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A comparison of ecological imagination typologies in the poetry of W.S. Rendra and D. Zawawi Imron: Indonesian literature's contribution to world ecopoetics

Yuni Pratiwi*
Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia
Email: yuni.pratiwi.fs@um.ac.id*

Abstract: *Differences in ecological landscape shape how poets imagine nature, yet descriptive ecopoetics still lacks categories that capture this variation. This study aims to (1) construct a typology of agrarian ecological imagination in the poetry of W.S. Rendra, (2) construct a typology of maritime–dryland ecological imagination in the poetry of D. Zawawi Imron, and (3) explain the implications of both typologies for ecological identity in modern Indonesian poetry and for world ecopoetics. The qualitativecomparative study draws on ecopoetics and Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics (semantic, reflective, and existential levels). The data are connotative words and imagery from two poems by Rendra ("Di Atas Bukit" and "Balada Ibu yang Dibunuh") and four poems by Zawawi ("Madura, Akulah Darahmu," "Pemandangan," "Nyanyian Kampung Halaman," and "Perjalanan Laut"). Rendra's poetry builds an agrarian typology, termed landscape-ecological imagination, in which nature is a shared living space of abundance and harmony that is also vulnerable to human interests. Zawawi's poetry builds a maritime–dryland typology, termed identificatoryecological imagination, in which nature is body, origin, and cultural memory, tied to resilience and adaptation. Both poets treat nature as an active presence rather than a passive backdrop; they differ in the mode of connectedness, landscape for Rendra and identification for Zawawi, as dominant rather than exclusive tendencies. The findings suggest that Indonesian poetry can widen the context of world ecopoetics, not by proposing a new theory but by showing that ecological imagination takes plural forms rooted in local geography and culture and by extending ecology toward the physical–cultural.*

Keywords: *ecological imagination, ecopoetics, typology of imagination, hermeneutics*

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary ecological crisis has changed how humans view their relationship with nature. It is also a cultural problem, bound up with how humans understand themselves, life, and nonhuman entities. Literature is central here: literary works do not merely represent the environment but shape how humans imagine, feel, evaluate, and make meaning of their ecological world.

The rise of ecocriticism and ecopoetics reflects this growing attention. Literature is understood not as a mirror of ecological reality but as a space where views of nature, humans, and environment are negotiated; ecocritical attention has shifted from "representation" toward the more complex relationship between humans and nature. Within ecopoetics, a recent distinction separates poetry that heightens awareness of one's physical surroundings from poetry that engages complex environmental questions of scale, justice, and politics (Lidström & Garrard, 2014).

Poetry makes this especially compelling, since it condenses ecological experience. Nature in poetry need not be mere backdrop — it can be a force, a subject of

*Corresponding author
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experience, a cultural space. The study of ecological poetry must therefore move beyond inventorying natural elements toward analyzing the *ecological imagination* built through poetic language and structure.

This matters for Indonesian poetry, which holds ecological alongside social and cultural diversity not automatically identical to European or American traditions. W.S. Rendra and D. Zawawi Imron offer a productive field here: both show strong concern for human life and its social–cultural environment, yet with distinct poetic sensibilities.

This difference is not meant to form a simple dichotomy — Rendra as "social ecology," Zawawi as "cultural ecology." Such categorization must be proven through textual reading; typology is not fixed beforehand but discovered by comparing how the two poets represent nature, position humans within ecological networks, present the nonhuman world, construct ecological values, and use particular aesthetic strategies.

This study therefore focuses on three issues: (1) how ecological imagination is constructed in Rendra's and Zawawi's poetry, (2) comparing these constructions to identify similarities, differences, and typologies, and (3) testing the significance of these findings for a broader ecopoetics, particularly the idea that Indonesian poetic experience can enrich world ecopoetics discourse. Rendra and Zawawi are treated not merely as documentation of environmental concern but as sources of ecological and aesthetic knowledge.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature–environment studies have moved from attention to the representation of nature toward the relationship among language, imagination, humans, and the nonhuman world. Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) frame ecocriticism as the study of literature's relationship with the physical environment; Buell (1995) offers the concept of the *environmental imagination*, where environment is not backdrop but part of what shapes human experience — important for poetry, since poetic language condenses ecological experience through diction, imagery, metaphor, symbol, rhythm, and form.

