

# **FROM EXPLOITATION TO EMPATHY: THE POETICS OF WOUNDED NATURE IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIAN POETRY**

***(Dari Eksploitasi ke Empati: Puitika Alam yang Terluka dalam Puisi Indonesia Kontemporer)***

**Mawaidi<sup>1\*</sup>, Kusmarwanti<sup>2</sup>, Suminto A. Sayuti<sup>3</sup>**

Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta

<sup>1\*</sup>[mawaidi@uny.ac.id](mailto:mawaidi@uny.ac.id), <sup>2</sup>[kusmarwanti@uny.ac.id](mailto:kusmarwanti@uny.ac.id), <sup>3</sup>[suminto\\_sayuti@uny.ac.id](mailto:suminto_sayuti@uny.ac.id)

**Abstract:** *This study examines the contemporary ecological paradox: despite growing public awareness of the environmental crisis, destructive practices continue. With a critical-qualitative design and interpretive orientation, this study combines close reading with the latest wave of ecocriticism (ecopoetics, material ecocriticism, posthuman/multispecies) to unravel how poetry constructs ecological moral criticism, fosters empathy, and formulates human-more-than-human relations. The corpus includes: “Kidung Tanah Air” and “Badai Katrina” (Frans Nadjira, Curriculum Vitae, 2007), “Elegi” (D. Zawawi Imron, Cinta Ladang Sajadah, 2003), and “Kisah Harimau Sumatra” (Sitor Situmorang, Rindu Kelana, 1994). The findings reveal three main axes. First, “Kidung Tanah Air” uses irony and satire to expose the tension between values and actions, thereby constructing ecological criticism without didacticism. Second, “Hurricane Katrina” and “Elegi” highlight ecological suffering through images of pollution intertwined with industrialization and modernization, mapping the cause-and-effect relationship between human practices and environmental damage. Third, “Kisah Harimau Sumatra” (The Story of the Sumatran Tiger) positions deforestation as an imaginative-narrative device that marks a crisis of connectedness while opening up horizons for relational and spiritual recovery.*

**Keywords:** *Deforestation/Logging; Ecocriticism; Ecological Suffering; Ecopoetics; Indonesian Poetry; Irony; Non-Human Persona; Satire*

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

The facts of environmental damage are now increasingly difficult to deny (Clark, 2015; Parham, 2021). Air pollution, massive deforestation, and the accumulation of plastic waste have had a real impact on life, both human and non-human (Gross, 2023). Forest fire smoke, for example, not only pollutes the atmosphere, but also directly suffocates the lungs of flora and fauna, while also destroying their living space (Wiebe & Wilcove, 2025). Modern society is well aware of this ecological destruction, but everyday practices reveal a paradox: despite knowing the dire consequences, destructive behavior continues (Parham, 2021; Braidotti, 2019).

This condition finds strong articulation in literary works (Braidotti, 2019). Through poetic imagery of ecological suffering, environmental damage is presented not as dry scientific data or reports, but as a concrete and moving experience (Weik von Mossner, 2017; Schneider-Mayerson, 2018). Poetic imagery allows readers to feel ecological wounds sensually, so that the suffering of non-humans gains space for empathy in human consciousness (Farrier, 2019; Keller, 2018). In the cultural tradition of the archipelago itself, forests have long been viewed not merely as an economic resource, but also as the center of the cosmos, the dwelling place of ancestral spirits, and a source of fertility (Ellen, 2016). When forests are cut down and destroyed, what is lost is not only the

physical ecosystem, but also the space for ecological spirituality that supports the balance of life (Undaharta et al., 2025).

Through an ecocritical perspective, these facts can be understood as a reflection of the paradox of modern humans who are both aware of and indifferent to the ecological crisis. The irony constructed in literary texts reveals the hypocrisy of human behavior, while images of ecological suffering deepen cross-species empathy (Keller, 2018; Farrier, 2019; Fiedorczuk, et.al., 2023; Reddick, 2024). At the same time, narratives of deforestation serve as symbols of the crisis of human spirituality, indicating a shift from harmony with nature towards capitalist exploitation (Zapf & Müller, 2022). Thus, literary studies within the framework of ecocriticism are not only academically relevant but also socially urgent: they open up the possibility for literature to serve as a field of reflection and symbolic resistance against the increasingly urgent ecological destruction.

The representation of deforestation in these poems should be read as a crisis of connectedness and a crisis of meaning, not merely an economic-environmental issue (Ağın, 2022; Chan et al., 2016). The reframing of human-nature relations through a posthumanist perspective and relational values opens up space for spiritual dimensions and ethics of care rooted in local landscapes—maritime in Nadjira, mountainous-lacustrine in Sitor, and rural-agrarian in Zawawi Imron. The “*affective ecologies*” approach explains how images of wounds, diction choices, and non-human voices activate readers’ sensitivity and shape the moral imagination necessary to respond to the ecological crisis (Weik von Mossner, 2017; Zapf & Müller, 2022).

