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LITERARY ECOCRITICISM STUDY IN ANALYZING ELEMENTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL RESISTANCE IN WIJI THUKUL'S POEMS

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Abstract

This study employs literary ecocriticism theory to examine elements of environmental and social resistance in Wiji Thukul's poetry. Wiji Thukul is a poet from the '98 generation, known for his provocative and vibrant works. The connection between literary works and elements of environmental and social resistance is prevalent in Wiji Thukul's poetry. Literary ecocriticism is applied to analyze his poetry using a qualitative descriptive method. The ecocritical analysis of Wiji Thukul's poetry offers insights into the ecological issues related to environmental and social resistance reflected in his poems. Seven of his poems will be analyzed in this study: Leuwigajah, Bunga dan Tembok, Nyanyian Akar Rumput, Sajak Anak-Anak, Nyanyian Tanah Ibu, Di Bawah Selimut Kedamaian Palsu, and Sajak Tikar Plastik - Tikar Pandan. The results indicate that Wiji Thukul's poems, when analyzed through literary ecocriticism, reveal elements of environmental and social resistance that serve as a critique of the government and as a means of raising public awareness about the deteriorating environmental conditions. **Keywords:** Analysis, Ecocriticism, Environmental, Literature, Poetry, Wiji Thukul.

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1. Introduction

The world of literature cannot be separated from nature. Poetry, in particular, is a literary form that frequently draws upon nature as a source of inspiration. Poetry is an art of crafting and arranging words that conveys various messages and impressions to readers. In creating a poem, poets infuse it with a spirit that brings the text to life, allowing it to transcend imaginary boundaries and influence its audience. The connection between nature and literature has given rise to the concept of literary ecocriticism, which explores nature and the relationships between humans, plants, animals, and life itself as depicted in literary works, especially in poetry.

Ecocriticism is a combination of the words "ecology" and "criticism" (Harsono, 2008: 31). Literary ecocriticism does not attempt to prove that nature is superior to humans or vice versa; rather, it aims to show that the two are

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interconnected, mutually influential, and share a strong reciprocal relationship (Zulfa, 2021: 57). One literary work that heavily incorporates elements of nature and is highly relevant to ecocriticism is the poetry of Wiji Thukul. Thukul's work highlights the role of humans in relation to nature and the issues that arise from it. Literary ecological criticism serves as an analytical tool to capture environmental phenomena depicted in literature (Harja, 2022: 4). This is evident in Wiji Thukul's poems, which capture natural phenomena around him as a foundation for his poetry. Ecocritical studies can also draw from the ideas of the modern environmental movement, which criticizes concerning environmental issues (Khomisah, 2020). This perspective is frequently reflected in Wiji Thukul's poetry, which contains elements of environmental and social resistance.

Environmental resistance is a social movement to protect nature, expressing concern about environmental damage and aiming to create preventive measures against increasingly widespread ecological destruction. Wiji Thukul conveys his observations and feelings about nature and his surroundings through his poetry, blending social issues, governmental criticism, political and cultural aspects that intersect with ecological themes. His criticism of the government is evident in his poems, where he expresses disappointment over the government's apparent indifference, even indirect support, for environmental destruction for profit. Environmental damage undoubtedly has social impacts, particularly affecting specific segments of society. Thukul portrays the lower social class as the group most affected by this environmental degradation. In this study, the author seeks to describe and analyze the fundamental assumptions of literary ecocriticism in Wiji Thukul's works, highlighting the elements of environmental and social resistance that characterize his writing style.

This study is relevant to several previous studies. First, research conducted by Harsono (2008) titled *Ecocriticism: Environmentally Conscious Literary Criticism* found that ecocriticism, when applied appropriately, can make an authentic contribution to the environmental political movement and offer benefits for both nature and humanity. Ecocriticism also supports the development of ecotourism, which synergizes with ecocultural values. Second, research by Sartina et al. (2021) titled *Humans and the Natural Environment in the Novel Aroma Karsa by Dee Lestari (A Literary Ecocriticism Study)* found that several characters have a close connection with nature through their sense of smell. The study also describes the journey of characters on a plant conservation expedition for the Puspa plant, illustrating both the positive and negative roles of humans toward nature.

