

# Anthropocentrism Ethics in Mari Okada's *Sayonara no Asa ni Yakusoku No Hana Wo Kazarou*

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**Abstract.** In the recent decades, there are many literary works that discuss about environmental related issues. Especially Japan that oftentimes criticize those issues in modern works such as animation films. Mari Okada conveyed a hidden message about environmental issues in her recent work, *Sayonara no Asa ni Yakusoku no Hana wo Kazarou*. By using an ecocritical approach, this study discussed about the environmental issues, environmental ethics and nature's representation depicted in the film. It is understood that the issues that were brought up in the film were racism, wild life exploitation, and pollution due to industrialization by a kingdom in the story. The kingdom also violated 5 out of 8 environmental ethics. From these results, it is inferred that this act is due to anthropocentrism ethics practiced by the kingdom. And the message hidden by creator were that nature will always respond.

## 1 Introduction

Literary work is an imaginary world filled with ideas, or experiences from the writer. Things written in literary work must have meddled with the writer's socio-cultural conditions. Noor [1] argues that even though as an imaginary world, literary works refer to the real world as a basis. In other words, all the happenings around the world may be reflected or expressed in such works.

The problems discussed in literature are usually the things closest to human life. In recent decades, many writers began to produce works focused on nature. This is due to concerns about environmental issues that may be caused by rapid development of technology. To prevent further problems, environmental ethics must be considered. As technology evolves, humans tend to focus on advantages and things that make their lives easier. On the other hand, it could be that this development has a negative impact on the environment in the long run. Through literature, writers want to draw the reader's attention to the problem, while providing depiction and criticism. The practice of literary criticism based on environmental points of view is called ecocriticism. In addition, Dobie [2], concluded that ecocritics is a study related to literature and nature, the relationship between the two, and to increase the reader's awareness and responsibility to the world other than humans. Animation, which is

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one form of literary work, often raises the theme of nature and environmental issues in it. One of the animation that discusses this issue is the anime *Sayonara no Asa ni Yakusoku no Hana wo kazarou* by director Mari Okada which was released in 2018.

The animation *Sayonara no Asa ni Yakusoku no Hana wo Kazarou*, which in this paper will be shortened to *Sayoasa* was produced by studio P.A. Works. The anime tells the story of the Maquia who are part of the iorph, a race that can live up to hundreds of years. One day the power-hungry Mezarte Kingdom came invading his village, eyeing the longevity of the iorph to be mixed in the kingdom's descendants. In the midst of chaos, Maquia is accidentally dragged by a dragonkin, called Renato, that gets out of control and falls in a distant forest. Lost and panicked, suddenly there was the sound of a crying baby from a homeless settlement that was destroyed by bandits. She decided to raise the baby and start a new life. Despite her ignorance of the outside world and being on the run, she is determined to continue living as a mother. In his struggle, it is shown how they depend on nature and that everything returns to nature no matter what man's will [3].

As living beings, humans depend on nature to survive. However, sometimes the relationship between humans and nature is not completely harmonious, nor balanced. Keraf [4] describes that the pattern is something more of an instrumental relationships. Nature is seen as a fulfillment of human needs. If it is considered useless, then nature will be ignored. Human action shows tend to have little to no consideration of preservation or conservation measures. This makes the human view narrow and ignores the responsibility on nature. This resulted in the rise of resource exploitation, which led to the emergence of environmental problems. The above explanation is a description of the anthropocentrism ethics. The view of anthropocentrism places man at the center of nature, any action will be weighed on the basis of moral value against human interests. If it benefits humans, it will be considered positive and vice versa. In anthropocentrism, humans are active subjects, while nature is a passive element.

What Keraf [4] described earlier is depicted in the *Sayoasa* animation. The environmental issues shown in this anime are not explicitly shown in the story, but through instructions from the dialogue and the background in the film. Glotfelty (2011: 242) through Dobie [2] suggests that ecocritics usually have an analog pattern, starting from discussing a representation of how nature is depicted in literary works, which increases public awareness to respond to nature. Then, discover and reconsider the genres of nature writing that have been overlooked. Also, ask questions related to the cause-and-effect relationship of anthropomorphism, the relationship with nature, and so on.