Imagination explains how this ecological meaning forms. Ricoeur (2003) treats metaphor not as ornament but as a productive mechanism generating new meaning and reference; in *Lectures on Imagination*, Ricoeur (2024) positions imagination as a productive capacity opening new understanding. Nature in poetry is thus not simply depicted but imaginatively constructed — rice fields, sea, soil, wind, sun, or drought acquire different meanings depending on the poet's ecological experience and aesthetic strategy. Ecological imagination is accordingly a poetic construction of the human–environment relationship, shaped through experience, language, metaphor, imagery, and symbol.

This connects closely to ecopoetics. Bate (2000) links poetry, the earth, and ecological consciousness; Buell (2005) stresses literary imagination's importance in confronting environmental crisis. Ecopoetics examines not merely poems about nature but how language and poetic form construct ecological understanding — since nature's presence in a poem is not automatically ecological, as it may instead function as backdrop, psychological metaphor, or cultural symbol. The field has since widened through readings informed by gender, race, Native, and disability studies (Hume & Osborne, 2018), and has been applied to regional poetries in which landscape and livelihood shape poetic form, as in Finnish forest poetry (Lummaa, 2023).

In the Indonesian context, ecological experience must be situated within tropical archipelagic diversity. This study uses three analytical categories: agrarian (land, rice fields, crops, seasons, food, labor), maritime (sea, coast, fishers, wind, waves, salt, mobility), and dryland (water scarcity, heat, soil, vegetation, adaptive strategy). Ecocritical readings of Indonesian literature include analyses of colonial environmental exploitation in Pramoedya's Buru Quartet (Darsono et al., 2024) and of development and anthropocentrism in a novel set in Malang (Indriyanto & Barus, 2025), often within a postcolonial framework (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015); Dewi (2016) argues that such readings can yield knowledge useful to society. Studies of the two poets examined here take a different route. Rendra's poetry has been read for social and moral criticism (Utamie & Singgih, 2021; Singgih et al., 2022) and for its ecological dimension (Liliani & Budiyanto, 2019). Zawawi's poetry has been read for the relationship between literature and ecology (Fauzi & Ambarwati, 2024), as an expression of local wisdom, identity, and ecological warning (Faruq & Ambarwati, 2025), in terms of harmony between humans and nature (Tabarok et al., 2024), through the maritime nature of Madurese society (Septian et al., 2025), and through critical discourse analysis of its Sufi perspective and resistance to capitalism and anthropocentrism (Izzah et al., 2025). Each of these studies of the two poets addresses one poet at a time. The present study instead describes the construction of ecological imagination, builds a typology through comparison of the two poets, and places it in dialogue with global ecopoetics, so that Indonesian ecological experience becomes a conceptual source rather than merely an object of applied theory.

METHOD

This qualitative interpretive study uses an ecopoetics perspective to uncover the construction of ecological imagination in Rendra's and Zawawi's poetry. Data are linguistic units—connotative words, expressions, and imagery — constructing ecological experience, selected for relevance to the research focus. The primary instrument is the researcher herself (a human instrument), aided by an analytical guide for identifying linguistic form, ecological context, human–nature relations, and imaginative meaning. Data were identified, marked, and classified, then analyzed using Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics, which treats textual meaning-making as layered across three levels: semantic, reflective, and existential. These patterns were synthesized into a typology of ecological imagination revealing the character of agrarian, maritime, and dryland experience, and linked to its contribution to ecopoetics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ecological Imagination in the Poetry of W.S. Rendra

Connotative Words as Tools of Imagination about Nature Table 1 samples the use of connotative words in Rendra's poetry.

