

Ecocritical Reading of the Masterpiece *Ibong Adarna* (Embracing Nature Through Literature: Literature Goes Green)

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the masterpiece *Ibong Adarna* through the lens of Ecocriticism to highlight the relationship between humans and the environment within the narrative. Specifically, it aimed to identify the representation of nature in the text, analyze its role in shaping the plot and characters, interpret the symbolism of natural elements, and determine the significance of environmental consciousness in literary studies. The research employed qualitative textual analysis of the ecological elements found in the corrido, including forests, mountains, rivers, animals, birds, and other natural and magical creatures.

The findings revealed that although *Ibong Adarna* does not explicitly advocate environmental conservation, it contains significant ecological dimensions that can be uncovered through close reading. Nature functions not merely as a setting but as an active force that influences the actions, decisions, and destinies of the characters. The forest, mountains, the Jordan River, the Adarna Bird, and other birds and animals symbolize the interconnectedness of humans and nature while emphasizing themes of survival, stewardship, interdependence, and respect for the environment. The analysis further showed that Don Juan's success is rooted not only in his bravery but also in his ability to cooperate with, understand, and respect nature.

The study demonstrates that literature can serve as a site of discourse on nature and ecological awareness. Through an ecocritical reading, *Ibong Adarna* emerges not only as a tale of adventure and heroism but also as an important medium for promoting environmental values. The study likewise underscores the importance of applying an ecocritical approach in literature teaching to further develop students' environmental consciousness and contribute to discussions on sustainability, climate action, and environmental protection.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, *Ibong Adarna*, Environmental Consciousness, Interdependence

INTRODUCTION

Ibong Adarna is a famous corrido which, despite its foreign origins, is regarded as an important part of Philippine literature. It is a narrative poem composed of octosyllabic stanzas and is traditionally sung or recited in a rapid or andante manner. Although its true authorship remains uncertain, it is often attributed to José de la Cruz, a renowned poet during the Spanish colonial period (Benitez, 2008). Because of its rich content and valuable lessons, *Ibong Adarna* has long been included in the Filipino curriculum in the Philippines. From earlier curricula such as the Basic Education Curriculum (BEC), Revised Basic Education Curriculum (RBEC), New Secondary Education Curriculum (NSEC), K to 12 Curriculum, and the Enhanced MATATAG Curriculum, it remains one of the literary works studied in Grade 7, reflecting Filipino culture, values, and elements of fantasy (Department of Education, 2016 Curriculum Guide; Department of Education, 2023).

Despite continuous reforms in the educational system, *Ibong Adarna* remains part of the learning competencies due to its themes of loyalty, love, family, faith, heroism, and adventure. Beyond its moral and cultural dimensions, it is also examined through various critical lenses such as sociological, moralist, feminist, and cultural criticism to connect the text to contemporary perspectives of learners (Lumbera, 2005).

At Bulacan State University, the study of *Ibong Adarna* continues beyond Junior High School and extends to the tertiary level, particularly in the Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) major in Filipino. It is included in

literature courses such as Literary Criticism and Reading of Literary Masterpieces, alongside works like *Florante at Laura*, *Noli Me Tangere*, and *El Filibusterismo* (CHED, 2017; DepEd, 2016).

Recent ecocritical scholarship emphasizes the interconnectedness of humans and the natural world, particularly in the context of environmental crisis and the Anthropocene. Ecocriticism is widely understood as a critical approach that examines how literature represents nature and exposes the relationship between human and non-human systems, highlighting environmental responsibility and ecological interdependence (Swaminathan & Chakravarthy, 2023). Contemporary studies further show that ecocriticism has expanded into empirical, affective, and more-than-human approaches, reflecting growing concerns on climate change, ecological loss, and environmental justice (Gaard, 2020; Ryan, 2023). These developments position literature not only as cultural expression but also as a site where ecological awareness and environmental ethics are constructed. In addition, ecocritical discourse stresses that literary texts often embed environmental meanings implicitly, requiring interpretive frameworks that reveal ecological dimensions beyond surface narratives (Lahtinen & Löytty, 2024).