To criticize a literature, a basis is needed to be used as a reference in determining the boundaries of environmental problems. Human must have a rule in behavior related to nature. Keraf [4] explained that environmental ethics is a discipline that speaks of moral norms and rules that govern human behavior in relation to nature and the values of moral principles that animate the behavior of these principles. Keraf also wrote that environmental ethics is better understood as a criticism of the ethics and morals that humans embrace towards nature only limited to human social communities, which should also be applied to biotic communities or ecological communities [4]. This research will try to analyze the causes of environmental problems and how environmental ethics are interpreted in animation.

## 2 Methods

The method used in this research is the qualitative method. With an ecocritical approach, this research focuses on the points of natural representation as well as the principles of environmental ethics. This research follows the principles of environmental ethics including 1) respect for nature, 2) moral responsibility for nature, 3) caring for nature, 4) no harm, and 5) moral integrity. This research uses the animation *Sayonara no Asa ni Yakusoku no Hana*

*wo Kazarou* by Mari Okada as the main source of data. The data analysis was carried out by examining environmental issues within the story and identifying signs of the principal of environmental ethics towards nature. The data acquired were then analyzed and transcribed as needed. The result was presented in a descriptive form and then concluded.

### 3 Ecocritical Reading in *Sayonara no Asa ni Yakusoku no Hana wo Kazarou*

#### 3.1 Depicted Environmental Issues

*Sayoasa* criticized the importance of maintaining the balance of nature. As explained in the introduction, environmental issues in *Sayoasa* are not highlighted as the main focus of the story. The main focus of the story is the drama of the life of a mother and her adopted child. Maquia, the main character, along with other iorphs lived apart from human civilization peacefully. Peace maintained for hundreds of years was destroyed by the arrival of the Kingdom of Mezarte which broke the balance of nature in the process of achieving power. The Kingdom of Mezarte is one of the most advanced kingdoms in terms of economy and military. The kingdom is described as very thirsty for power and continues to spread its influence through military force. In the early part of the story, Mezarte's army came to the village of the iorph race to bring all the women, in order to be the prince's bride. They aim to mix human blood with iorphs that can live up to hundreds of years, with the aim of extending the duration of the regime's rule. All this is done unilaterally and blatantly violates the basic right to live.

Racine: "Our whole life is weaving cloth, weaving the hibiol. Always repeating this monotonous cycle. To associate with you like this is not—"

Izol: "It is not for you to decide. It is the king's order. You are to come with us to Mezarte this instant. The woman! Seize the woman! Cut down anyone that resists!"

It is true that iorph is not a human being, so it cannot be categorized as having human rights, but as a creature whose appearance is exactly the same as that of humans or arguably humanoid, has the same level of reasoning, has a culture, and speaks the same language, it is unethical to make such barbaric decision. What's more, Mezarte is described as a very developed country. The takeover taken by the Mezarte kingdom in the above quote shows how much they do not value races other than humans. In the above quote of the leader of the Mezarte army, Izol in the Japanese version pronounces "*hamukau mono wa isso kiri sutete mo kamawanai*". Mono in the context of using the Japanese sentences above means as person. This means that despite recognizing iorphs as distinct individuals from animals, it is clear mezarte does not value their right to live.

This animation uses a fictional setting. The story is depicted in a fantasy world, whose values bear a resemblance to the real world around the 16th and 17th centuries. The difference lies only in races other than humans, as well as mystical animals or living things. However, the technological development, architecture, and socio-cultural conditions of society described are very similar to Europe in the renaissance. Okada tried to convey an implicit message related to nature in this animation judging from her efforts to write a fantasy story that is not too much different from reality. The message that Okada wants to show is not directly shown, but is based on the relationship between the characters in the story. This style of writing has been her trademark since she became the lead author of *Anohana: The Flower We Saw That Day* (2011) and *The Anthem of the Heart* (2015). In addition, in this animation she tries to convey the message through visuals. Dorail is one of the cities in the kingdom of Mezarte. Dorail serves as an iron-forging city. The city is shown to be a multi-

storey city that consist of iron forging, which is mainly assigned to make Mezarte army weapons. In the story, when the kingdom of Mezarte wanted to expand their influence through military forces, Dorail were ordered to make weapons such as cannons in large quantities, which caused the entire city to be covered by the smoke from the forging. Even in clear daylight, smoke covers the city like clouds as shown in the following image.



**FIGURE 1.** Depiction of Dorail.

Dorail, which produces weapons en masse, could diminish the amount of iron ore that exists by continuing to mine the mineral excessively. The large number of weapons already produced before made the citizens of the city knew beforehand that Mezarte was going to war soon, but they had no choice but to follow the direction of their government.

