

ROOTED IN THE WILD: AN ECOCRITICAL READING OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING IN THE WILD ROBOT (2024)

Muhamad Irgi Sadam Qie¹, Reza Anis Maulidya²

¹Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, muhamad.irgi23@mhs.uinjkt.ac.id

²Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, reza.anis@staff.uinjkt.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Ecocritical studies in popular media are becoming more pertinent due to the pressing need to address environmental challenges and the evolving dynamic between technology and nature. This essay employs Greg Garrard's theoretical framework to analyze how identity and belonging are portrayed in Chris Sanders's animated feature film, *The Wild Robot* (2024), from an ecocritical perspective. Using a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach, the study gathers information by watching the movie and reviewing the literature several times in a methodical manner, concentrating on significant moments, conversations, and visual components that illustrate how technology (Roz) and nature interact. The results show that by showing Roz's journey from an outsider to a caring member of the ecosystem, the movie subverts the traditional lines separating the natural from the artificial, fostering ecological empathy and awareness. By demonstrating how animated films can foster new perspectives on environmental stewardship and peaceful cohabitation between technology and nature, this study advances ecocritical theory. Incorporating ecocritical narratives into educational and cultural discourse can enhance public understanding of ecological challenges, according to the study's conclusion, which also provides suggestions for further interdisciplinary research.

Key Words: *Ecocriticism, The Wild Robot, Nature-Technology Relationship.*

ABSTRAK

Studi ekokritik dalam media populer semakin relevan karena kebutuhan mendesak untuk mengatasi tantangan lingkungan dan dinamika yang berubah antara teknologi dan alam. Esai ini menggunakan kerangka teoretis Greg Garrard untuk meneliti bagaimana identitas dan rasa memiliki digambarkan dalam film animasi Chris Sanders, *The Wild Robot* (2024), dari perspektif ekokritik. Menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif-analitis kualitatif, studi ini mengumpulkan informasi dengan menonton film dan meninjau literatur beberapa kali secara metodis serta berkonsentrasi pada momen-momen penting, percakapan, dan komponen visual yang menggambarkan bagaimana teknologi (Roz) dan alam berinteraksi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dengan menunjukkan perjalanan Roz dari seorang outsider menjadi anggota ekosistem yang peduli, film tersebut membalikkan garis tradisional yang memisahkan yang alami dari yang buatan, mendorong empati dan kesadaran ekologis. Dengan menunjukkan bagaimana film animasi dapat mempromosikan sudut pandang baru tentang pengelolaan lingkungan dan koeksistensi damai antara teknologi dan alam, studi ini memajukan teori ekokritik. Menggabungkan narasi ekokritik ke dalam wacana pendidikan dan budaya dapat meningkatkan pengetahuan publik tentang tantangan ekologi, menurut kesimpulan studi ini, yang juga menawarkan saran untuk penelitian lintas disiplin lebih lanjut.

Kata Kunci: Ekokritisisme, *The Wild Robot*, Hubungan Alam-Teknologi

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the intersection of environmental issues and questions of identity has become increasingly central in both global discourse and literary studies. The 2024 Sustainability Trends Report highlights that while renewable energy is expanding rapidly, the world continues to struggle with climate change, deforestation, and the depletion of natural resources. These issues demand urgent cultural and technological solutions. (Fahrurrozi, Amrullah, & Par, 2025). As societies grapple with these crises, literature and film have emerged as powerful media for exploring how humans relate to the natural world and to each other, often challenging the boundaries between technology, nature, and identity.

Increasingly, people around the world are becoming aware of environmental issues and how the popular media can change how people think about the connection between humans and nature. This makes ecocritical studies of this film even more important. Animation movies have a big effect on making people more environmentally aware, especially among young people (Abdurrahman, 2024). They can do this by telling stories that are easy for people of all ages to understand. With \$333.8 million in worldwide sales, *The Wild Robot* was a commercial hit. It was also praised by critics and was nominated for nine Annie Awards and three Academy Awards, making it the DreamWorks movie with the most Oscar nods. This success highlights the strong resonance of ecological issues in contemporary popular stories.

