as a retaliatory force: the dragon summons a flood to punish the villagers' greed. It echoes a broader Southeast Asian pattern in which rivers and lakes are treated as spiritually alive and morally responsive (Andaya, 2016); furtherly validated through the role of Baru Klinting in his dragon form, the guardian of sacred sites in Javanese culture (Eslit, 2023). Both traditions embody what material ecocriticism terms "storied matter," in which water is not a passive backdrop but a narrative agent capable of reacting to human disobedience. Moreover, as studies in folklore and education have shown, pedagogical functions are provided to teach children risk awareness and ecological ethics through fear and consequence (Onodera & Fujii, 2018). Hence, Kelpie and Baru Klinting, indeed, dramatise cultural anxieties about water, but, at the same time, they also transmit enduring lessons about human responsibility toward the natural world.

> The burst of water flew like a jet. In the blink of an eye, the water burst transformed into a massive flood. The villagers ran away to save their lives. But it was too late. The whole village has drowned beneath the massive flood. Mbok Rondo was the only villager who remained safe. When the massive flood came, she got into a wooden mortar. As requested by Baru Klinting. (Taru & Idawati, 2018, p. 15)

Eliminating the human as the centre of meaning-makers, Kelpie and Baru Klinting show water and monsters, which are natural elements, as symbols with deep meaning. The humans in both folklores act merely as actors who have to nurture environmental stability, not being the centre of the story in delivering the messages implicitly or explicitly.

> The kelpie trotted towards the middle of the loch. Flora chased after it, hoping to cut big brother free. Fergus hauled back on the horse's head, slowing it down. Flora splashed through the water, trying to catch up. The kelpie waded deeper and deeper into the loch. (Don, 2016, p. 21)

In the quotation above, the image of the Kelpie is presented as a medium for the turbulence of water. In the book, the illustration depicts the water surging in response to Kelpie's brutal movement to drag Fergus into the loch. While water is an inanimate object, the portrayal of water depicted by following Kelpie's movement also seeks to convey its ferocity, emphasising the real-life danger of storms that often happen near water bodies in Scotland (Stewart et al., 2017).

The connection between nature and folklore stems from the limited level of knowledge of early man (Ben-Amos, 1983). Mackinlay (1893) stated that many water monsters were represented in the shape of bulls or horses, as exemplified by the Each-Uisge, an evil horse-shaped water spirit. In the view of Tylor in Mackinlay (1983), a speculation occurred to connect the natural phenomena of waves all of a sudden without wind. The confusion led them to speculate on the emergence of water spirits who caused the natural phenomena to happen. They assumed all the creatures living near the water to be guardian spirits of the water. Fundamentally, given their limited level of knowledge, early man simplified the natural phenomena with concrete forms.

In these two stories, nature is represented through the monsters' physical appearances and their actions, committing to the human mind to understand complicated concepts of nature. Their body transformation works beyond narrative twist, revealing the material response to human intrusion (Kaukio, 2023). Kelpie serves as both a physical embodiment of nature and its narrative function; one that is beautiful, deceptive, and ultimately dangerous when approached without understanding or respect. Through its physical transformation from a perfect white horse into a monstrous being, Kelpie reveals nature's dual character: aesthetically pleasing on the surface, yet powerful and even vengeful beneath. The swirling steam and waves surrounding its body further blur the boundary between creature

and environment. It tells us that nature itself possesses agency and the ability to respond. Rather than portraying nature as passive and harmonious, these depictions emphasise its unpredictability and potential for retribution, especially when humans fail to recognise their ecological limits.

b. Rescue Methods

As aforementioned, the two folklores resemble the same outputs in emphasising the importance of humans to obey the rules. This concern resonates with the theory of material ecocriticism in the facet of non-linear causality, which elucidates the implicit meaning that if humans stick to the rules, nature will not harm them. As Iovino & Oppermann (2012) argued, non-linear causality inclines as a domino effect but in an indirect way. Those sequences of occurrences are intertwined, but not in a linear cause-and-effect trajectory.