In this context, literature is not only a reflection of human experience and imagination but also a medium through which human beings engage with nature. Ecocriticism examines how literary works portray the natural world and how such representations shape characters' perspectives and actions (Lumbera, 2000; Reyes, 1992). In *Ibong Adarna*, significant natural elements such as forests, mountains, rivers, and other symbolic landscapes play crucial roles in shaping the narrative. Through an ecocritical reading, these elements reveal how nature both sustains life and presents challenges to human experience (Almario, 2015; Tolentino, 2001).

However, in many classroom discussions of *Ibong Adarna* and other literary works, the ecological dimension is often underemphasized. Thus, ecocriticism serves as a lens to foreground environmental awareness and highlight human responsibility toward nature (Nibalvos, 2020). As Buell (2005) argues, nature functions as a significant presence that shapes moral and ethical perspectives, allowing texts to be read in terms of whether nature is portrayed as nurturing, threatening, or exploited.

This approach addresses a gap in the conventional interpretation of *Ibong Adarna*, particularly in relation to environmental awareness, which is increasingly relevant in the face of flooding, rising heat indices, climate change, and other ecological concerns. Ultimately, this study also contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land), by promoting ecological awareness through literary analysis.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to analyze *Ibong Adarna* through the lens of Ecocriticism. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Identify how nature is portrayed in the literary work;
2. Analyze the role of nature in shaping the plot and characters;
3. Explain the symbolism of natural elements such as forests, mountains, and magical creatures;
4. Demonstrate the relationship between humans and nature based on the narrative of the work; and
5. Promote awareness of the importance of nature through literature.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative textual analysis using the lens of ecocriticism to examine the relationship, conflicts, and responsibilities of humans toward nature. Words and references related to nature found in the *corrido* were identified and analyzed in relation to the events and narrative development of the poem. Unlike conventional corpus-based analyses, where environmental elements are explicitly presented through narration, dialogue, or descriptive language, the ecological dimensions in the *corrido* are often implicit. As such, they require close, interpretive, and in-depth reading to uncover their underlying meanings.

There are four commonly used approaches in ecocritical analysis: (1) *Symbolism and Metaphor*, which examines how natural elements such as forests, rivers, and animals represent broader social or human conditions rather than literal nature (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996); (2) *Setting and Environment*, which explores how descriptions of

nature, whether flourishing or degraded, reflect the moral, political, or emotional conditions of characters (Buell, 1995); (3) *Human–Nature Relationship*, which foregrounds how characters’ actions, decisions, and outcomes are shaped by their interaction with the natural world, even when such relationships are not explicitly articulated in the text, thereby enabling an analysis of implicit ecological behavior such as dependence, respect, and exploitation (Garrard, 2012); and (4) *Natural Resources and Environmental Events*, which provides a framework for examining how elements such as water, animals, and land function not merely as background features but as active components of narrative development that influence conflict, resolution, and character progression (Heise, 2008).

Among these approaches, the study concentrated on the Human–Nature Relationship and Natural Resources and Environmental Events. These were selected because they most directly align with the narrative structure and ecological dynamics present in *Ibong Adarna*. Together, they allow the study to move beyond representational analysis toward functional and relational interpretation. While Symbolism and Setting focus on descriptive and representational aspects of nature, the selected approaches emphasize how ecological elements actively shape narrative events and character development.

This analytical focus aligns with the core principle of ecocriticism, which asserts that ecological meanings are often implicit rather than explicitly stated. Thus, ecological significance in the text is not always directly expressed but is constructed through the interaction between human actions and environmental elements, requiring interpretive engagement grounded in close reading, critical analysis, and contextual understanding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and analysis of the masterpiece *Ibong Adarna* are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Ecocritical Reading of *Ibong Adarna*