In recent years, ecocritical studies have shifted away from idealized images of nature and toward a more nuanced examination of the connections between technology, identity, and the environment. People often associate ecocriticism, which examines environmental issues through literature or culture, with a green political and moral agenda. The field of study focuses on "the study of the relationships between humans and non-humans" in cultural history (Garrard, 2012). In this way, cartoon movies like *The Wild Robot* are a great way to discuss big ideas, such as what "naturalness" means and how identity can change as a result of interacting with the world around us.

The primary concept underlying this study is the complexity of the relationship between technology and nature in contemporary narratives, specifically how these stories shape our perception of ourselves and our role within an ecological context. A gap needs to be filled in the knowledge base by exploring in more detail how popular films create different stories about how the artificial and the natural can work together, and what this means for identity and belonging in a world where traditional opposites are no longer relevant. In this movie, the main character is a robot that transforms into different forms by learning animal languages, forming emotional connections, and adapting to the natural world. This contradicts the common belief that technology is separate from nature.

The story of *The Wild Robot* is about Roz's trip. She was originally designed to be a servant robot that would perform tasks for people, but when a cargo ship gets caught in a storm, she gets stranded on an island with wild animals. Due to a series of unexpected events, such as ruining a goose nest and killing the mother goose, Roz must learn animal language and adapt to a place that initially did not want her. Chris Sanders, who has worked on *How to Train Your Dragon* and *Lilo & Stitch* before, employs a drawing style influenced by watercolors, classic Disney animated movies, and Hayao Miyazaki's work. He creates images that illustrate the interconnectedness of technology and nature in a natural way. Kris Bowers composed the moving music for the movie, marking his first work on a full-length animated film.

This article explores how *The Wild Robot* (2024) portrays the evolving relationship between technology and the natural world through Roz's journey as an outsider among the forest animals. It examines how the film shows technology transitioning from a perceived threat to an important and nurturing part of the ecosystem. The article also discusses how Roz's role as a caregiver challenges traditional boundaries between technology and nature, conveying ecocritical messages about coexistence. Additionally, it highlights how the story demonstrates technology as a guardian or ally of nature, influencing people's acceptance of technology in ecological contexts. Finally, the film offers lessons

on ecological awareness, stewardship, and living in harmony with both technology and nature.

Several important studies from the past have looked at similar topics. Fathinah et al. (2023) used Garrard's theory to analyze the documentary film *Drought* (2023); Sari & Rahmawati (2022) looked at the novel *The Wild Robot* from an ecofeminist point of view; Pratiwi (2023) talked about how cross-species caregiving is shown in children's books; Nugroho (2021) looked at the idea of dwelling in science fiction books; and Rahman (2024) looked into the relationship between people and technology in animated movies. However, no one has specifically examined *The Wild Robot* (2024) as a film that employs Garrard's ecocritical method to explore identity and connection within the context of relationships between nature, technology, and care.

The purpose of this article is to contribute to the body of ecocritical studies by examining animated movies from a theoretical perspective. Specifically, it aims to demonstrate how famous stories can offer new perspectives on the connections between technology, identity, and ecology. In the real world, this study should help teachers, media professionals, and policymakers understand how animated movies can be used to send complicated environmental messages. Using Garrard's ecocriticism theory, which is based on big metaphors like wilderness, animals, and dwelling, this study will show how *The Wild Robot* (2024) presents a challenging view on the potential for harmony between the technological and natural worlds, as well as what this means for the idea of identity and belonging in the Anthropocene era.

This study dives into understanding *The Wild Robot* (2024) through a thoughtful qualitative content analysis, using Greg Garrard's ecocriticism lens to explore how the film weaves together themes of identity and belonging through the relationship between technology and nature. To keep things thorough and organized, the research unfolded in three clear stages: gathering data, sorting and coding it, and then analyzing the findings in depth.

