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Teaching comparative literature through environmental poetry: Integrating Taufiq Ismail and Simon Armitage to strengthen climate literacy

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Abstract: *Climate change and environmental degradation are global issues requiring an educational response grounded not only in scientific knowledge but also in ecological awareness, values, and responsibility. In literature education, environmental poetry provides a space to connect aesthetic experience with ecological reflection, while comparative literature enables learners to examine global issues through diverse cultural perspectives. This study aims to comparatively analyze ecological representations in the poetry of Taufiq Ismail and Simon Armitage and formulate their implications for strengthening climate literacy in literature education. The study employs a qualitative approach using comparative literature methods and close reading. The analysis draws on Bassnett's perspective on comparative literature, Buell's concept of environmental imagination, and Garrard's ecocriticism. The findings reveal three shared ecological dimensions: environmental degradation, human responsibility toward nature, and ecological sustainability. However, Armitage tends to represent nature as an agent with its own presence and vitality, whereas Taufiq Ismail tends to construct nature as a sign requiring moral and spiritual interpretation. Based on these findings, the study formulates a* Comparative Ecopoetry Reading Framework *comprising five stages: contextualizing, reading, comparing, reflecting, and responding. The framework offers a pedagogical pathway linking literary appreciation, cross-cultural understanding, ecological reflection, and climate literacy*

Keywords: *comparative literature, ecopoetry, literature instruction, climate literacy, ecocriticism*

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is a global issue increasingly affecting the relationship between humans and the environment. Changes in atmospheric conditions, rising temperatures, shifting weather patterns, ecosystem degradation, pollution, and biodiversity loss demonstrate that environmental issues cannot be understood solely as ecological matters but also as social, cultural, ethical, and educational ones. In this context, education holds a strategic position in developing learners' ability to understand environmental issues while reflecting on the human relationship with the natural world.

Literary studies play a significant role in this process. Literature conveys environmental issues not merely as factual information but constructs them through language, imagery, symbols, metaphors, irony, and emotional experience. The relationship between literature and the environment has evolved significantly since the emergence of ecocriticism as a field of study examining the connections among literary works, culture, and the environment (Drew & Sitter, 2011; Al Fawareh et al., 2023). Fundamentally, ecocriticism expands literary inquiry from questions of human

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representation to the relationship between humans, the environment, and the non-human world (Garrard, 2012).

This development also indicates that the study of literature and the environment is not limited to novels or prose. Poetry holds significant potential because the density of poetic language allows ecological experiences to be conveyed through imagery, symbols, and emotional resonance. Research on poetry and environmental education indicates that literary works can help learners develop an interest in ecological issues and build a more reflective relationship with the environment (Alghanem, 2023; Sikuku, 2024; Khasanah et al., 2024). Thus, environmental poetry can be viewed not merely as an object of aesthetic appreciation but also as a text that enables learners to develop environmental awareness and climate literacy.

In this study, comparative literature is positioned not merely as a method for identifying similarities and differences between two works, but as a pedagogical approach enabling learners to understand how ecological issues are represented through diverse cultural perspectives. Environmental poetry serves as a medium for this process, as it allows ecological concerns to be conveyed through language, imagery, symbols, metaphors, and emotional experiences. Consequently, the comparative reading of poems by Taufiq Ismail and Simon Armitage aims not only to foster textual understanding but also to cultivate the learners' awareness of the relationship between humanity and the environment.

Based on this rationale, the study recognizes a close connection among comparative literature, environmental poetry, and climate literacy. The learning process begins with the reading and interpretation of texts, proceeds to a comparison of cultural perspectives, and culminates in reflection on ecological issues and human responsibility. Through this progression, climate literacy is not treated as supplementary material external to the study of literature; rather, it is cultivated through the very process of interpreting and comparing the literary works themselves.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Comparative Literature as Cross-Cultural Dialogue

Comparative literature essentially enables literary works to be read in relation to other works originating from different languages, cultures, periods, or traditions. Bassnett (1993) points out that the development of comparative literature is inseparable from shifting perspectives on identity, culture, and inter-literary relationships. Therefore, comparisons should not be predicated on hierarchical assumptions regarding the center and the periphery.

This principle is crucial to the present study. Taufiq Ismail and Simon Armitage hail from distinct cultural contexts. Taufiq’s work is rooted in the Indonesian experience—characterized by specific socio-political history, religiosity, and ecological issues—whereas Armitage developed within the context of contemporary English literature. These differences do not constitute an obstacle; rather, they provide a space to examine how global ecological issues find distinct cultural articulations.

Thus, comparative literature is employed here as a dialogic approach. The aim of the comparison is not to determine which poet is more "ecological," aesthetically superior, or more powerful, but rather to understand how cultural contexts influence

the representation of nature, humanity, environmental degradation, responsibility, and sustainability.

E*cocriticism and the Environmental Imagination*

Ecocriticism has emerged as an approach that examines the relationship between literature, culture, and the environment. Garrard (2012) notes that the field encompasses several key concepts, including pollution, apocalypse, the pastoral, wilderness, animals, and dwelling. These concepts provide a framework for analyzing how literary texts construct the environment and the relationship between humans and the non-human world.

Buell (1995) expanded this field of study through the concept of the "environmental imagination." From his perspective, literature possesses the capacity to shape how humans imagine the environment and the relationship between humanity and nature. The environment within a text need not be treated merely as a backdrop, as it can serve as an active component of the work's meaning structure.