Nature/Environmental Element Mentioned in the Corrido	Ecocritical Interpretation
Forests and Mountains (Mount Tabor and the Piedras Platas Tree)	This was the place traversed by the three prince brothers in their quest to find a cure for their father's illness. The forest serves not merely as a setting but as an active force that tests the morality, perseverance, and wisdom of the characters. The mountain symbolizes great sacrifice and trials that must be overcome before success can be attained. It also highlights the relationship between humans and nature in the context of endurance, growth, and development. Although the forest and mountain landscapes described in the corrido are not presented in great detail, they may be viewed as largely untouched by human activities due to their distance from the palace and surrounding communities. No settlements existed in the area, and only a hermit was said to reside there. The narrative also recounts that Don Juan eventually exhausted the provisions he had brought on his journey, having even shared them with an elderly man he encountered along the way. Despite this, he did not starve and managed to survive for a considerable period. This suggests that the forest and mountain environment provided him with food and other necessities. Thus, the forest and mountain are not merely physical settings in the

	corrido; they demonstrate the significant support and sustenance that nature provides to the protagonist. The increasing occurrence of floods, landslides, extreme heat, and other environmental disruptions further highlights the interconnected relationship between human activities and ecological systems. These phenomena may be interpreted as manifestations of broader environmental changes that challenge assumptions about human control over nature. In this context, the narrative's representation of forests and mountains as powerful and influential elements acquires renewed significance. The Sierra Madre Mountain Range provides a contemporary example of nature's continuing ecological function. Its role in weakening or redirecting typhoons underscores the capacity of natural landscapes to shape human experiences and mitigate environmental hazards. Such examples reveal that nature is not merely a passive backdrop to human activity but an active force that influences social and environmental outcomes. From an ecocritical perspective, the representation of forests and mountains in the corrido highlights the limits of human authority over the natural world. Despite technological advancement and environmental modification, natural systems continue to operate according to their own processes and dynamics. The narrative therefore presents nature as a powerful presence whose influence persists beyond human intentions and control.
2. The Adarna Bird	From an ecocritical perspective, the Ibong Adarna is not merely a fantastical element but a representation of the deeper relationship between humans and nature—where respect and proper treatment are essential in order to receive nature's blessings. The Adarna Bird embodies the dual character of nature as both a life-giving and potentially destructive force. Its song possesses healing power capable of restoring life and health, yet its enchantment also places individuals at risk, transforming them into stone when they fail to resist its influence. This duality suggests that nature cannot be understood solely as benevolent or hostile; rather, it operates according to its own power and agency. The bird's capacity to heal and harm reflects the complexity of the human–nature relationship depicted in the corrido. Furthermore, the narrative presents the Adarna Bird as only one among many sources of healing found in the natural world. The presence of medicinal plants, roots, leaves, sap, and bark highlights nature's abundance and its role as a source of sustenance and restoration. These elements emphasize the ecological value of the environment and its significance to human survival. Likewise, natural features such as wells and waterfalls are

	portrayed as spaces associated with renewal and healing. Through these representations, the corrido constructs nature as an active and indispensable force whose resources and processes shape human experiences and outcomes.
3. The Hermit	The hermit lives in close proximity to nature and provides guidance to individuals such as Don Juan who venture into distant forests. His assistance—offering items such as a razor, lime, and cord used to capture the Adarna Bird—plays a significant role in the success of the quest. He represents a person who has a deep relationship with nature, demonstrating that wisdom is gained through harmony and communion with the environment. In contemporary society, the figure of the Hermit may be understood as a symbolic representation of individuals who embody environmental awareness and stewardship. These may include caretakers of protected areas, environmental advocates, or community members who contribute to ecological preservation through everyday practices. Their presence in society reflects the continuing role of environmental consciousness in maintaining the relationship between humans and the natural world. Within the context of the corrido, the Hermit functions not only as a guide to the protagonist but also as a representation of ecological wisdom, suggesting that knowledge, responsibility, and care for the environment are valuable forces that support human survival and well-being.
4. The Three Princess	The three brothers represent different types of human attitudes toward nature: Don Pedro, who is exploitative; Don Diego, who is indifferent or passive; and Don Juan, who is responsible and acts as a steward and ally of the environment. The ratio of one environmentally conscious brother to two self-interested brothers may be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the unequal distribution of environmental awareness within society. The narrative highlights how attitudes toward nature vary among individuals, with ecological responsibility often overshadowed by personal interests and ambitions. This imbalance reflects the challenges faced by those who act with consideration for the environment within a broader social context that may not share the same values. The miraculous provision of bread and water by the Hermit further reinforces the connection between human actions and environmental outcomes. In the context of the corrido, survival and success are associated with humility, restraint, and a respectful relationship with the natural world, suggesting that harmony emerges when humans recognize their dependence on forces beyond themselves.