The heart of the study is the animated film *The Wild Robot* (2024), directed by Chris Sanders. I watched it five times between March and May 2025, each

time with a specific focus to truly understand the story. The first watch was all about soaking in the plot and getting to know the characters. The second time, I paid close attention to moments where Roz, the main character, connects with the natural world around her. On the third go, I jotted down key dialogues that stood out. The fourth viewing was about noticing the visuals and sounds—like the colors, sound effects, and camera angles—that bring the story to life. The fifth time was for double-checking my notes to ensure everything was accurate. To back this up, I also leaned on books and articles about ecocriticism (like Garrard’s 2012 work), environmental humanities, and studies on the **Wild Robot** novel and similar stories to give the analysis some solid ground.

Next came the coding and sorting phase, guided by Mayring’s (2014) qualitative content analysis approach. I broke the film down into key pieces: dialogues, character interactions, and visual themes. Using Garrard’s six ecocritical metaphors, such as wilderness, animals, dwelling, apocalypse, pastoral, and future. I categorized each scene to see what it revealed. For example, when Roz is shunned by the forest animals, I tagged that as wilderness. When she’s caring for Brightbill, it feels like a mix of animals and dwelling, showing her growing connection to the world around her.

To keep everything clear and open, I created a coding table to track the most important scenes. Each entry lists the scene’s timestamp, any key dialogue or narration, visual details, the ecocritical metaphor it connects to, and my thoughts on its meaning. This process helped me see how the film’s story and visuals tie into ecocritical ideas, making it easier to understand how *The Wild Robot* speaks to the relationship between technology, nature, and finding one’s place in the world.

Table 1.
Coding Framework for Ecocritical Film Analysis in The Wild Robot (2024)

No .	Discussion Focus	Key Findings	Dialogue or Picture	Ecocritical Concept (Garrard)	Timestamp
1.	General Opinion on the Role of Technology in the Eyes of Nature	1. Roz is perceived as a threat or “monster” by the forest animals due to her robotic appearance, signifying technology’s initial rejection by nature. 2. Animals express fear toward Roz, demonstrating nature’s instinctive defense mechanism against foreign, artificial presence. 3. A baby bunny questions Roz’s intention, symbolizing distrust from nature’s inhabitants.	Roz: “Rozzum 7134 is available for task assignment.” “Rozzum robot comes standard with the Alpha 113 Dimensional Processor.” “If you're unsure how I can assist, try asking me about myself.” Animal 1: “The monster!” Animal 2: “The monster!” Bunny: “Are you here to kill us?”	Wilderness	00:07:49
2.	Formation of the Relationship between Technology and Nature	1. Despite initial rejection, Roz helps animals by repairing nests and searching for food, showing that technology can support ecological needs. 2. Roz adopts and	 	Animals/ Dwelling	00:23:18 - 00:56:48

		raises Brightbill, showing that technology can form intimate, nurturing relationships with nature 3. Roz allows Brightbill to migrate with his flock, acknowledging the natural life cycle despite emotional	 Roz: "I'm glad you'r going where you belong."		
		attachment. This demonstrates technology's ability to honor ecological rhythms.			
3.	Technology as a Guardian of Forests and Its Impact on the Acceptance of Technology in the Natural Perspective	Roz saves animals from a snowstorm, proving her value as a guardian of the forest and shifting perception from "monster" to "protector."	 Fink: "Because of her, the thing, the monster, well, her name is Roz... she risked everything to bring you here."	Apocalypse / Future	01:07:00

DISCUSSION

The animated film *The Wild Robot* (2024), directed by Chris Sanders, effectively conveys the concept of ecocriticism to children and society. This research examines the interplay between nature and technology via the narrative of Roz, a smart robot, highlighting their interrelationship. The film, which

addresses the interaction between technology and the environment, was produced in an animated format to capture children's interest. Roz's adventure, featuring a sophisticated humanoid robot with a head, hands, legs, and body, clearly illustrates the significance of nature while articulating the underlying ecocritical themes of the narrative.