In addition to the weaponry which is considered sophisticated at the time, Mezarte also had another military asset, renato. Renato is an animal that can be said to be mystical from its dragon-like stature and ability to spit out fire. In addition, renato also has a pair of wings that are able to make them fly very quickly from one place to another. This combination made Mezarte to use renato as the main weapon in conquering other countries and gaining absolute power. But one thing Mezarte didn't consider was the animal's welfare. They armed renato with armor and other war support equipment, but did not pay attention to their health. Despite looking dashing and mighty, gradually renato contracts a deadly plague called "red-eyes". The symptoms are that renato's eyes will turn red, and renato will burn from within his own body. This caused renato to go berserk and die not long after. At the beginning of the story, renato's remaining population is less than ten, and all of them were supposed to be military assets. But seeing this, mezarte did not take any precautions other than one, namely quarantine. But the unfortunate thing is that the quarantine was done late and poorly. The step Mezarte took when a renato contracted the plague was to kill it, followed by cremation, and then the rest of its body was buried deeply into the ground. Although the population of renato were reduced to less than five, the kingdom did not take any move and instead said the following.

Minister A: "Up to now, Mezarte has been able to conquer neighboring countries because of the ancient flying beast, Renato. If Renato dies out, the balance will be shifted. "

minister B: "In order to maintain the authority of the Mezarte, an alternative to Renato, a being beyond human knowledge will be needed. "

King: "Yes, yes. We have got it. The chosen blood. (The iorphs)"

The Mezarte officials treated renato as more of a tool than an asset. Instead of saving the endangered species, they even began to think about exploiting other living things just for political and military purposes. At the end of the story, there is only one renato left. In addition to the exploitation carried out by the Mezarte kingdom, humans have actually

committed crimes that reduce the biodiversity of nature, as stated by Racine, the elder of the iorph race as follows.

"Those of us who live long lives without much change in our appearance are a fairytale to those who don't. Until just a few hundred years ago, those beings were everywhere. A race with bird-like wings, flowers singing before dawn, giant fish rising to the surface of the sea. But all of them had said goodbye to this world. That is why we continue to weave the cloth of hibiol."

These creatures disappeared swallowed by time and were regarded as fairytale by humans, without realizing that it was their work. Therefore, in order to avoid the same result, the iorph decided to move away from human civilization and weave hibiol cloth for hundreds of years of their lives.

From the analysis above, the environmental problems contained in the animation can be narrowed down to the following points: 1) The Mezarte kingdom discriminated the iorph and violated the basic right to for political and military purposes; 2) The exploitation of Renato, which fell into the category of endangered animals, as a military asset by the Mezarte kingdom, which almost led to the extinction of the species; 3) Environmental pollution caused by industrialization without regard to the impact on the environment.

### **3.2 Environmental Ethics and the Representation of Nature**

In environmental ethics, there are principles that are used as human guidelines in deciding policies in order to overcome ecological crises [4]. The study will use five of the eight principles in environmental ethics.

#### **1. Respect for nature**

Humans have a moral obligation to respect all beings in the ecological community [4]. It is a basic principle by which humans as part of a community live together in the universe, and protect and preserve its contents. In the story, the iorph is shown as a representation of appreciating nature. They live as part of nature, taking no more than they need to. On the contrary, Mezarte has absolutely no respect for nature and often prioritizes their greed without having respect for other living things.

#### **2. Moral Responsibility for Nature**

Humans who are of nature have a responsibility to the existence and preservation of every part of the universe, especially living things [4]. Each party is responsible for joint efforts, policies, and actions to safeguard the universe and its contents. One of the representations of this principle is indicated by the iorph. Iorph is a race that lives very long regardless of the appearance that is still like children. One of the oldest is the elder of the iorph village, Racine who is more than 400 years old. With such a long lifespan, it is difficult for the iorph to interact with the outside world. Their daily job is to weave hibiol cloth; the cloth is considered to be the entire record of their lives. All existing events will be woven into a cloth so that they can be stored forever. In the plot, this hibiol cloth is also often analogous to the fabric of time described in the following narrative:

"Warp threads are the flowing months and days. It changes the seasons and dyes the sky blue. The weft threads are the life of people. Stamping the ground, shaking the heart. The people of iorph continue to weave the hibiol. In their hundreds of years of long, distant life."