Table 1: Connotative Words as Tools of Imagination about Nature in the Poetry of W.S. Rendra

No.	Word & Quotation	Semantic	Reflective	Existential
1	hill — "On top of the hill, I stand, / gazing at the vast stretching rice fields" (*On the Hill*)	A higher place; the lyrical "I" viewing the rural landscape.	A vantage for realizing the expanse and interconnectedness of the agrarian environment.	A space for finding a new perspective on existence.
2	vast stretching rice fields (*On the Hill*)	Farmland stretching across the rural landscape.	An agrarian space sustaining life; land as livelihood.	A shared living space binding humans, land, and plants.
3	carrying silence — "the wind blows gently, / carrying silence" (*On the Hill*)	The wind seems to carry something abstract — silence.	A calm rural atmosphere, far from noise.	Silence opens a more reflective experience of existence.
4	trees swaying, dancing (*On the Hill*)	Wind-driven motion personified as "dancing."	Nature perceived as active and alive, not inert.	The nonhuman world becomes a subject with its own dynamic.
5	touching the earth — "leaves fall, touching the earth" (*On the Hill*)	Leaves fall and touch the ground.	An ecological cycle of return to the earth.	Nature as a relational web of interconnected life.
6	peace within silence (*On the Hill*)	Tranquility without noise.	Rural silence enables peace; nature shapes emotion.	Nature as an alternative space of calm.
7	boundless blue sky (*On the Hill*)	A sky that appears limitless.	Awareness of an ecological space beyond daily life.	Humans placed within a space far greater than themselves.
8	old, hollow tree — "Mother civet sheltered in the hollow of the old tree" (*Balada Ibu yang Dibunuh*, "Ballad of the Murdered Mother")	An old, hollow tree as shelter for the civet.	The tree as habitat; nature protects nonhuman beings.	Nature as shared home; destroying habitat threatens other creatures.
9	daily wager on life (*Ballad of the Murdered Mother*)	An animal's life facing daily risk.	The countryside as space of struggle, not only peace.	Nonhuman life has value of its own.
10	old leaves — "upon its carcass also fell / old leaves" (*Ballad of the Murdered Mother*)	Old leaves fall around the civet's carcass.	Death and decay confronting human violence.	Violent death raises ethical questions about nonhuman life.

At the semantic level, these images present agrarian nature through concrete sensory experience — hill and rice field show landscape vastness, wind and trees show movement, silence gives auditory texture, while leaf, tree, hamlet, thicket, and sky enrich a shared ecological space. Nature is not merely named but seen, felt, heard, and imagined

in motion. At the reflective level, this sensory experience presents the countryside as possessing atmosphere and ecological relations, yet in "Ballad of the Murdered Mother" also a space not entirely harmonious, since nonhuman life remains vulnerable to human action. At the existential level, through redescription, agrarian nature emerges not as scenery for human enjoyment but as a living world shared by humans, plants, animals, soil, air, and space — its beauty always tied to the continuity of life within it. *4.1.2 Imagery as Tools of Imagination about Nature* Table 2 samples the use of imagery in Rendra's poetry.

Table 2: Imagery as Tools of Imagination about Nature in the Poetry of W.S. Rendra

No.	Word & Quotation	Semantic	Reflective	Existential
1	hill (*On the Hill*)	Visual-spatial	An elevated space of observation.	Distance lets the countryside be seen as a whole expanse.
2	vast stretching rice fields (*On the Hill*)	Visual	A wide, open expanse of rice field.	An agrarian space tied to land, work, food, rural life.
3	wind blows gently (*On the Hill*)	Motion-tactile	Gentle wind imagined through motion and touch.	A calm, sensory human–environment relationship.
4	carrying silence (*On the Hill*)	Auditory	Wind imaginatively carries silence.	An atmosphere far from noise.
5	trees swaying, dancing (*On the Hill*)	Visual-motion	Wind-driven movement personified as dancing.	Plants appear active and alive.
6	leaves fall (*On the Hill*)	Visual-motion	Movement of leaves from tree to ground.	A process of change and the cycle of life.
7	boundless blue sky (*On the Hill*)	Visual-spatial	A sky appearing without limit.	Expands perspective; places the village in a wider space.
8	old, hollow tree (*Ballad of the Murdered Mother*)	Visual-spatial	A hollow tree sheltering the civet.	Plants' ecological function as habitat.
9	hamlets, thickets (*Ballad of the Murdered Mother*)	Visual-spatial	Two spaces: hamlet (human) and thicket (vegetation).	Animal life intersecting with human space.
10	old leaves falling (*Ballad of the Murdered Mother*)	Visual-motion	Old leaves falling around the carcass.	Death and vegetative change intersecting with violence.