The interplay between technology and the natural environment exemplifies ecocriticism, illustrating that sophisticated robots supplant humans in nature, which serves as a symbolic depiction of this dynamic. The interaction between technology, specifically robotics, and the environment is referred to as ecology. "Ecological awareness perceives the world in a comprehensive and holistic manner, recognising its inherent diversity" (Buntaran, 1996).

1. General Opinion on the Role of Technology in the Eyes of Nature

Roz's inaugural expedition as a robot inadvertently marooned in a realm populated by flora and fauna. Roz was designed as a robot to facilitate all human endeavours; yet, she ultimately found herself marooned in a jungle, which starkly contrasts with her intended programming. The evidence, presented as a dialogue at minute 04:15, illustrates Roz's identity.

Roz: "Rozzum 7134 is available for task assignment."

"Rozzum robot comes standard with the Alpha 113 Dimensional Processor."

"If you're unsure how I can assist, try asking me about myself."

The forest animals reject Roz due to her appearance as a metallic robot. As seen in picture 1 below, Roz is perceived as a monstrous figure in the animals' lives.



Picture 1 Nature's first glimpse of technology



Picture 2 Defining technology as a monstrosity

In picture 2, the robot Roz is designated as a monster by the creatures on the remote island where she is marooned. Creatures such as Fink the fox and Thorn the bear perceive Roz's presence as a threat due to her status as an alien technology that disrupts the natural cadence of the forest. The forest constitutes their habitat, abundant with trees that offer shelter, rivers that furnish water, and plants that act as a food source, rendering Roz's presence a disturbance to the equilibrium of their ecology. The evidence, presented as a discussion at minute 07:49, indicates that Roz is designated as a monster.

Animal 1: "The monster!"

Animal 2: "The monster!"



Picture 3 What are the thoughts of nature's inhabitants towards technology

In picture 3, there is evidence of a conversation in which a bunny youngster asks Roz, "Are you here to kill us?" This indicates that animals or forest inhabitants perceive Roz's robotic form unfavourably. This is the perspective of nature's inhabitants on the abrupt introduction of technology into their lives. Nonetheless, as seen in image 4, Roz started to assist the animals by mending broken nests and aiding in the food search. Nevertheless, the animals continue to be agitated and wary of the technology that has abruptly intruded into their existence. They perceive Roz as an aberration, possibly jeopardising the equilibrium of the forest that has nurtured their existence. This tension embodies the ecocritical perspective on the discord between human-engineered technology and the natural world, wherein technology is frequently perceived as a menace before its eventual acceptance via adaptation and collaboration.



Picture 4 Beneficial impact of technology on nature

However, Roz persisted; she continued to extend assistance to other animals in her vicinity, as seen in picture 4, demonstrating Roz's intention to aid the woodland creatures, given that she is fundamentally a robot designed to facilitate all human endeavours. Roz exemplifies that not every technology threatens the conservation of nature and the environment. Consequently, those creatures should not presume that all technology is the same.

2. Formation of the Relationship between Technology and Nature

The connection between technology and nature is evident as Roz takes in Brightbill. In the film *The Wild Robot*, Brightbill is a goose that Roz found as an egg, forsaken by its mother. Following Brightbill's hatching, Roz dedicated herself wholly to his upbringing. Roz studied Brightbill and, as a perceptive robot, swiftly understood all of Brightbill's needs, from Brightbill's growth and development to all of Brightbill's need. While caring for Brightbill, Roz was accompanied by a cunning fox named Fink. Initially, Fink intended to employ Roz only to nurture Brightbill, with the eventual objective of swallowing him upon maturation. Nonetheless, Fink progressively developed a more profound attachment to Roz, finally considering her and Brightbill as his family.