In the corpus of contemporary Indonesian poetry, especially in the works of Frans Nadjira, Sitor Situmorang, and D. Zawawi Imron, irony and satire function as strategies for moral criticism of human practices that are indifferent, greedy, or irresponsible. In Nadjira's work, irony highlights the clash between the voice of the people and their country. In Sitor's work, subtle satire and nostalgia problematize the fracture in the relationship between humans and the forest. In Zawawi Imron's work, moral reprimands are conveyed through diction that sharpens affect and personifies natural elements. Theoretically, humor and irony reduce affective resistance and trigger cognitive elaboration, making criticism more easily accepted in sensitive public spaces (Becker & Anderson, 2019; Zekavat & Scheel, 2023).

Eco-critical research on poetry in Indonesia over the past decade has moved in two directions: mapping “ecological elegies” and advocacy through imagery and diction (Dewi, 2022); and comparative expansion linking the affect of reading with tropical forest conservation and the imagery of trees (Liliani, 2022). The postcolonial framework adds the frame of “ecological precariousness” to read deforestation, pollution, and indigenous dispossession in narrative techniques and poetic persona choices (Ryan, 2020). Meanwhile, research discussing D. Zawawi Imron focuses on the theme or symbolism of nature and the mapping of ecological values through (eco)semantic analysis (Abror & Sabila, 2025; Izzah et al., 2025), but has not yet unraveled the poetic mechanism of how irony or satire works as a moral criticism strategy. In Frans Nadjira, research confirms the maritime horizon and coastal imagery (Triadnyani, 2018), but has not systematically explored ecological suffering as a poetic practice—for example, the network of non-

human imagery-diction-persona and its affective effects. In Sitor Situmorang, readings through Garrard's categories and Batak Toba eco-theology enrich the context (Setiawan, 2024, 2025), but deforestation has not been positioned as an imaginative-narrative device that mediates the growth of human-nature spiritual relations in the structure of poetry.

Eco-critical studies in Indonesia still predominantly map themes, while poetic mechanisms—particularly irony/satire, representations of ecological suffering, and the mediation of eco-spirituality through the figurative of deforestation—have not been systematically examined. This study therefore focuses on a close reading of the poems of Frans Nadjira, Sitor Situmorang, and D. Zawawi Imron to formulate a “poetics of wounded nature” and assess the extent to which these poetic strategies shift the ethical horizon from exploitation to empathy.

Theoretically, this research is relevant to the development of the latest wave of ecocriticism (material *ecocriticism*, *posthumanism*, *multispecies studies*) which emphasizes the agency of matter/landscape, non-human voices, and the ethics of interconnectedness (Braidotti, 2019; van Dooren et. al., 2016). Examining contemporary Indonesian poetry from this perspective enriches the local ecocritical map while offering a typology of poetic strategies that shift the anthropocentric view toward ecological empathy. Practically and culturally, this kind of poetic reading has the potential to expand public ecological literacy: poetry can transform “data” into “sensory power,” spark ethical reflection, and encourage more ecologically just policy imagination. Thus, this research is important not only for the field of literary studies, but also for ecological education and cultural advocacy.

Against this backdrop, this research is necessary: to answer how (1) irony or satire constructs criticism of human behavior towards the environment; (2) ecological suffering is practiced poetically through imagery, diction, and non-human personas; and (3) deforestation is presented as an imaginative-narrative device that mediates the growth of spiritual relations between humans and nature. Together, these three focuses are expected to map “from exploitation to empathy” as an ethical and aesthetic current in contemporary Indonesian poetry.

## **B. METHOD**

This research is qualitative-critical in design with an interpretive orientation. The analytical framework combines *close reading* and contemporary ecocriticism (ecopoetics, material *ecocriticism*, *posthuman/multispecies*) to examine how poetry constructs ecological moral criticism, fosters empathy, and formulates human-more-than-human relationships. The researcher takes a reflective position; layered readings with attention to socio-ecological contexts and the ethics of interconnectedness. This study is a text-based literature review. Main data: (1) Frans Nadjira, “Kidung Tanah Air” and “Badai Katrina” in *Curriculum Vitae* (2007); (2) D. Zawawi Imron, “Elegi” in *Cinta Ladang Sajadah* (2003); (3) Sitor Situmorang, “Kisah Harimau Sumatra” in *Rindu Kelana* (1994). Supporting sources include comparative anthologies, essays or interviews with authors, as well as theoretical literature and previous studies.

Data analysis was conducted in three stages. (1) Pre-analysis: comprehensive reading to map the poetic situation, lexical field, and narrative ecological context. (2) Descriptive-poetic coding: systematic marking of imagery (visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile), diction (lexicon of pollution/deforestation vs. sacred-care), figurative devices (metaphor, metonymy, personification), as well as non-human personas and shifts in vocalization. (3) Analytical-critical coding: identification of irony/satire (form, target, vehicle), articulation on of ecological suffering as poetic practice (anatomy of “wounds” and affective-ethical effects), and mapping of forest clearing as an imaginative-narrative device (signifiers of deforestation, symbolic function, plot of interconnected crisis towards a horizon of eco-spirituality). The findings are then synthesized across texts (Nadjira–Sitor–Zawawi) to confirm common patterns and characteristics and formulate a working model of “the poetics of wounded nature.”