2. Method

The research method in this paper uses descriptive qualitative analysis. This method is employed because the research describes the object of the study. The field of ecocriticism emphasizes analyzing the literary works of Wiji Thukul using an ecological approach. This is applied because Wiji Thukul's poems are closely related to ecological themes.

This method is associated with literary ecocriticism, which encompasses two main approaches: the reality approach and the discourse approach. The reality approach refers to field research or the actual conditions of the object of study. The discourse approach focuses on literature research or assumptions regarding the object of study. These two approaches are interconnected as they provide feedback and complement each other. The application of the reality and discourse approaches in the ecocritical analysis of Wiji Thukul's poetry is closely related to his works. Wiji Thukul creates literary works by observing the actual conditions of his environment and critiquing them in the form of poetry.

Bayu (2020: 108) argues that the way ecocriticism works involves, first, understanding the sciences related to the environment. Second, having ecological awareness. Third, evaluating texts and ideas in terms of coherence and usefulness as a response to environmental crises. In this discussion, the researcher will analyze seven poems by Wiji Thukul within the framework of ecocritical studies.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ecology comprehensively involves knowledge from natural sciences, social sciences, and philosophy. The main focus of this field is the interconnectedness of all living beings (Croall and Rankin, 1997:126). Ecology has both beneficial and detrimental purposes, depending on who employs it. In this context, ecological theory is used as a critical tool combined with literary theory, resulting in the term literary ecocriticism.

Literary ecocriticism is the study that examines the relationship between literature and the physical environment (Glottfelty, 1996: xix). Cultural analysis is necessary to address issues of nature and the environment, as it arises from the interaction of ecological knowledge and cultural change (Juliasih K., 2012: 87). Ecocriticism has a fundamental assumption that objects involved in ecological networks can be the subjects of this critical approach (Harsono, 2008:33). Literary ecocriticism, which is a fusion of ecology and literature, requires relevant coherence among various theories that focus on issues of literary and environmental studies, including literary criticism, critical theory, and environmental ethics and culture.

Garrard (2004:4) argues that ecocriticism can address and help explore and determine broader ecological issues. Ecocriticism serves as a form of response, perspective, and attitude of society towards nature and its surrounding environment. This is related to literature that continues to grow and evolve alongside ecological developments. Ecocriticism plays a role not only in literary criticism but also as a provocative action related to the morality and aesthetics of nature (Clark, 2011:38). This occurs because literary ecocriticism extends into other fields closely related to nature, such as culture, society, politics, history, religious studies, and psychology, making ecocritical analysis multidisciplinary.

Lawrence Buell (1995: 7-8) posits several criteria that can be considered as literary ecocriticism: (1) non-human environments are present as part of human history, which is implicated in natural history; (2) human interests are not the only legitimate interests; (3) the role of humans in the environment is part of the ethical orientation of a text; and (4) understanding the environment is a process, not a constant or instant condition.

3.1. Fundamental Assumptions of Ecocritical Literature in the Poetry of Wiji Thukul

The ecocritical theory is multidisciplinary, as it involves many other components considered contributors to literary criticism. Garrard (Endraswara, 2016:40) states that concepts related to literary ecocriticism include earth, habitat, housing, animals, wilderness, disasters, and pollution. This perspective encompasses elements beyond humans, such as places, land, rivers, animals, plants, air, and human perceptions that are combined and modified to produce a literary work. In this regard, the development of nature also influences the evolution of literary works. This can be illustrated by the portrayal of literature from the past, which reflects the nature of that era, while contemporary literature depicts the nature of the present. Evaluations of these issues are then expressed in the form of literary ecocriticism.

3.1.1 Field of Ecocriticism

The field of ecocriticism can be distinguished into three areas: ecopolitics, ecofeminism, and ecodrama. Ecopolitics is a combination of ecology and politics, meaning a scientific study of the patterns of political and environmental relationships. Piers Blaikie (1999: 131) argues that ecopolitics is an approach that studies the processes, impacts, and phenomena of political relations concerning the environment. Ecofeminism combines ecocriticism with drama and is a social movement and philosophy that connects women with ecological issues (Tong, 2006:366). Ecodrama views the ecosphere as a drama, encompassing the realities within it (Harsono, 2008: 36). In this context,

the object of study is poetry. The primary focus of this ecocritical discussion is ecopolitics. This research concentrates on analyzing the poetry of Wiji Thukul, making the field of ecopolitics the most appropriate and fitting basis for the study.