Picture 5 The function of technology within the natural environment

Picture 5 depicts an evocative scene from *The Wild Robot* (2024), with Roz embracing her position as a nurturing "mother" to Brightbill, an orphaned gosling. The scenario depicts Roz tenderly feeding Brightbill, demonstrating her ability to fulfil his needs in the wilderness. This moment underscores how Roz, a robot, begins to forge a genuine connection with nature. It marks her transition from an outsider in the forest to an integral component of its ecology. The forest serves as a vast, vibrant habitat for Brightbill, abundant in vegetation for sustenance and expansive areas for flight training, while Roz learns to navigate its complexities. She examines the feeding behaviours of geese and ensures Brightbill's protection from threats such as predators or adverse weather conditions.

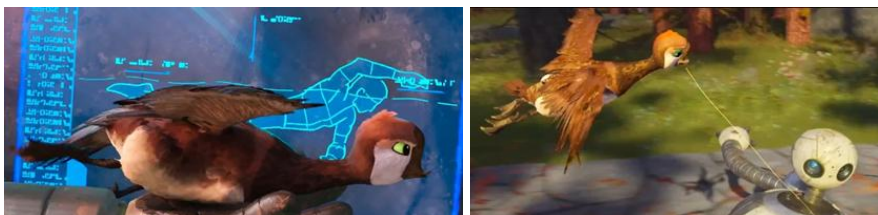
This scenario conveys a profound message: even an artificial entity like a robot may establish a deep and respectful bond with its surroundings. It aligns seamlessly with ecocriticism, which examines how narratives illustrate the significance of nature and the necessity of coexisting harmoniously with it. Roz's nurturing of Brightbill contests the notion that technology and nature are antagonistic. Rather, it demonstrates that technology can foster and sustain the natural environment, as seen by Roz utilising her abilities to procure sustenance or provide a secure habitat for Brightbill. The forest, characterised by its verdant foliage, meandering streams, and vibrant noises, exudes vitality in this depiction, underscoring its significance as a valuable environment deserving of preservation. This moment prompts reflection on our current use of technology. Roz's acts resemble contemporary instruments, such as eco-friendly applications or animal tracking devices, that contribute to preserving nature rather than its detriment. For children observing, it serves as a fundamental lesson on environmental stewardship.



Picture 6 Beneficial effects of technology on the environment

The last phase involves Roz, who assumes the role of Brightbill's mother, establishing a refuge and a cosy environment for Brightbill. Picture 6 illustrates the influence of technology in enhancing the appreciation of Brightbill's natural integrity. The sight illustrates how technology nurtures the environment. At the film's midpoint, Roz acquires the ability to instruct Brightbill in swimming and

flying, competencies that will prove essential for his journey. Demonstrated in picture 7 and 8 below.



Pictures 7 & 8 The function of technology within the natural environment

In one of the emotional moments, Roz might have to let Brightbill go to join his flock in migration, respecting the natural cycle of the geese. The scenes in picture 9 show that Roz respects Brightbill's natural need to migrate.



Picture 9 Technical recognition of the requirements of nature's occupants

This demonstrates that technology can recognise and facilitate the cadence of nature, a central issue in ecocriticism. The emotional connection between Roz and Brightbill, forged through their encounters with the forest, underscores that technology such as Roz may cultivate a respectful relationship with the environment. The evidence, presented as a dialogue at minute 56:48, illustrates how technology like as Roz may establish a respectful relationship with the environment.

Roz: 'I'm glad you're going where you belong.'

The dialogue and the picture prompt contemplation on people's need to honour natural processes, such as migration and ecosystem renewal, rather than undermining them with deleterious technology. Roz demonstrates how technology honours the natural cycle.

3. Technology as a Guardian of Forests and Its Impact on the Acceptance of Technology in the Natural Perspective

Near the film's conclusion, Roz gains acceptance from other animals and assists in resolving environmental issues, including saving animals from the peril of a snowstorm. This scenario may depict Roz using her technical skills to assist the forest and its denizens. In *The Wild Robot*, Roz is shown as a selfless robot that exhibits profound compassion for her environment. At minute 67, Roz is seen rescuing animals from a severe snowfall. All species were assembled in a designated area created by Roz for their safeguarding. Demonstrated in the discourse between Fink and all the animals as follows:

Fink: “Because of her, the thing, the monster, well, her name is Roz. And while you all ran from her, and stole from her, and made fun of her, all she's been trying to do is raise her kid, the little one that no one gave a chance, including me. She's the one who got you out of the storm, built this place, and despite my suggestion that she let you all freeze, she risked everything to bring you here.”