### C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings in the table below map the role and form of each text's poetic strategy, paving the way for in-depth discussion. The poem “Kidung Tanah Air” (Song of the Homeland) uses irony and satire as devices to condemn human morality—a strong indication that ecological criticism operates through the tension between values and actions. The poems “Badai Katrina” (Hurricane Katrina) and “Elegi” (Elegy) highlight exploitation through representations of environmental pollution intertwined with industrialization and the pressures of modernization. This pattern of reading both poems suggests a cause-and-effect relationship between human practices and ecological damage. The poem “Kisah Harimau Sumatra” (The Story of the Sumatran Tiger) presents both exploitation and empathy: deforestation for urban development is juxtaposed with its impact on the sustainability of ecosystems and habitats, creating a space for reading about the crisis of connectedness and the potential for relational recovery.

The following discussion highlights three axes: ironic or satirical work, poetic practices of ecological suffering, and deforestation as an imaginative-narrative node that mediates empathy.

**Table 1. The Wounded Nature in Contemporary Indonesian Poetry**

No	Poem Title	Function		Form
		Exploitation	Empathy	
1	Song of the Homeland		√	Irony and satire to criticize human morality
2	Hurricane Katrina			Environmental pollution caused by human actions; industry and the pressures of modernization
3	Elegy	√		Deforestation to build cities and its impact on the sustainability of the ecosystem within it (biodiversity and native forest habitats)
4	The Story of the Sumatran Tiger	√	√	

Depicting nature as a living entity capable of feeling suffering due to human exploitation is an important communicative strategy in raising ecological awareness. This personification builds an emotional bond between humans and the environment. Ecological damage is no longer seen merely as a material loss, but also as a psychological wound that is symbolically experienced by humans (Guazzini et al., 2025; Liu, et al.,

2022). Messages about the urgency of nature conservation are more easily accepted because humans tend to be more sensitive when suffering is visualized as a shared lived experience (Thomas-Walters & Raihani, 2017). Empirical evidence confirms that emotional connection with nature plays a major role in strengthening ecological awareness and encouraging pro-environmental actions (Stenfors, 2025; Flecke, et al. 2024).

This urgent need reflects the principle of modern ecocriticism, which demands that literary works transcend their aesthetic function and play an active role in building readers' ecological awareness. Many recent studies reveal that representations of nature as a living entity—one that feels the damage caused by human actions—offer greater rhetorical power than neutral descriptions of nature or mere backgrounds (Sahoo, 2025). Analysis of themes in ecocritical poetry shows that interpersonal and emotional depictions of human-nature relationships broaden readers' ethical horizons, transforming perceptions of nature from passive objects to empowered subjects (Tajane, et al., 2024). Clear and personal representations of nature's suffering, such as pollution or drought, become effective critical tools for sparking moral responsibility and concrete action toward environmental preservation (Sahoo, 2025).

Contemporary literature must be rooted in the latest ecocritical studies that view literary works not only as aesthetics, but as an active medium in building ecological awareness (Tajane, et al., 2024). Satirical and ironic genres in literary works successfully open up space for criticism of human exploitation, particularly by revealing *the disjunction* between moral claims and actual practices towards nature (Skiveren, 2024). In addition, literary research shows that depictions of environmental damage—air, water, and soil pollution—have a stronger impact when nature is portrayed as a living entity that suffers and rejects its passive position as an object (Tajane, et al., 2024). The themes of deforestation and land degradation appear in various studies as concrete illustrations of the ecological and social impacts of human actions (Mohapatra, 2025). The spiritual dimension or inherent value of nature is increasingly being raised, especially in narratives that reject the dualism of humans and nature and promote moral responsibility towards the natural world (Tajane, et al., 2024).

## 1. Human Irony and Moral Condemnation

Critical literary and cultural groups should focus their criticism of human actions through satirical, ironic, or moral condemnation approaches, as these approaches have the capacity to raise readers' awareness both emotionally and intellectually. Rendra's lines in his poem entitled “Sajak Sebatang Lisong” (A Poem of a Single Reed) refer to poets: */who write poems about wine and the moon/ while injustice occurs beside them/*. This passage is reinforced by the last line, which reads:

*Apakah artinya kesenian,  
bila terpisah dari derita lingkungan:  
Apakah artinya berpikir,  
bila terpisah dari masalah kehidupan.*

*(What is the meaning of art,  
if separated from the suffering of the environment:  
What is the meaning of thinking,*

*if separated from the problems of life.)*

It is only fitting that Rendra's pamphlet-style poetry be revived by contemporary young poets (Nadjira, 2007), rather than writing perfumed poems that hide from the hustle and bustle of politics, injustice, the arrogance of those in power, and the suffering of the environment. Poets need to take to the streets like activists who are not equipped with poetic knowledge. This is because by seeing the situation on the ground firsthand and mingling with environmental activists, poets will not only write poetry under dim room lights, in lecture halls and training rooms, but will also need to write poetry under the scorching sun and as close as possible to landfills to breathe in the foul air from human waste.