5. The Wolf, Horse, Unicorn, Eagle, and Birds, as Companions in the Journey

The Wolf, Horse, Eagle, and Other Animals

The wolf and horse, as well as birds such as the unicorn and eagle, demonstrate that nature is not an enemy of humankind but rather a companion in human journeys and adventures. These creatures also serve as protectors and rescuers of the characters. Their presence reflects the interdependent relationship between humans, animals, birds, and the natural world as a whole. Humans benefit from nature, just as nature is influenced by human actions.

The wolf, or wild dog, that assisted and healed Don Juan may be interpreted as a symbol of nature's nurturing and compassionate character. Although commonly perceived as a fierce creature, the narrative presents it as evidence that nature is not humanity's adversary but can instead serve as an ally and savior.

Through an ecocritical lens, this part further illustrates that:

- A balance must exist between humans and nature; when people treat nature with kindness and respect, nature often responds positively.
- Birds and animals generally become aggressive only when they feel threatened, experience hunger, or suffer from human intrusion into their habitats.
- Insects and wild animals play essential roles in the food chain and the broader ecosystem; therefore, they should not automatically be regarded as pests or harmful creatures.

Thus, this aspect of the narrative underscores the importance of coexistence, mutual respect, and ecological balance between humans and the natural world.

7. The Jordan River (Water)

The Jordan River symbolizes life, healing, renewal, and transformation within the narrative. Its ability to restore Don Juan's wounds positions water as an active force that influences the course of human experience rather than merely serving as a passive setting. The river functions as a medium through which recovery and change become possible, highlighting the dependence of human well-being on natural elements.

Beyond its symbolic significance, the river also represents the broader ecological functions of water. As a source of irrigation, food, livelihood, and environmental stability, it sustains both human and nonhuman life. From an ecocritical perspective, the narrative portrays water as a vital component of an interconnected ecological system in which humans, animals, plants, and natural resources continuously interact. The Jordan River therefore signifies more than physical restoration; it embodies the life-supporting capacities of nature and its influence on social and ecological processes.

	Through this representation, the corrido emphasizes the interdependent relationship between humans and the natural world. The river's role in sustaining life and facilitating transformation underscores the idea that human existence is deeply connected to ecological systems, whose presence and functions shape both individual experiences and collective survival.
8. King Salermo's Trials (Planting Wheat, Reclaiming Land from the Sea, and Moving a Mountain)	Planting wheat represents the value of food and livelihood. It shows that nature is the primary source of human needs, and therefore humans have the responsibility to care for it. The act of planting wheat reflects human dependence on land and natural resources for survival. From an ecocritical perspective, it demonstrates that nature is not merely a provider of resources but also a partner in sustaining life. Successful cultivation requires fertile soil, water, and proper environmental care. In this sense, agriculture becomes a life-saving activity, especially during times of pandemic and economic hardship. The act of reclaiming land from the sea to build a castle illustrates humanity's attempt to alter and control nature in order to satisfy needs and desires. In ecocritical reading, this can be seen as a symbol of human power to intervene in the natural order of the environment. However, it also suggests that such transformations may have ecological consequences, particularly for marine ecosystems and the organisms that inhabit them, similar to land conversion for subdivisions, infrastructure, and industrial development. The task of moving a mountain to the palace window symbolizes strength, stability, and the grandeur of nature. The command to relocate it reflects humanity's desire to reshape nature according to human will. From an ecocritical standpoint, this may be interpreted as viewing nature as an object that can be controlled. Nevertheless, it also emphasizes that nature possesses inherent value and does not exist solely for human convenience. Thus, the trials of King Salermo illustrate the close relationship between humans and nature. While humans have the ability to use and modify the environment, they must still respect its natural balance and intrinsic value. These trials represent humanity's interactions with nature, which may involve both conflict and harmony. From an ecocritical perspective, humans are not separate from nature or its absolute rulers; rather, they are part of it. Success is achieved through respect, cooperation, and responsible interaction with the environment.