Picture 10 The technology in safeguarding the natural environment

The setting in this picture 10 conveys a potent ecological message that

technology, when utilised with utmost respect, may serve as an ally to the environment. Roz embodies the archetype of a forest guardian, illustrating the ecocritical perspective of technology facilitating conservation efforts. The forest is shown as a delicate yet robust ecosystem, and Roz's involvement illustrates how technology intrusion may enhance, rather than jeopardise, natural equilibrium. This scenario prompts the spectator to contemplate how contemporary society may engineer technology to save nature, including renewable energy sources and environmental monitoring instruments.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, this qualitative study concludes that *The Wild Robot* (2024) provides a rich ecocritical narrative that redefines the relationship between technology and nature, particularly through the character of Roz who evolves from an outsider to a nurturing and accepted member of the forest community. The film demonstrates how technology, initially perceived as a threat by the natural inhabitants, can transform into a source of care and harmony within the ecosystem, especially through Roz's caregiving of Brightbill. These findings offer a deeper understanding of how animated films can challenge traditional dichotomies between the artificial and the natural, supporting and expanding upon Greg Garrard's ecocriticism framework by highlighting the potential for coexistence, empathy, and ecological stewardship. The study contributes to previous research by providing a focused analysis on identity, belonging, and the role of care in the Anthropocene era, while also illustrating the power of popular media to shape ecological values among audiences, particularly children.

Socially and culturally, the implications of this research suggest that films like *The Wild Robot* can serve as effective tools for promoting environmental awareness, empathy, and critical reflection on the integration of technology within natural systems. Academically, the study enriches the discourse on ecocriticism in film by offering new perspectives on the negotiation of identity and belonging in contemporary narratives. However, this research is limited by its reliance on textual and visual analysis of a single film without incorporating

audience perspectives or cross-cultural comparisons. Future studies are encouraged to adopt interdisciplinary approaches, include audience reception, or conduct comparative analyses with other works to further explore how media narratives influence perceptions of environmental stewardship and the evolving relationship between technology and nature.

REFERENCES

- Fahrurrozi, M., SE, M., Amrullah, S. H., & Par, M. S. (2025). Economics Sustainable Keseimbangan Antara Pertumbuhan, Keberlanjutan, Dan Ketahanan. PT Literasi Nusantara Abadi Grup.
- Abdurrahman, U. (2024). PENGARUH FILM ANIMASI “PLANT OF MYSELF” SEBAGAI MEDIA EDUKASI PENTINGNYA MERAWAT TANAMAN (Doctoral dissertation, Politeknik Negeri Media Kreatif).
- Fauzan, A. (2024). Ecological Apocalypse in Peter Brown's *The Wild Robot* Protects: An Ecocritical Analysis. Undergraduate Thesis. Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.
- Garrard, G. (2012). *Ecocriticism* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Pratiwi, D. (2023). Inter-species Parenting in Contemporary Children's Literature: A Case Study of *The Wild Robot*. *Children's Literature Studies*, 12(1), 45-62.
- Rahman, M. (2024). Human-Technology Relations in Animated Films: An Ecocritical Perspective. *Journal of Film and Media Studies*, 8(1), 33-50.
- Sari, N. M., & Rahmawati, D. (2022). Ecocritical Analysis of *The Wild Robot* Novel by Peter Brown. *Indonesian Journal of English Literature*, 9(2), 120-135.
- Nugroho, A. (2021). Dwelling and Identity in Science Fiction Novels: An Ecocritical Approach. *Literature and Environment*, 6(2), 101-117.