Another way to achieve an indirect effect is by choosing irony or satire in the writing of a poem. *Indirect effects* in poetry can be achieved through the use of irony and satire, which delay overtly normative claims of “ “ but instead strengthen the affective and cognitive appeal to the reader. Within the framework of *environmental humanities*, ecological satire functions as a strategy of “criticism and affirmation” that shifts the way readers feel and think about the environmental crisis, thereby opening up space for “critical hope” rather than apocalyptic rhetoric that paralyzes action (Skiveren, 2024). This also inspired Frans Nadjira's creative process as a poet who stated his credo that, “As long as I don't write poetry, it's because I can't record the presence of ordinary people and give them a voice.”

Here is an excerpt from Frans Nadjira's poem entitled “Kidung Tanah Air” (Song of the Homeland), which has an ironic effect when viewed in the context of the nation's situation. The ironic effect arises when a critique is presented implicitly and does not explicitly mention the facts.

*Berkat darah kami Republik ini berdaulat  
Walau kekayaan alamnya yang la limpahkan  
Telah tergerus habis oleh bangsa lain  
Untuk memperkaya kelompok mereka.*

*(Thanks to our blood, this Republic is sovereign  
Though its natural wealth is abundant  
Have been completely eroded by other nations  
To enrich their own groups.)*

Satire and irony force readers to view the destruction of nature from a reversed perspective, often revealing the absurdity, hypocrisy, or greed of humans towards the environment. The use of satire and irony in environmental short films such as *Finding Beauty in Garbage* and *The Majestic Plastic Bag* not only challenges the dominant discourse, but also opens up imaginative space for new hope—namely, alternative responses to the environmental crisis that are more reflective and ethical (Skiveren, 2024). On the participatory pedagogy side, the experience of producing humor (rather than just consuming it) has been shown to increase connectedness, knowledge, and sustainable attitudes—demonstrating its potential translation into the praxis of poetry writing that departs from social practice (Spörk, Martinuzzi, Findler, & Vogel-Pöschl, 2023).



## 2. Human Environmental Pollution

Highlighting the suffering caused by environmental pollution as a direct result of human activities is an important step in emphasizing the real consequences of exploiting nature. By highlighting the fact that air, water, and soil pollution not only destroy habitats and biodiversity but also endanger human health—including respiratory, cardiovascular, reproductive, and neurological disorders—literary texts and cultural criticism can serve as urgent moral warnings. Shetty, et al. (2023) make it clear that exposure to environmental contaminants is significantly associated with increased morbidity and mortality in many developing countries, proving that pollution is not an abstract ecological issue but an urgent humanitarian one.

Poetry has the unique potential to give a “voice” to environmental damage, as poetic language is capable of conveying ecological experiences in an emotional and reflective form. By presenting the suffering of nature in symbolic lines, poetry can evoke empathy and a sense of moral responsibility, rather than merely communicating facts. For example, this can be found in another poem by Frans Nadjira entitled “Hurricane Katrina,” the following stanza of which reads

*Di bantaran sungai penuh sampah plastik  
lelaki itu memperhatikan tumpukan huruf di koran*

*(On the banks of the river filled with plastic waste  
the man observes the pile of letters in the newspaper)*

While the previous discussion focused on the presence of satire in a poem, in this poem Frans Nadjira presents facts about the wounds and destruction of nature. The presentation of wounds and destruction in the lines above does not require validation from the Ministry of Environment. The river, which should be clear, has turned murky, smelly, and full of waste; the air, which should be a space for shared breathing, has turned into suffocating poison. Consider the following lines:

*Sungai keruh berbalik arah  
menuju sudut-sudut gang sempit*

*(The murky river reverses its course  
towards the corners of narrow alleys)*

These facts are conveyed not in the form of technical reports, but rather through poetic language that highlights ecological truths. Similarly, in his poem “Elegi” (Elegy), prolific poet D. Zawawi Imron, who chose to live in his hometown rather than in a big city, describes environmental damage. Through the presentation of environmental damage in his verses, D. Zawawi Imron reminds us:

*Jangan mandi di situ, air sungai itu bercampur limbah,  
nanti kalau kamu dewasa kulitmu tidak sempurna  
sebagai anak Indonesia. Aku tak ingin, kamu jadi  
orang asing di atas tanah kelahirannya sendiri.*

*(Don't bathe there, the river water is mixed with waste, later, when you grow up, your skin will not be perfect as an Indonesian child. I don't want you to become a stranger on your own birthplace.)*

In this context, Frans Nadjira and D. Zawawi Imron reject the presence of bureaucratic authority as the sole determinant of truth about environmental conditions. Poetry can stand alongside scientific reports and state policy, even surpassing both in touching the emotional and ethical realm of the reader. At this point, literary works become witnesses to the suffering of nature, voices for the voiceless, and reminders that the ecological crisis is not just a statistical figure, but a reality that erodes the human body and shared living space (Skiveren, 2024). Artistic forms of expression, including poetry, are effective in broadening public understanding of environmental degradation and encouraging participation in ecological movements (Klößner & Sommer, 2021; Bentz, 2020).

The involvement of poetry is also increasingly relevant in the digital media era, when platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have become the main means of disseminating ideas among young people. Environmental poetry disseminated through social media has proven to be able to raise ecological awareness in a more inclusive and interactive way. This digital ecocriticism emphasizes that short-form literary content, when combined with visuals and emotional narratives, can transcend traditional audience boundaries and reach generations that have previously been less exposed to environmental issues (Travis, et. al., 2022; Naji, 2021; Baccar, et. al., 2021).