The foregoing analysis positions literature as a discursive space through which nature is constructed, interpreted, and assigned value. The narrative suggests that humans are not separate from the natural world but are situated within its broader ecological systems, where meaning and existence are shaped through continuous interaction. Within this framework, notions of "success" can be read as culturally mediated constructs that reflect the degree to which human actions align with ecological balance, relationality, and environmental awareness.

The depiction of birds and magical creatures functions as a symbolic representation of biodiversity and ecological complexity. Rather than serving only as fantastical elements, these figures may be interpreted as narrative devices that foreground the diversity, agency, and interconnectedness of nonhuman life. In doing so, the text reflects an ecological worldview in which multiple forms of life coexist within a shared system, each contributing to the dynamics of the environment. This emphasis situates the human world within a wider network of ecological relations, where value is distributed across both human and nonhuman entities rather than centered exclusively on human experience.

CONCLUSION

Based on the ecocritical reading of the masterpiece *Ibong Adarna*, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Ecological meanings in *Ibong Adarna* can be inferred from its settings, where nature is closely connected to the characters' journey and outcomes.
2. Ecocritical reading focuses on implied meanings in the text, allowing deeper interpretation beyond what is explicitly stated by the author.
3. Ecocriticism reveals environmental dimensions in literary works that are often overlooked in traditional classroom analysis.
4. The protagonist's success is shaped not only by strength but by his interaction with nature, showing that nature functions as an active force that influences events and character development.
5. Literature serves as a space for exploring representations of nature, and ecocritical analysis links these representations with ecological and cultural contexts for deeper understanding of the text.

Implications For Pedagogy in Filipino Classrooms

In conclusion, through the lens of ecocriticism, *Ibong Adarna* is not merely a tale of adventure but a significant reminder that nature is a living force that must be respected, valued, and protected. Upon it depends not only human survival but also the continued existence of humankind itself.

The ecocritical reading of *Ibong Adarna* suggests several implications for teaching literature in Filipino classrooms. First, it expands literary instruction beyond moral and thematic interpretation by integrating environmental awareness into text analysis. This allows students to understand literary works not only as cultural or moral narratives but also as representations of human–nature relationships.

Second, ecocriticism encourages teachers to highlight the ecological dimensions of familiar texts such as landscapes, animals, and natural forces. In doing so, students are guided to recognize that nature in literature is not merely a background setting but an active element that shapes characters and events.

Third, this approach supports interdisciplinary learning by connecting literature with contemporary environmental issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecological sustainability. Such integration helps students relate classical texts to present-day realities, making learning more relevant and meaningful.

Lastly, ecocritical pedagogy fosters critical thinking by encouraging learners to interpret implicit meanings in texts. Instead of focusing solely on explicit lessons, students are trained to examine how literature constructs ideas about nature, power, and responsibility, thereby developing deeper analytical and reflective skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Future literary analyses may benefit from integrating scientific research, empirical knowledge, and contemporary events to strengthen connections between literature and environmental realities.
2. Researchers and educators may consider the strategic use of digital resources and artificial intelligence as supplementary tools in literary interpretation and instruction.
3. The continued and expanded application of ecocritical frameworks in literary studies is suggested to further enhance environmental awareness among learners, including its use in analyzing texts such as *Florante at Laura* and other canonical works.

4. Ecocritical literary analysis may be incorporated into diverse pedagogical strategies to support more meaningful, relevant, and context-based environmental education in the classroom.

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