Nature always records all events that exist on earth without exception and always leaves traces of past life. Javaux [5] said that a stone can record evidence of life that existed since billions of years ago. Javaux [5] refers to rocks and other abiotic objects. But in the story, the recording is done literally by living beings. It is also mentioned by Maquia as

follows.

Barlow: "Are you done?"

Maquia: "No, it is not over. Because as long as I live, Ariel's hibiol will always continue."

At the end of the story after Ariel dies of old age, Barlow who is also an iorph asks if his business is over. The affairs here are not only interpreted as related to Ariel, but can be interpreted as natural affairs that are always witnesses of everything. Although Ariel is dead, she remains part of Maquia's hibiol or life record. While the iorph can be said to be a representation of nature, Ariel is a human representation. Although a human in the past is gone, what he did during his lifetime will continue until the next generation through the traces left behind in nature.

### 3. Caring for Nature

This principle emphasizes compassion or concern for nature and related ecological elements in one way, without expecting retribution [4]. According to Keraf, in the perspective of deep ecology the more humans love nature, the richer it will be and can realize itself as an ecological person. This principle leads to a perspective, which is not present in the Mezarte government, which arbitrarily exploits, discriminates, which implies that they consider humans above all else.

### 4. No Harm

This principle makes it clear that man has an obligation to protect all life in the universe, at least not to harm it. Singer in Keraf [4] says that although humans are allowed to take advantage of all the contents of the universe, including animals and plants, it must be done wisely taking into account the fulfillment of reasonable needs. So not to the extent that it can damage the balance of the ecological environment as a whole. Iorph shows the lifestyles of those who make sufficient use of nature and do not interfere in ecological communities other than what they need. Mezarte attacked other races, exploiting resources such as iron ore and exploiting endangered animals only for strengthening an already superpower kingdom. Here is a statement from Izol when reporting renato affected by the outbreak.

"One more Renato has developed red eye disease. It is quickly killed and incinerated. The remains were further buried deep into the earth. The number of living individuals is now reduced to five."

It is seen instead of overcoming the outbreak, Mezarte killed the renato that was infected. The non-harming actions mentioned in this principle are not harming animals, not causing the destruction of certain species, not reducing biodiversity and so on. The Kingdom of Mezarte had already violated all these principles. The near extinction of renato, the attack on the iorph, and the pollution seen on Dorail as described earlier can also represent the "rotting" or "decaying" nature.

### 5. Moral Integrity

This principle leads to government officials making public policy. The power they have must be able to consider the public interest including the preservation of nature [4]. Officials of the Mezarte government did not consider what was good for their country, and only considered political interests to enrich themselves. They are also not responsible for the decisions they make. Here is what the king said when he was on the run at the time of invasion by the alliance of neighboring countries.

King: "Where are the ministers?"

Soldier A: "About that, they had already left the castle with their retainer."

As policymakers, the king, prince, or even ministers are not responsible by the slightest for all the actions they take towards nature and the surrounding country. This is also stated by Izol at the end of the story as an ironic result. He said that Mezarte, who harnessed the ancient power of nature to show dominance, was instead punished for their decision for abusing that power. Here, the alliance of countries that attack Mezarte and iorph represents that nature fights back.

## 4 Conclusion

Mari Okada criticized the selfishness and greed of mankind, especially towards nature. She conveyed her message through implicit means hidden in the story and far out of focus. Those messages became the story's set of gear, driving things step by step until the peak of the conflict. Only by the end viewers were made to realize the impact of such selfishness, and what a meek little girl could do to change it although not directly.

Maquia, other iorph, and renato represent nature in the whole story. It represents nature that has always been a witness, the nature that is decaying, and the nature that fights back against the damage done to it. While the kingdom of Mezarte explicitly represents the negative side of man. Mezarte violated the ethical principles of the environment that should be a guide to a harmonious life with nature. From this analysis, Mezarte is a country that adheres to Shallow Ecological Movement, in other words an excessive anthropocentrism ethic that positions humans above all else. The real Anthropocentrism should not be like what Mezarte had showed. Anthropocentrism is indeed an ethic that utilizes nature to meet human needs. But because human life depends on the continuity of other living things, it is man's business to maintain the universe and its contents. But because of misinterpretation and greed, man ignored problems that do not have a direct impact on themselves, or it could be said human were just thinking about the short-term consequences. Throughout the story, Maquia just wants to change the fate of herself and her loved ones. But without her knowing, it has an impact on the sustainability of a country and even nature as a whole. The message conveyed is that no matter what man does, nature will always respond.

## References

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