### **3. Cities Built by Cutting Down Forests**

The growth of modern cities and the expansion of factories often take place without regard for the biological ecosystems that have long inhabited these locations. Many cities choose development and industrialization as benchmarks for progress. Activities such as industrial infrastructure development and the construction of production facilities encourage the conversion of old habitats—remnant forests, wetlands, old trees—which are important habitats for native flora and fauna. Liu, Zihan, & Wu (2025) conducted a study on the impact of urbanization on biodiversity in 1,523 cities worldwide, finding that the expansion of built-up areas reduces the integrity of natural habitats, accelerates fragmentation, and weakens ecosystem functions. This was also a concern for Theodorou (2022), who noted that the addition of industrial zones accelerates habitat degradation through air, noise, and waste pollution, putting species with low tolerance under great pressure.

Damage to old habitats also severs the ecological and cultural ties between humans and nature. Communities that once used ancient trees as a source of traditional medicine, water, and spiritual space lost access to them when the trees were replaced by chimneys and factories. The collective identity of the community was also eroded when the presence of old nature in the urban landscape was replaced by concrete and factory smoke. Therefore, urban planning must involve the conservation of existing habitats, not just the development of new green spaces in vacant locations. Factories and industrial facilities need to be located in such a way that space for old habitats is preserved as the foundation for ecological and cultural sustainability (Liu et al., 2025; Theodorou, 2022).

The ecological crisis marked by the loss of old habitats is not only recorded in scientific reports but also finds its echo in literary works. Poetry presents ecological experiences in a more poetic and emotional way, allowing readers to feel the suffering of non-human living beings more closely. The lines about “black bats” flying chaotically while screeching because they were driven out of industrial chimneys become a concrete metaphor for ecological dislocation due to development in D. Zawawi Imron's poem entitled “Elegi”. A poem is capable of voicing the cries of other creatures who have lost their living space; a voice that is often overlooked in the discourse of modern urban development.

*Kelelawar-kelelawar hitam simpang siur di udara,  
memekik-mekik  
Karena diusir cerobong-cerobong perkasa.*

*(Black bats flutter chaotically in the air,  
screeching  
Because they were driven out by mighty chimneys.)*

Birds tormented by toxic air are described metaphorically through the personification of nature, which seems capable of feeling pain, sadness, and anger. This description emphasizes that urban civilization is no longer friendly to non-human living creatures. At the same time, forests are being massively exploited, threatening the living space of biological ecosystems. The depiction of the impact of forest exploitation is also reinforced in poetry. The following is described in a poem by D. Zawawi Imron entitled “Elegi” (Elegy).

*Kalau mereka lari ke hutan,  
Hutan pun sedang terbakar.*

*(If they run to the forest,  
The forest is burning.)*

Forest exploitation does not only refer to the physical destruction of vegetation, but also to widespread ecosystem damage—including the loss of biodiversity (Feng Ba, et al., 2023), the disruption of animal and plant life (Hallaj, et al., 2024), and the emergence of social conflicts within local communities (Papilo, et al., 2022; Brock, et al., 2021; Fuss, et al., 2019). A global study of the drivers of deforestation states that economic pressures, land use for large-scale agriculture, and policies that do not favor sustainable forest management intensify resource conflicts between local residents, landowners, and the state (Bernhard, Shapiro, & Hunt, 2023). Depicting the suffering caused by these activities in literary works or critical studies humanizes their impact and affirms them as real problems for humans and the environment. Wiyatmi, et al. (2022) show that in contemporary novels in Indonesia and Malaysia, deforestation is presented not only as physical destruction but also as a critique of anthropocentrism—the view that sees nature only as a resource and ignores its intrinsic value and ecological function.

Sitor Situmorang, an exiled poet who is often labeled as a leftist poet (Fawaid, 2020), is rarely read from an ecocritical perspective. In fact, a number of his poems record a

longing for the old harmony, when nature was still pristine and humans lived in harmony with their environment. In the poem “Kisah Harimau Sumatra” (The Story of the Sumatran Tiger), this longing is expressed through images of the past that emphasize the closeness between humans and nature as a single, unified whole.

*ketika masih banyak harimau,  
ketika hutan masih lebat,  
tapi kini hampir punah jenisnya  
bersama hutan bekas kerajaannya*

*(when there were still many tigers,  
when the forests were still dense,  
but now the species is nearly extinct  
along with the forests that were once their kingdom.)*

However, behind the longing for old harmony lies the irony that this longing is now nothing more than nostalgia. Animal habitats, including those of tigers, are disappearing as the forests that once protected them are destroyed. Reading Sitor Situmorang's poem “Kisah Harimau Sumatra” (The Story of the Sumatran Tiger) means reading poetry as an alternative medium that presents ecological testimony through the aesthetics of language. Poetry functions as a cultural document that records the reality of destruction as well as a moral voice that reminds the public. This strategy is in line with contemporary ecocriticism, which emphasizes the importance of art in legitimizing the ecological experiences of communities, not just scientific data or formal regulations (Sahoo, 2025; Boykoff, 2019).

