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FROM ECO-HERO TO ECO-HEROES: ENVIRONMENTALISM IN ECO-CENTERED MALAYSIAN NOVELS IN ENGLISH

Abstract:

This paper is informed by Tim Poland's concept of "eco-hero" which refers to the hero who "seeks and nurtures diversity and complexity and fights against all forms of pollution, class hierarchy, and outside threats to bioregional autonomy" thus rejects all self-interest, in search for the "ecocentric Self". I analyze eco-heroes in five contemporary eco-centered Malaysian novels in English: Yang-May Ooi's *The Flame Tree* (1998), KS Maniam's *Between Lives* (2003), Keris Mas' *Jungle of Hope* (2009), Zakaria Ali's *The Dam* (2009), and Chuah Guat Eng's *Days of Change* (2010). The environmental complexities presented in these works differ, but the common thread in these works is grassroots struggles against environmental degradation in Malaysia, spanning from colonialist rule to present time. Using the concept of eco-hero, this paper aims to answer two pertinent questions: How successful are the eco-heroes in their quest to fight against environmental threats? What, essentially, characterizes their success and failure? The answers to these questions might reveal a great deal about environmentalism in Malaysia. This paper argues that understanding the history of environmentalism in Malaysia that influence the success and failure of eco-heroes in the selected novels is also necessary. It also posits that the eco-hero, in the realm of Malaysian literature in English, has transformed from a solitary figure to group solidarity.

Keywords:

eco-hero, environmentalism, Malaysian novels