At the semantic level, these images construct agrarian–rural nature as a living, interconnected expanse through hill, rice field, wind, tree, leaf, soil, animal, and human — nature as ecological space, not separate objects. At the reflective level, this reveals two faces of the rural environment: tranquility in "On the Hill," and vulnerability in "Ballad of the Murdered Mother," where nonhuman continuity confronts human intervention. At the existential level, the countryside becomes a shared living world binding humans, soil, plants, animals, air, and space into one web of existence. Rendra's ecological imagination thus moves from an aesthetically experienced landscape toward a web of life vulnerable

to human intervention: peace is not a fixed state but a condition to be safeguarded, since human and nonhuman life share the same, interdependent space.

Ecological Imagination in the Poetry of D. Zawawi Imron

Madura's coastal and relatively dry ecological conditions shape an experience of endurance, which is expressed through the use of connotative words as an important tool for constructing ecological imagination, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Connotative Words as Tools of Imagination about Nature in the Poetry of D. Zawawi Imron

No.	Word & Quotation	Semantic	Reflective	Existential
1	chunk of rock — "Upon you, a silent chunk of rock sleeps" (*Madura, Akulah Darahmu*, "Madura, I Am Your Blood")	Hard, dense material; "silent" and "sleeping" give it life.	Madura's harsh, dry character, demanding adaptation.	A still nature that still shapes existence and homeland memory.
2	blossoming with prayer (*Madura, I Am Your Blood*)	Plant growth combined with prayer.	Ecological experience inseparable from the spiritual.	Nature as meeting of material and spiritual; growth as meaning.
3	returning into your womb (*Madura, I Am Your Blood*)	Madura as womb of origin and return.	Homeland as source of life and cultural identity.	Madura as ecological womb; humans inseparable from origin.
4	karapan cattle — "that I am karapan cattle / born from your smile and the water of your eyes" (*Madura, I Am Your Blood*)	Traditional Madurese racing cattle; the "I" identifies with it.	Brings together humans, animals, tradition, and identity.	Identity formed through relations with animal, tradition, land.
5	dust (*Madura, I Am Your Blood*)	Fine soil particles that cling.	Dry environment; bodily closeness to land.	The human body materially tied to its originating land.
6	hill of salt (*Madura, I Am Your Blood*)	A mound of salt like a hill.	Salt links coast with labor and livelihood.	A meeting space of nature, labor, and culture.
7	your parched chest (*Madura, I Am Your Blood*)	"Parched" (dry); "chest" depicts Madura's body.	Drought as ecological and emotional experience.	Madura as thirsting body; land's and human suffering merge.
8	I plow you with my metal horns (*Madura, I Am Your Blood*)	Plowing land; "metal horns" as farming implement.	Intense human– land labor; harsh environment met with effort.	Land as a body one relates to; humans depend on it.
9	chasing waves (*Madura, I Am Your Blood*)	Waves as sea movement; "chasing" human effort to follow.	Maritime experience; sea as space of movement and life.	The sea, never fully controllable; relation through acceptance.
10	plucking the stars (*Madura, I Am Your Blood*)	Star–branch–ancestral spirit metaphor.	Cosmos merged with ancestral memory and identity.	Nature as space of spirituality and intergenerational memory.

At the semantic level, these data build Madura's ecological imagination through rock, dust, salt, parched land, cattle, and sea meeting the human body and activity: rock, dust, salt hills, and a parched chest present a harsh, dry environment, waves present maritime experience, and the metaphors of womb, chest, and horns give nature a living

body. At the reflective level, this reveals the Madurese ecological–cultural experience — dryness as scarcity, salt as coastal livelihood, karapan cattle as human–animal–tradition, waves as coastal life — nature sustains, limits, demands labor, and shapes culture. At the existential level, Madura appears as an ecological body: soil becomes womb, dryland becomes parched chest, salt the product of coastal encounter, cattle a cultural identity, and stars linked to ancestral spirits extend nature into memory and spirituality. Zawawi's imagination thus presents nature as homeland, body, source of life, labor, culture, and ancestral memory at once. Table 4 presents samples of imagery that express and construct the ecological imagination.