A reading of the poem “Kisah Harimau Sumatra” (The Story of the Sumatran Tiger) by Sitor Situmorang opens up access to a local narrative treasure trove about the characters Sariburaja and Boru Pareme. In the Batak Toba tradition, this story functions not only as folklore, but also as a cultural medium that regulates social organization, strengthens the traditional system of legitimacy, and maintains the kinship structure that is the foundation of collective identity continuity (Vergouwen, 2019). Through a close reading approach, the poem constructs a symbolic relationship between humans, nature, and animals, which is represented metonymically through the figures of a baby, honey, and a tiger. The baby represents human vulnerability and dependence on the environment; honey symbolizes nature's capacity as a provider of life and sustenance; while the tiger, although synonymous with threat, appears as an intermediary agent that maintains the balance of ecological relations. The following are the lines of the poem.

*sampai akhirnya Sariburaja dan Boru Pareme  
melihat seekor harimau belang,  
membawa sarang lebah di mulutnya  
yang lalu diletakkannya di hadapan bayi  
di depan teratak*

*(until finally Sariburaja and Boru Pareme  
saw a striped tiger,  
carrying a beehive in its mouth  
which it then placed in front of the baby*

*in front of the hut)*

This line of poetry presents the baby as a symbol of humanity at its most fragile and dependent, nature manifested in honey—a natural product that gives life and sustenance—while the tiger serves as an animal figure that crosses the traditional boundaries between danger and majesty. The tiger is not only a predator but also a giver: it brings honey to the baby, thus reinforcing the notion that humans and nature are not only in an antagonistic relationship but complement each other in a symbolic order. The baby needs honey, honey depends on bees and their habitat, and the tiger, as a wild creature, acts as an intermediary and guardian of the balance between humans, animals, and the environment. This relationship, in the perspective of Orrick, Dove & Schmitz (2023), the interaction between humans, wild animals, and the physical environment has the potential for coexistence and interdependence in the form of practices in traditional societies and natural symbolism that shape social legitimacy and identity structures.

Such relationships echo the concepts of *kin relationality* and *ecological belonging* in the perspective of indigenous peoples, where human identity is formed in a network of relationships with all living creatures and natural phenomena; moral responsibility and respect for nature are manifested through narratives, symbolism, and rituals (Celidwen & Keltner, 2023). *Ecocriticism* studies also reveal that traditional poetry and literature are capable of conveying this kind of interdependence, reinforcing social norms and cultural legitimacy through representations of humans, animals, and nature in a form that is not hierarchical but coexistent (Sahoo, 2025).

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

A reading of the four poems indicates that the “poetics of wounded nature” works effectively when ethical criticism is constructed through poetic mechanisms rather than didactic statements. In “Kidung Tanah Air,” irony and satire reveal the gap between exalted values and destructive practices, thereby triggering moral evaluation at the textual level. “Badai Katrina” and “Elegi” present ecological suffering as a poetic experience through images of suffocation, filth, and weariness; modernization is represented with its consequences, and ecological cause-and-effect relationships are articulated through a network of diction and imagery. “Kisah Harimau Sumatra” links the motif of deforestation with the crisis of ecological connectedness and hints at the possibility of recovery through spiritual relations between humans and more-than-humans. Methodologically, *close reading* focuses on mechanisms that reveal the capacity to uncover the production of ethical and affective effects in poetry. In practical terms, the poems studied offer an alternative imagination to the technocratic discourse on environmental issues by emphasizing relational responsibility. The limitations of the study—which relies on textual analysis—open up space for further research on reader reception and corpus expansion. Overall, the findings provide an initial map of the direction of ethics–ecopoetics in contemporary Indonesian literature.

#### **E. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

This article is part of activities funded by Yogyakarta State University through the 2025 Research Assignment Scheme for Professors and Structural Lecturers at Yogyakarta State University. The author expresses his appreciation for the funding and facilitation that

enabled this research to be carried out properly. All views, findings, and errors that may be contained in this manuscript are entirely the responsibility of the author.