3.1.2 Object of Ecocriticism

Literary ecocriticism is a critical theory within contemporary literary approaches. According to Glotfelty (in Sukmawan, 2016:51), literary ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Literary ecocriticism has objects of study that encompass various elements, including culture, art, politics, society, and many other aspects closely related to the environment. In this study, the object of ecocriticism is specifically focused on the poetry of Wiji Thukul. His poetry extensively utilizes the realm of ecopolitics, where the integration of themes related to nature and politics frequently appears in his works. Thus, the focus of ecocritical analysis in this research is on the connection between nature, society, and politics.

3.2. Ecocritical Study of Wiji Thukul's Poetry

Howarth (1996: 69) argues that ecocriticism is a critique that assesses the strengths and weaknesses of writings that depict cultural effects on nature, aiming to commemorate nature and condemn its destroyers who harm it through political actions. In this regard, Wiji Thukul's poetry is highly relevant to this viewpoint. His poems can be analyzed through the lens of literary ecocriticism, as they often juxtapose socio-political issues with nature. In his poem titled *Leuwigajah*. The multidisciplinary nature of literary ecocriticism, encompassing issues of nature, society, and politics, is evident and can be analyzed as follows.

“LEUWIGAJAH
*Leuwigajah berputar
dari pagi sampai pagi
jalan-jalan gemetar
debu-debu membumbung
dari knalpot kendaraan pengangkut
mesin-mesin terus membangunkan
buruh-buruh tak berkamar-mandi tidur jejer
berjejer alas tikar tanpa jendela tanpa cahaya matahari
lantai dinding dingin lembab pengap
lidah-lidah penghuni
rumah kontrak
terus menyemburkan cerita buruk:
lembur paksa sampai pagi – upah rendah*

*jari jempol putus kecelakaan - kecelakaan
kencing dilarang – sakit ongkos sendiri
mogok? pecat!
seperti nyabuti bulu ketiak
tubuh-tubuh muda terus mengalir ke Leuwigajah
seperti buah-buah disedot vitaminnya
mesin-mesin terus menggilas
memerah tenaga murah
satu kali dua puluh empat jam
masuk – absen – tombol ditekan
dan truk – truk pengangkut produksi
meluncur terus ke pasar
Leuwigajah tak mau berhenti
dari pagi sampai pagi
cerobong asap terus mengotori langit
limbah mengental selokan berwarna
Leuwigajah terus minta darah tenaga muda
Leuwigajah makin panas
berputar dan terus menguras
tenaga-tenaga murah*

Bandung – Solo, 21 Mei – 16 Juni”

“LEUWIGAJAH
Leuwigajah spins
from morning to morning
the roads tremble
dust rising
from the exhaust of transport vehicles
machines keep waking up
workers sleep without bathing, side by side
lined up on mats, without windows, without sunlight
the floor and walls cold, damp, suffocating
the tongues of the inhabitants
of rented houses
keep spewing bad stories:
forced overtime until morning – low wages
thumbs severed in accidents – accidents
no urinating allowed – sickness at one's own expense
strike? fired!
like plucking armpit hair
young bodies keep flowing to Leuwigajah
like fruits sucked of their vitamins
machines keep grinding
squeezing cheap labor
twenty-four hours
in – clocked in – button pressed
and trucks carrying production
roll on to the market

Leuwigajah won't stop
from morning to morning
smokestacks keep dirtying the sky
waste thickening, colored ditches
Leuwigajah keeps demanding the blood of youth
Leuwigajah gets hotter
spinning and draining
cheap labor.

Bandung-Solo, May 21 – June 16”

Leuwigajah is a sub-district in Cimahi Selatan that is a densely populated industrial area. The poem depicts the state and situation of Leuwigajah, filled with pollution affecting the land, water, and air. It also illustrates the lives of workers living in an environment that is no longer conducive and healthy. The concerning social conditions complement and parallel the increasingly damaged state of nature. This is reflected in the following excerpt from the stanza:

“Leuwigajah berputar
dari pagi sampai pagi
jalan-jalan gemetar
debu-debu membumbung
dari knalpot kendaraan pengangkut
mesin-mesin terus membangunkan
buruh-buruh tak berkamar-mandi tidur jejer
berjejer alas tikar tanpa jendela tanpa cahaya matahari
lantai dinding dingin lembab pengap

...