In Kelpie, the occurrence of causality started with the children daring to play on the edge of the water, the emergence of Kelpie with its magical physical appearance, the effect of disobedience, and the rescue phase, with iron as the key. As for Baru Klinting, the causality happened in which Baru Klinting lived peacefully in asceticism, the appearance of greedy villagers who ate Baru Klinting's body, the trial of forgiveness towards the villagers, the coming of a curse, and the rescue phase for the human who did good deeds, as well as punishment for those who were excessively greedy. Given that, the patterns are similar and sufficient to prove that the causality is not linear. The effect of causality must undergo a supernatural occurrence and punishment before delivering an implicit message.

Here, iron also plays a role in the rescue method within the folklore itself. In Kelpie's story, the children survive only by using an iron blade. Flora draws the knife from her brother's boot and slashes at the Kelpie's mane, the horsehair sizzling as the iron touches it.

> Flora reached the kelpie just as the water reached her waist. She stretched up and slid the knife out of her brother's boot, then jumped up and slashed at the kelpie's mane. The horsehair sizzled when the iron blade touched it. Fergus ripped his hands free and fell into the water. Flora hauled him spluttering to his feet and they backed away from the horse. (Don, 2016, p. 23)

This moment shows that the iron blade is not an inert object but an active material agent that breaks the Kelpie's hold, and iron becomes essential to human survival. This function of iron resonates with wider pagan traditions, in which the belief in the protective power of iron links Irish and Scottish traditions, and it reflects a shared cultural understanding across Celtic contexts. In Irish Pagan practice, iron charms are understood as protective objects that keep away bad spirits and protect loved ones from harm (O'Sullivan, 2017). Historical sources confirm that such uses of iron were also widespread in Scotland.

In Argyllshire, a circular iron broach was fastened to a child's fork "to prevent fairies from injuring them", often worn for years (Literary and Statistical Magazine for Scotland, 1819, as cited in Black, 1894). Mother would place "an old rusty sword" under a cradle or throw old keys into a dish to protect their sleeping children in the house from being taken by fairies, since iron was thought to repel their influence (Ure, 1793, as cited in Black, 1894). Iron was also linked with mysterious natural effects, as in Orkney where it was said the sea itself would rise stormily if anyone set foot on a rock carrying even an iron nail in their shoes (Wallace, 1833, as cited in Black, 1894). Thus, when the Kelpie tale places an iron blade at the heart of rescue, it echoes deeply embedded traditions in Scottish culture, where iron was believed to hold the power to defend human life against spirits and the natural world.

In Baru Klinting's story, Mbok Rondo was saved by getting onto a mortar or *lesung* as instructed. In Javanese culture, *lesung* is used in everyday life to separate grain rice from its husk and make flour (Nurislamingsih et al., 2024). Other than those functions, *lesung* produces a sound as a musical instrument when clashing with alu and led to Lesung Jumengglung song (Suranny, 2017, as cited in Nurislamingsih et al., 2024).

Other folklore, such as Roro Jonggrang and the folklore of solar eclipse and Batara Kala, use

lesung as a powerful tool to thwart antagonists' actions with its noise and as a ritual to ward off evil during solar eclipse (Alvanita, et al., 2024). The Goddess of Rice, Dewi Sri, is believed to be a goddess of growth and fertility who brings agricultural prosperity (Heringa, 1997). Given this, the connection between *lesung* and nature entices deeply. Mbok Rondo is the only one who gave food to Baru Klinting. Since she offered goodness through agricultural yields in the form of food, symbolically, Mbok Rondo was rewarded by being saved from disaster.

4. Educational Purpose

Both the folklore of Kelpie and Baru Klinting provide insights into how communities perceive and teach about their natural surroundings, especially lakes. In the Scottish tale, Kelpie symbolises the duality of water. Like water, the horse is alluring in its beauty and apparent calm but unpredictable and potentially dangerous. Just as an untamed horse can turn wild, still waters can conceal depth and peril. In *The Secret of the Kelpie* (2022), children are tempted by the creature's appearance, thinking it is merely a beautiful horse, which reflects the deceptive attraction of nature and the need for caution. This lesson echoes Bascom's (1954) four functions of folklore, which are amusement, cultural validation, moral education, and social conformity. It uses tales to transmit warnings.