## REFERENCES

- Abror, M., & Sabila, S. A. N. (2025). Ekokritik Greg Garrard pada Puisi D. Zawawi Imron: Analisis Tema dan Simbolisme Alam. *Deiktis: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra*, 5(1), 291–298. <https://doi.org/10.53769/deiktis.v5i1.1377>
- Ağın, B. (2022). Material ecocriticism and ecofeminist literature. In *The Routledge Handbook of Ecofeminism and Literature* (Chap. 34). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003195610-34>
- Baccar, M., Bergez, J.-E., Couture, S., Sekhar, M., Ruiz, L., & Leenhardt, D. (2021). Building Climate Change Adaptation Scenarios with Stakeholders for Water Management: A Hybrid Approach Adapted to the South Indian Water Crisis. *Sustainability*, 13(15), 8459. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13158459>
- Becker, A. B., & Anderson, A. A. (2019). Using humor to engage the public on climate change: The effect of exposure to one-sided vs. two-sided satire on message discounting, elaboration and counterarguing. *Journal of Science Communication*, 18(4), A07. <https://doi.org/10.22323/2.18040207>
- Bentz, J. (2020). Learning about climate change in, with and through art. *Climatic Change*, 162(3), 1595–1612. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-020-02804-4>
- Bernhard, K. P., Shapiro, A., & Hunt, C. A. (2023). Drivers of tropical deforestation: a global review of methodological approaches and analytical scales. *Biodiversity and Conservation*, 33(1), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10531-023-02747-z>
- Boykoff, M. T. (2019). *Creative (Climate) Communications: Productive Pathways for Science, Policy and Society*. Cambridge University Press.
- Braidotti, R. (2019). A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 36(6), 31–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276418771486>
- Braidotti, R. (2019). *Posthuman Knowledge*. Polity/Wiley.
- Brock, R.C., et al. (2021). Implementing Brazil's Forest Code: a vital contribution to securing forests and conserving biodiversity. *Biodivers Conserv* 30, 1621–1635. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10531-021-02159-x>
- Celidwen, Y., & Keltner, D. (2023). Kin relationality and ecological belonging: A cultural psychology of Indigenous transcendence. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 994508. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.994508>
- Chan, K. M. A., Balvanera, P., Benessaiah, K., et al. (2016). Why protect nature? Rethinking values and the environment. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 113(6), 1462–1465. <https://www.pnas.org/doi/pdf/10.1073/pnas.1525002113>
- Clark, T. (2015). *Ecocriticism on the edge: The Anthropocene as a threshold concept*. Bloomsbury.
- Dewi, N. (2022). Ecological lamentation and advocacy in Eka Budianta's selected poems. *Poetika: Jurnal Ilmu Sastra*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.22146/poetika.v10i1.74114>
- Diego-Cordero, R., Martínez-Herrera, A., Coheña-Jiménez, M., Lucchetti, G., & Pérez-Jiménez, J. M. (2024). Ecospirituality and Health: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 63(2), 1285-1306. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-023-01994-2>

- Ellen, R. (2016). *Nuauulu ritual regulation of resources, sasi and forest conservation in eastern Indonesia*. *South East Asia Research*, 24(1), 5–22. <https://doi.org/10.5367/sear.2016.0290>
- Farrier, D. (2019). *Anthropocene poetics: Deep time, sacrifice zones, and extinction*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Fawaid, A. (2020). *Politik Estetika Sitor Situmorang: Trilogi Mimesis dalam Ibu Pergi ke Surga (1950-1981)*. Yogyakarta: Cantrik Pustaka.
- Feng Ba., et.al. (2023). How human–elephant relations are shaped: A case study of integrative governance and human–wildlife conflict. *Journal for Nature Conservation*, 75, 126245. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forpol.2023.103051>
- Fiedorczuk, J., Newell, M., Quetchenbach, B., & Tierney, O. (Eds.). (2023). *The Routledge Companion to Ecopoetics*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003187028>
- Flecke, S.L., et al. (2024). Nature experiences and pro-environmental behavior: Evidence from a randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2024.102383>
- Fredriksen, B.C. & Groth, C. (Eds.). (2023). *Expanding Environmental Awareness in Education Through the Arts*. Springer Singapore. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-4855-8>
- Fuss, S., Golub, A., & Lubowski, R. (2021). The economic value of tropical forests in meeting global climate stabilization goals. *Global Sustainability*, 4, e1. <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2020.34>
- Gross, M. (2023). Breathing wildfire smoke. *Current Biology*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2023.07.004>
- Guazzini, A., Valdrighi, G., Fiorenza, M., & Duradoni, M. (2025). The Relationship Between Connectedness to Nature and Pro-Environmental Behaviors: A Systematic Review. *Sustainability*, 17(8), 3686. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17083686>
- Hallaj, Z., et al., (2024). Forest land use change effects on biodiversity, ecosystem services and livelihoods. *Science of the Total Environment*, 1. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indic.2024.100445>
- Izzah, I., Ahmadi, A., & Yohanes, B. (2025). Deskripsi Ecosemantik pada Karya Puisi D. Zamawi Imron. *GHANCARAN: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia*, 563—581. <https://doi.org/10.19105/ghancaran.vi.15816>
- Keller, L. (2018). *Recomposing ecopoetics: North American poetry of the self-conscious Anthropocene*. University of Virginia Press.
- Klöckner, C.A. & Sommer, L.K. (2021). Visual art inspired by climate change—An analysis of audience reactions to 37 artworks presented during the 21st UN Climate Change Conference in Paris. *PLoS ONE* 16(2): e0247331. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0247331>
- Lidskog, R., Waterton, C., & Vogel, J. (2022). Environmental knowledge controversies: The role of narrative and aesthetics. *Environmental Sociology*, 8(2), 141-153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2021.2004811>
- Liliani, E. (2022). Embracing comparative ecocriticism through affect: Representations of tropical forest ecologies in Indonesian and Nicaraguan poetry. *RILE: Revista Interdisciplinar de Literatura e Ecocrítica*, 9, 126–146. <https://aslebrasil.com/journal/index.php/aslebr/article/view/197>