Leuwigajah tak mau berhenti
dari pagi sampai pagi
cerobong asap terus mengotori langit
limbah mengental selokan berwarna
Leuwigajah terus minta darah tenaga muda
Leuwigajah makin panas
berputar dan terus menguras
tenaga-tenaga murah”

“Leuwigajah spins
from morning to morning
the roads tremble
dust rising
from the exhaust of transport vehicles
machines keep waking up
workers sleep without bathing, side by side
lined up on mats, without windows, without sunlight
the floor and walls cold, damp, suffocating.

...
Leuwigajah won't stop
from morning to morning
smokestacks keep dirtying the sky
waste thickening, colored ditches
Leuwigajah keeps demanding the blood of youth
Leuwigajah gets hotter
spinning and draining
cheap labor."

Ecocriticism, or green studies, guides analysts to critique environmental conditions resulting from the exploitation of nature, particularly the pollution caused by large-scale industrial activities. In line with the phenomenon of environmental degradation, social inequality arises due to the diminishing availability of habitable land for humans. This is also related to political interests that prioritize the profits of certain parties over the welfare of workers, who predominantly come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Through this poem, Wiji Thukul conveys the unrest he encounters, which is highly relevant to conditions in various places in Indonesia. Such literary works can serve as effective campaign tools to raise public awareness about the deteriorating state of the environment, as seen in Wiji Thukul's poem titled *Bunga dan Tembok* (Flowers and Walls).

"Bunga dan Tembok

*seumpama bunga
kami adalah bunga
yang tak kau hendaki tumbuh
engkau lebih suka
membangun rumah dan merampas tanah
seumpama bunga
kami adalah bunga
yang tak kau kehendaki adanya
engkau lebih suka
membangun jalan raya dan pagar besi
seumpama bunga
kami adalah bunga
yang dirontokkan di bumi kami sendiri
jika kami bunga
engkau adalah tembok itu
tapi di tubuh tembok itu
telah kami sebar biji-biji
suatu saat kami akan tumbuh
bersama dengan keyakinan:
engkau harus hancur!
Dalam keyakinan kami
dimanapun tirani harus tumbang!*

"Flowers and Walls

like flowers
we are the flowers
you do not wish to see grow
You prefer
to build houses and seize land
like flowers
we are the flowers
whose existence you don't want
you prefer
to build highway and iron fences
like flowers
we are the flowers
uprooted in our own land
if we are flowers
you are that wall
but in the body of that wall
we have scattered seeds
one day we will grow
along with belief:
you must be destroyed!
in our conviction
Wherever tyranny stand must
fall!

Solo, 1987”

Solo, 1987”

One of the functions of literary ecocriticism that expresses concern for the environment is contained in the stanza of the poem "Bunga dan Tembok" (Flowers and Walls) by Wiji Thukul. He begins to feel an unease about the gradual disappearance of green spaces, which are increasingly replaced by concrete structures. The poem conveys a serious call regarding how nature is starting to be regarded as unimportant. From a social perspective, this poem also addresses social inequality, illustrating how ordinary people, referred to as flowers, must be marginalized and subdued by those in power. The poem also depicts an unrelenting resistance to defend nature. This is reflected in the following stanza:

*“jika kami bunga
engkau adalah tembok itu
tapi di tubuh tembok itu
telah kami sebar biji-biji
suatu saat kami akan tumbuh
bersama dengan keyakinan:
engkau harus hancur!”*

*“if we are flowers
you are that wall
but in the body of that wall
we have scattered seeds
one day we will grow
along with the belief:
you must be destroyed!”*

The lyrics convey a profound social message about how, one day, hope and great strength will grow together and be able to restore the nature that has been damaged by those with specific interests. The resistance to defend nature will continue alongside the many developments taking place. This work is quite effective as a campaign for environmental preservation. This is also reflected in the poem *Nyanyian Akar Rumput* (Song of the Grassroots):