As Mackinlay (1893) observed, even advanced civilisations such as Greeks and Romans deified water, while in Scotland, legends like that of the Church of St. Vigenas portrayed Kelpie as both helper and foreteller of misfortune. Despite differences in storyline, these tales reflect a consistent pattern that water is sacred, powerful, and not to be disregarded. Thus, folklore entertains while also reflecting cultural and religious beliefs about respecting natural forces. As a medium for moral education, fables or folktales convey general values and attitudes (Bascom, 1954). Morality functions as a benchmark to determine whether actions are good or bad, with virtuous deeds exalted and evil ones avoided. In this sense, *The Secret of the Kelpie* uses children as main characters to mirror its target readers, while conveying the lesson that deviation from norms and moral caution leads to peril. The story reinforces the idea that children must learn to avoid dangerous lakes and respect the boundaries set by nature, so they remain aware and careful near water and refrain from harming or destroying the lake itself.

The legend of Baru Klinting similarly conveys moral and ecological lessons, though with a different cultural framework. The dragon functions as a protector of the environment, rooted in Javanese and Hindu traditions that honour *naga* (dragons) such as Sang Hyang Antaboga, believed to safeguard the earth and restore life (Cahyanto & Angge, 2017). Similarly, in Baru Klinting, what once was a mountain becomes a lake, which symbolises renewal as well as destruction. It echoes Antaboga's association with cycles of death and revival. On the other side, the story also reflects human actions and the consequences of disrespecting nature. When villagers exploit and harm the dragon, the act represents human exploitation of nature. Their dismemberment of Baru Klinting's body highlights destructive human behaviour, with flooding as the ecological consequence. This aligns with Garrard's (2004) categories of human-nature relations, where Baru Klinting embodies nature as subject, while the villager's action exemplifies the exploitation of nature as object (Suwandi et al., 2025).

Both tales, therefore, reflect the dual relationship between humans and nature. In line with Zapf's (2014, in Iovino & Oppermann, 2014) view of literature as cultural ecology, they symbolically express the interconnectedness of culture and nature. Oral folklore, as Lestari (2020) notes, has long conveyed moral lessons, and their written retellings continue this function for younger audiences today. Through such narratives, folklore not only preserves tradition but also transmits ecological values, which may encourage children to respect the environment, recognise its dangers, and reflect on their moral responsibilities.

Conclusion

This research has argued that both stories of Kelpie and Baru Klinting carry interconnective patterns between nature and

culture, furtherly analysing the ways different societies have embedded ecological knowledge in folklores. Through the incorporation of material ecocriticism, the theory provides us with a broader lens for viewing matter, highlighting the notion of how matter and nonhuman entities tell stories through their forms, transformations, and effects. This study helps us to understand the disguised evilness and the role of protector that is owned by Kelpie and Baru Klinting, revealing the intended messages of warning to be careful of the unpredictable nature and to preserve Mother Nature. Similarly, the water environment in the stories plays a crucial role to present the power and characteristics of nature as a nonhuman object with autonomy to react upon the human-caused intrusion, emphasising the messages to be careful of the storms in Scotland and to preserve the sacredness of nature as provider for human and all other beings. Despite these, matter can also represent the rescue methods from disaster, for instance, the use of iron and lesung to ward off evil spirits in both stories.

Despite the diverse differences and similarities between the two, the folklore of Kelpie and Baru Klinting both teach the connection between humans and nature, serving as an early source of precaution in how to treat and maintain the environment before science exists and becomes accessible, as nature is seen as an inspiration to humans' creative minds. By drawing on material ecocriticism, future research might be expanded to other lenses of approach, potentially, ecological tourism or other natural elements.

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