- Liu, N., Liu, Z., & Wu, Y. (2025). Direct and Indirect Impacts of Urbanization on Biodiversity Across the World's Cities. *Remote Sensing*, 17(6), 956. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rs17060956>
- Liu, Y., et al. (2022). Nature connection, pro-environmental behaviors and wellbeing: Understanding the mediating role of nature contact. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 228. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2022.104550>
- Mohapatra, A. (2025). Ecocriticism in Recent Literary Works. *International Journal of Social Impact*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.25215/2455/100120>
- Naji, J. (2021). *Digital Poetry*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-65962-2>
- Orrick, K., Dove, M., & Schmitz, O. J. (2023). Human–nature relationships: An introduction to social-ecological practice theory for human–wildlife interactions. *Ambio*, 53, 201–211. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-023-01945-x>
- Papilo, P., et al. (2022). Palm oil-based bioenergy sustainability and policy in Indonesia and Malaysia: A systematic review. *Heliyon*, 8(11), e11558. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e10919>
- Parham, J. (Ed.). (2021). *The Cambridge companion to literature and the Anthropocene*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108683111>
- Reddick, Y. (2024). *Anthropocene Poetry: Place, Environment, and Planet*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-39389-1>
- Ryan, J. C. (2020). “The pained and silent song of a branch”: Ecological precarity in the poetry of Taufiq Ismail and Khairani Barokka. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 56(4), 488–502. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2020.1762832>
- Sahoo, A. (2025). Ecocriticism in poetry and its role in raising eco-consciousness: A review of themes, research gaps and challenges. *DECISION – Review and Curation*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40622-025-00430-6>
- Schneider-Mayerson, M. (2018). The influence of climate fiction: An empirical survey of readers. *Environmental Humanities*, 10(2), 473–500. <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-7156848>
- Setiawan, K. E. P. (2024). *Sitor Situmorang's poems from the perspective of Greg Garrard's ecocriticism as an innovation in teaching materials for literary criticism with ecological literacy content in higher education*. Dissertation. Sebelas Maret University.
- Shetty, S.S., et al. (2023). Environmental pollutants and their effects on human health, *Heliyon*, (9)9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e19496>.
- Skiveren, N. (2024). Humor as Hope?: On Critique and Affirmation in Ecological Parody and Satire. *Environmental Humanities*, 16(2), 441–459. <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-11150075>
- Spörk, A., Martinuzzi, A., Findler, F., & Vogel-Pöschl, H. (2022). When students write comedy scripts: humor as an experiential learning method in environmental education. *Environmental Education Research*, 29(4), 552–568. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2022.2136626>
- Stenfors, C. U. D., Osika, W., Mundaca, L., Ruprecht, S., Ramstetter, L., & Wamsler, C. (2025). Nature connectedness and other transformative qualities associated with pro-environmental attitudes, behaviors, and engagement across scales: the direction of compassion matters. *Global Sustainability*, 8, e15. <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2025.15>

- Tajane, S.S., et al. (2024). Ecocriticism in literature: Examining nature and the environment in literary works. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice (KUEY)*, 30(6), 2162-2168. <https://doi.org/10.53555/kuey.v30i6.5675>
- Theodorou, P. (2022). The effects of urbanisation on ecological interactions. *Current Opinion in Insect Science*, 52. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cois.2022.100922>
- Thomas-Walters, L., & Raihani, N. J. (2017). Supporting conservation: The roles of flagship species and identifiable victims. *Conservation Letters*, 10(5), 581–587. <https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12319>
- Travis, C., Dixon, D. P., Bergmann, L., Legg, R., & Crampsie, A. (Eds.). (2022). *Routledge Handbook of the Digital Environmental Humanities*. Routledge.
- Triadnyani, I. G. A. A. M. (2018). Maritime traces in Frans Nadjira's poems. *Prosiding Konferensi Internasional Kesusastraan XXVII*, 354–365.
- Undaharta, N. K. E., Martini, F., & Wee, A. K. S. (2025). *Comparable biodiversity and demographic structure between sacred groves and protected forests with Dipterocarpus hasseltii reveal conservation value of customary forests in Bali, Indonesia*. *Biodiversity and Conservation*, 34, 3147–3162. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10531-024-02885-y>
- van Dooren, T., Kirksey, E., & Münster, U. (2016). Multispecies Studies: Cultivating Arts of Attentiveness. *Environmental Humanities*, 8(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3527695>
- Vergouwen, J. C. (2019). *The Social Organization and Customary Law of the Toba-Batak of Northern Sumatra* (Reprint ed.). Leiden: Brill/KITLV.
- Weik von Mossner, A. (2017). *Affective ecologies: Empathy, emotion, and environmental narrative*. The Ohio State University Press.
- Wiebe, R. A., & Wilcove, D. S. (2025). Global biodiversity loss from outsourced deforestation. *Nature*, 639, 389–394. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-024-08569-5>
- Wiyatmi, et al. (2022). *Deforestation in Indonesian and Malaysian Novels: When Wild Forests are Destroyed by Anthropocentrism*. *KATA: Journal of Language and Literature*, 24(1), 29-39. <https://doi.org/10.9744/KATA.24.1.29-39>
- Zapf, H., & Müller, T. (2022). Ecology in American literature. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Environmental Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199389414.013.808>
- Zekavat, M., & Scheel, T. (2023). *Satire, Humor, and Environmental Crises* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003055143>