“Nyanyian Akar Rumput

“Song of the Grass Roots

*jalan raya dilebarkan
kami terusir
mendirikan kampung
digusur
kami pindah-pindah
menempel di tembok-tembok
dicabut
terbuang
kami akar rumput
butuh tanah
dengar!
Ayo gabung ke kami
Biar jadi mimpi buruk presiden!”*

*the highway is widened
we are displaced
we establish a village
it is demolished
we move around
clinging to walls
uprooted
cast away
we are the grass roots
we need land
listen!
come join us
So we can become the
president's nightmare!”*

This provocative work serves as a call against the injustice experienced by those referred to as "grassroots" or the lower class, in contrast to the authorities who exploit their power to seize land. The provocative action is

evident in the line "Come join us, to become a nightmare for the president!" Ecocriticism, which depicts nature and the surrounding environment concerning literature, indirectly serves as a means for humans to respond to the realities of nature and their environment within a literary work. On another note, literary ecocriticism also plays a role in preventing the notion that culture refers not only to humans but to all living beings (Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker 2017, 264).

Ecocriticism encourages people to think more critically and sensitively about the nature and environment in which they live. Ecocriticism demonstrates that literary works contribute to solving ecological problems. Moreover, within ecocriticism, there exists a continuous relationship between the writer, the text, and external elements that constitute the environment itself. This is illustrated in the poem *Sajak Anak-Anak* (Children's Poem).

"Sajak Anak-Anak

*Anak-anak kecil bermain
di jalan-jalan
kehilangan tanah lapang
pohon tumbang
tembok didirikan
kiri-kanan menyempit
anak-anak terhimpit
anak-anak itu anak-anak kita
ingatlah
ketika kau mendirikan rumah
ingatlah
ketika kau menancapkan pipa pabrik
anak-anak kecil berdesakan
sepak bola di jalan-jalan
bila jendela kacamu berantakan
tengoklah anak-anak itu
pandanglah pagar besimu
sungguh luas halaman rumahmu
Solo, 9 Juni 1987"*

"Children's Poem

Little children play
in the streets
losing open land
trees fallen
walls erected
narrowing left and right
the children are squeezed
those children are our children
remember
when you build your house
remember
when you install factory pipes
the children are crowded
playing soccer in the streets
if your window is shattered
look at those children
gaze at your iron fence
how vast is your yard
Solo, June 9, 1987"

In this poem, there is a depiction of a village that is gradually disappearing due to the increasing number of buildings being erected. A sense of longing is evident in reminiscing about the past, conveying disappointment over changes that have transformed the environment into something unrecognizable. The portrayal of children playing soccer in the streets starkly contrasts with the past, when there were still many open fields available for play. In each of his works, Wiji Thukul positions himself as a marginalized community member, calling attention to the deteriorating natural environment and becoming an opponent of progress that increasingly damages nature. This is also reflected in the poem *Nyanyian Tanah Ibu* (Song of Mother Earth).

"Nyanyian Tanah Ibu

Siapa yang menggetarkan suaraku
Yang menggetarkan udara
Getaran menyalakan pita mulutku
Mulutku bicara sama sama mereka
Yang jongkok menghadap selokan
Rakyat biasa yang tangannya luar biasa
Siang malam membangun kota
Maka jadilah otot-otot kota
Berdirilah gedung-gedung
Menghamparlah jalan raya
Rakyatku kembali ditimbuni batu-batu
Mengaspal jalan-jalan mobil
Rakyatku diam tak disebut-sebut
Rakyatku bisu
(tapi di dalam gelap piye-piye
Kadang melenguh seperti sapi
diperah
tanpa waktu
seperti kuda beban digebugi
tanpa waktu)
rakyatku adalah pencipta sorga di dunia
meski ia sendiri tak pernah mencicipi
sebab sorga
telah dijilat habis-habisan
sampai
hutan ikut terbakar
rakyatku adalah pelayan setia
yang hanya bekerja dengan gembira
dan **bangun pagi: lunasi hutang!**

19 Januari 1988”

“Song of Motherland

Who shakes my voice
that trembles the air
The vibration ignites my vocal cords
My mouth speaks alongside them
squatting by the drain
ordinary people with extraordinary hands
day and night building the city
Thus, the muscles of the city are formed
Buildings rise
highways spread out
My people are buried under stones again
paving the roads for cars
My people are silent, unmentioned

My people are mute
(but in the dark, somehow
sometimes they moan like cows
being milked
without time
like burdened horses being whipped
without time)
my people are the creators of paradise on earth
though they themselves have never tasted it
for paradise
has been devoured entirely
until
the forests also burn
my people are loyal servants
who only work joyfully
and rise early: to pay off debts!