Table 4: Imagery as Tools of Imagination about Nature in the Poetry of D. Zawawi Imron

No.	Word & Quotation	Semantic	Reflective	Existential
1	silent chunk of rock (Madura, Akulah Darahmu, "Madura, I Am Your Blood")	Visual-tactile	A hard, dense, heavy object; "silent" reinforces stillness.	Madura's harsh, dry land, which must be accepted.
2	a drop of dew (Madura, I Am Your Blood)	Visual-tactile	A very small, cool amount of water.	In dryness, little water reveals its preciousness.
3	hill of salt (Madura, I Am Your Blood)	Visual-spatial	A mound or expanse of salt in the coastal landscape.	Brings together sea, land, heat, labor, livelihood.
4	chasing waves (Madura, I Am Your Blood)	Motion-visual	Human running/chasing; the sea's dynamic movement.	The sea as close, moving, part of lived experience.
5	mangroves in the coastal marsh (Pemandangan, "Scenery")	Visual-spatial	Vegetation at the land–sea transition.	The coast as an ecosystem sustaining life.
6	orange sea — "orange clouds, orange sky, orange wind, and orange sea" (Scenery)	Visual-spatial	Repetition of "orange" unites cloud, sky, wind, sea.	Atmospheric elements and sea as one ecological experience.
7	ripples of water (Scenery)	Visual-motion	Small surface movement; "moaning" suggests sound and emotion.	Water not lifeless; seems to respond to human experience.
8	velvet sky, silver clouds (Nyanyian Kampung Halaman, "Song of the Homeland")	Visual-spatial	Color, texture, atmosphere of sky; clouds seeming to settle.	The village experienced through atmosphere and visual beauty.
9	red road toward the hills (Song of the Homeland)	Visual-spatial-tactile	Land (road, hills) and bodily heat/rain.	The village's inland character felt through journey and body.
10	fog, the rainy season (Perjalanan Laut, "Sea Journey")	Visual-atmospheric	Vague fog, sudden "burst," seasonal change.	Maritime nature as dynamic, unpredictable.
11	gulls (Sea Journey)	Visual-motion	Coastal fauna; "mischievous" conveys free movement.	Gulls as maritime marker; sea as nonhuman habitat.
12	tide and ebb (Sea Journey)	Motion-visual-spatial	Rising and falling sea water; "floating" and "sinking."	The sea's own rhythm, part of coastal experience.

At the semantic level, “Madura, I Am Your Blood” presents dryland and coast through “a silent chunk of rock,” “a drop of dew,” “a hill of salt,” and “chasing waves”; “Scenery” extends this through mangroves, an orange sea, and rippling water, so the coast brings together vegetation, land, air, water, and sea. “Song of the Homeland” presents the inland side through red road, hills, heat, and rain; “Sea Journey” emphasizes maritime experience through fog, the rainy season, gulls, and tide and ebb. At the reflective level, this imagery presents nature as a living space bound to the body, work, culture, memory, and identity of the Madurese. At the existential level, dryland, coast, village, and sea are ecological spaces that give life, demand adaptation, provide livelihood, shape culture, and hold homeland memory. Together, the four poems form an ecological imagination positioning humans not as separate from nature but as part of a living world shaped by land, coast, sea, and culture in reciprocal relation.

Comparison of the Typologies of Imagination and Their Contribution to World Ecopoetics

Comparing the ecological imagination of Rendra and Zawawi requires a comparative-literature perspective, so the difference in their ecological experience does not stop at geographical setting or an inventory of natural elements. The comparison is not simply Javanese nature versus Madurese nature, but how environment, ecological experience, culture, and the human–nature relationship are transformed into imaginative structures within the poetry.