January 19, 1988”

In this poem, Wiji Thukul expresses his concern about the rampant development taking place. He presents a discourse on the social and environmental conditions that he critiques. The poem reflects the state of an area that is being eroded by the tides of modernity. The social phenomenon shows that the community is beginning to lose the authenticity of a place that is transforming into an urban area. The workers and laborers who build these cities cannot enjoy what they construct; they remain mere laborers living in poverty. This discourse is approached through a reality perspective, as the poem was created during a time when social and environmental conditions were already critical. The changing social and environmental landscape has caused Wiji Thukul's own sense of unease. This is also depicted in the poem titled *Di Bawah Selimut Kedamaian Palsu* (Under the Blanket of False Peace).

“Di Bawah Selimut Kedamaian Palsu

Apa guna punya ilmu tinggi
Kalau hanya untuk mengibuli
Apa guna banyak baca buku
Kalau mulut kau bungkam melulu
Dimana-mana moncong senjata
Berdiri gagah
Kongkalikong dengan kaum cukong
Di desa-desa
Rakyat dipaksa
Menjual tanah
Tapi, tapi, tapi
Dengan harga murah”

“Beneath the False Blanket of Peace

What's the use of high-knowledge
if it's only for deceit?
What's the use of reading many books
if your mouth is always shut?
Everywhere there are muzzles of weapons
standing proudly
colluding with the tycoons
In the villages
the people are forced
to sell their land
But, but, but
at a low price.”

The realm of ecocriticism is clearly illustrated in this poem. Wiji Thukul critiques the political patterns present at the time the poem was written. The political state, which has begun to silence the people, becomes a hot issue for Wiji Thukul to produce works that can be analyzed through ecocritical literature. The environmental aspect within a social context depicts the plight of the community that is being pressured to sell their land at an unfair price. The portrayal of the powerful silencing the people, along with the situation of the citizens who can only submit, gives rise to deepening social inequalities. This aligns with the poem *Sajak Tikar Plastik-Tikar Pandan* (Plastic Mat-Pandan Mat).

“Sajak Tikar Plastik-Tikar Pandan

*tikar plastik-tikar pandan
kita duduk berhadapan*

*tikar plastik-tikar pandan
lambang dua kekuatan
tikar plastik buatan pabrik
tikar pandan dianyam tangan
tikar plastik makin mendesak
tikar pandan bertahan
kalian duduk dimana?”*

Solo, April 1988

“Poem of Plastic Mats and Pandan Mats

plastic mats and pandan mats
we sit facing each other

plastic mats and pandan mats
symbols of two strengths
plastic mats made by factories
pandan mats woven by hand
plastic mats are pressing in
pandan mats endure
where do you sit?”

Solo, April 1988

The object of ecocriticism that illustrates the relationship between nature, society, and politics in the poem is quite clear. The depiction of nature being eroded by development is evident in the phrase "factory-made," indicating the

growing presence of factories that encroach upon the production of traditional mats. The cultural aspect is reflected in the use of pandan mats, which are part of the lower-class village community's culture. This is also illustrated by the effective utilization of natural resources, such as the pandan leaves used as the raw material for mat-making. However, this tradition is beginning to be overshadowed by plastic. The use of plastic, representing industrialization, raises concerns among various groups. This also impacts industrial development, which has the potential to harm the environment.

4. Conclusion

This study analyzes the poetry of Wiji Thukul using ecocritical literary theory to dissect his works following the foundational assumptions and methodologies of ecocriticism. The results of this study reveal that Wiji Thukul's poetry is highly relevant when examined through the lens of ecocritical literature, as the ecological content, which is multidisciplinary in nature, is reflected in each of his works. His poems express a critical attitude towards the ecological conditions surrounding him, which are linked to political activities and have significant effects on the local environment. This research is limited to Wiji Thukul's poetry which discusses nature, society, and politics. Future research will focus on analyzing the expressionism in other works by Wiji Thukul.

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