Nature in a literary work is not a neutral geographical reality but has undergone selection, imagination, and linguistic expression. The comparison is therefore directed at three questions: how nature is presented, how the human position toward nature is constructed, and how ecological experience gains cultural and existential meaning through poetic language — placing Indonesian poetry within world literature, in line with Damrosch’s (2003) idea of world literature as circulation and refraction of national literatures, and Moretti’s (2000) call for comparative categories. Remak (1961) likewise frames comparative literature as including the relations between literature and other areas of knowledge and belief, which suits a comparison that brings poetry into dialogue with ecology, while Heise (2008) examines how ecological attachment to place relates to imagining the global, which supports reading local landscapes as contributions to a wider ecopoetic conversation.

The comparison reveals both fundamental similarities and differences. Neither poet presents nature as passive backdrop; both give it movement, atmosphere, body, voice, and relation to human life through metaphor, personification, and imagery. But the mode of connectedness differs: Rendra more strongly constructs nature as a living landscape — a shared space and web of life — while Zawawi more strongly constructs nature as body, origin, identity, and cultural space, where nature becomes body, womb, and blood. This aligns with Bate’s (2000) view of literature as a medium for reflecting on the human–earth relationship: nature functions not only as backdrop but as part of ecological experience and reflection on human existence within the natural world.

Comparatively, this yields a more significant finding: a single overarching concept of the human–nature relationship can take different imaginative configurations depending on local ecological experience. Ecopoetics should not be understood as one

model of how literature depicts nature, but should remain open to diverse modes of ecological imagination born of different geographies and cultures.

This study therefore formulates two contextual tendencies. First, *landscapeecological imagination*, dominant in Rendra, constructing nature as a web of living spaces linking humans to the agrarian domain and other beings. Second, *identificatory-ecological imagination*, dominant in Zawawi, constructing nature as body, origin, cultural identity, memory, and existence. These are not absolute, mutually exclusive categories — Rendra still carries dimensions of identity and existence, and Zawawi also presents nature as landscape — but dominant tendencies drawn from comparative reading of the corpus.

This offers a conceptual contribution to ecopoetics: where literature–environment studies have long asked how nature is represented, this study shifts the question toward how ecological experience is constructed into patterns of imagination through poetic language. Ecological imagination can thus serve as an analytical category bridging four elements, consistent with Buell's (1995) view: the physical environment supplies ecological conditions, culture supplies values and identity, and poetic language structures how humans imagine their connectedness with the environment.

A further contribution is expanding what "ecology" means within ecopoetics. The comparison shows that ecology in poetry is not confined to the biophysical: in Zawawi's work, land, sea, karapan cattle, salt, village, ancestors, and Madurese identity form one ecological–cultural unity, so the human–nature relationship is also built through tradition, memory, symbol, and community identity. Ecopoetics can thus move from physical ecology toward physical–cultural ecology without losing the environment's material dimension.

The contribution of this study to world ecopoetics, then, is not a new theory but an expanded context through the plurality of ecological imagination. World ecopoetics becomes broader when it seeks not only universal patterns between literature and nature, but room for the diversity of ways communities and poets imagine their existence alongside nature (Damrosch, 2003; Buell, 2005).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research aims and analysis, this study reaches three main conclusions. *First*, W.S. Rendra's poetry constructs an agrarian ecological-imagination typology positioning nature as a space of abundance, harmony, and continuity of life, yet also inseparable from human conflicts of interest; through markers such as hill, rice field, tree, leaf, and animal, nature is a web of living spaces connecting humans with the agrarian environment and other beings — a tendency termed *landscape-ecological imagination*. *Second*, D. Zawawi Imron's poetry forms a maritime–dryland ecological-imagination typology representing nature as a space of resilience, adaptation, and cultural identity; through markers such as sea, salt, dry land, karapan cattle, and village, nature is part of the body, origin, memory, and community identity — termed *identificatory-ecological imagination*. *Third*, comparing the two typologies shows that differences in ecological landscape tend to shape how poets construct ecological identity in modern Indonesian poetry, not merely their choice of poetic language. This category of ecological imagination, born of local geographical and cultural experience, can contribute to world ecopoetics — not as a new theory, but as an expanded context

positioning Indonesian literature as a conceptual source rather than merely an object of applied theory.

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