This concept is relevant to reading the poetry of Armitage and Taufiq. In both corpora, nature is not simply a setting for human experience; elements such as water, air, trees, birds, forests, snow, mountains, and urban landscapes play a role in shaping the poems' meanings. However, the two poets position nature differently, and this distinction constitutes a primary focus of the research.

Ecopoetry and Environmental Literacy

Environmental poetry can be understood as a form of poetic expression that focuses on the relationship between humans and the environment. A poem need not explicitly mention the term "climate change" to possess ecological relevance. Representations of pollution, habitat loss, landscape alteration, or the degradation of forests and water—as well as intergenerational relationships—can all form part of a broader ecological imagination.

Johns-Putra (2016) demonstrates that literature plays a crucial role in shaping how climate change is imagined. Literature lends narrative and emotional form to issues often conveyed through scientific language. Consequently, the study of literature offers a space to connect environmental issues with human experience.

In an educational context, climate literacy entails more than the ability to recall facts about climate change (Rushton, 2025; Tisoglu, Sönmez, Kaya, & Et. (2025). It also encompasses the capacity to understand the human-environment relationship, recognize the consequences of human actions, evaluate ecological issues, and formulate responsible responses. Poetry facilitates this process by allowing learners to move from the act of reading toward interpretation and reflection.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach utilizing the comparative literature method. The primary technique used is close reading—an in-depth analysis of linguistic elements, imagery, symbols, metaphors, repetition, lyrical voice, and the interrelationships between elements within the text.

The research corpus consists of eight poems. Four poems by Simon Armitage are *Snow, Ark/Bring Back the Leaf, Plum Tree Among the Skyscrapers***,** and *Birthday.* Four

poems by Taufiq Ismail are *Biru Bukit, Bukit Kelu, Membaca Tanda-Tanda, Aku Ingin Menulis Puisi, Yang,* and *Wasiat 11 Bait untuk Cucu-Cucuku.* The selection of the corpus is based on the presence of representations regarding nature, the environment, ecological degradation, the human-nature relationship, and intergenerational sustainability.

The analysis is conducted in three stages. The first stage involves an intratextual reading to identify how each poem represents the environment. The second stage involves mapping findings onto three ecological dimensions: (1) environmental degradation, (2) human responsibility toward nature, and (3) ecological resilience. The third stage entails a comparative reading utilizing the perspectives of Bassnett (1993), Buell (1995), and Garrard (2012).

Bassnett's framework is used to ensure the comparison remains dialogic rather than hierarchical. Buell's work is used to analyze how the environment gains a position within the poetic imagination. Garrard's work is used to identify ecological concepts such as pollution, apocalypse, and the human-environment relationship.

In addition to identifying similarities and differences in ecological representations, the findings from the comparative reading in this study are further interpreted from a pedagogical perspective. This interpretation aims to explore how the comparative results can be applied to the process of literary learning—specifically through activities such as understanding context, conducting close reading, comparing cultural perspectives, reflecting on ecological issues, and formulating responses. Thus, the pedagogical aspect of this study is grounded in the findings of the literary analysis rather than being an empirically tested instructional intervention.

The analysis compares the poems both thematically and textually. Consequently, similarities are understood not merely as shared topics but as shared poetic functions, while differences are understood not simply as variations in vocabulary but as differing ways of constructing the relationship between humanity and nature. This study is an interpretive analysis and has not empirically tested the effectiveness of the pedagogical framework. Therefore, the resulting Comparative Ecopoetry Reading Framework is a conceptual proposition based on text analysis and cannot yet be claimed as a learning model proven to enhance climate literacy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Environmental Degradation: Ark and Membaca Tanda-Tanda

A prominent initial parallel between Simon Armitage and Taufiq Ismail is their use of representations of environmental degradation to foster ecological awareness. However, the two poets employ distinct poetic strategies in presenting this degradation.

In *Ark* (specifically *Bring Back the Leaf*), Armitage constructs an ecological world in crisis. Imagery involving oil-slicked birds, habitat alteration, plastic waste, and species loss illustrates the impact of human activity on the environment. The repetition of the phrase "bring back" serves as a crucial structural element, evoking both a sense of loss and a desire to restore the damaged ecological state.

From Garrard's (2012) perspective, these representations can be interpreted through the concepts of pollution and apocalypse. Pollution is not merely a material issue but also a sign that the system of human-nature relations has been disrupted.

Meanwhile, the apocalyptic dimension emerges through visions of a world that has lost its ecological balance.

In *Membaca Tanda-Tanda* ("Reading the Signs"), Taufiq Ismail similarly constructs an image of environmental degradation through a series of natural phenomena. Changes in the air, receding water, the silencing of birds, forest destruction, and the onset of disasters are arranged sequentially to establish a cause-and-effect relationship. In their analysis of the poem, Visiaty et al. (2020) highlight the importance of interpreting the ecological signs present in the text.

A fundamental difference lies in how the two poets position nature. In *Ark*, nature and non-human entities appear as those bearing the consequences of the ecological crisis. Nature acquires a form of agency, as readers are guided to recognize that this degradation disrupts not only human life but also non-human existence.

Conversely, in *Membaca Tanda-Tanda*, nature is constructed as a system of signs; natural changes are something that must be "read" by humans. The question of human ability to read signs shifts the environmental issue from a merely physical matter to a moral one.Thus, both poems construct the concept of environmental degradation, yet through different orientations:

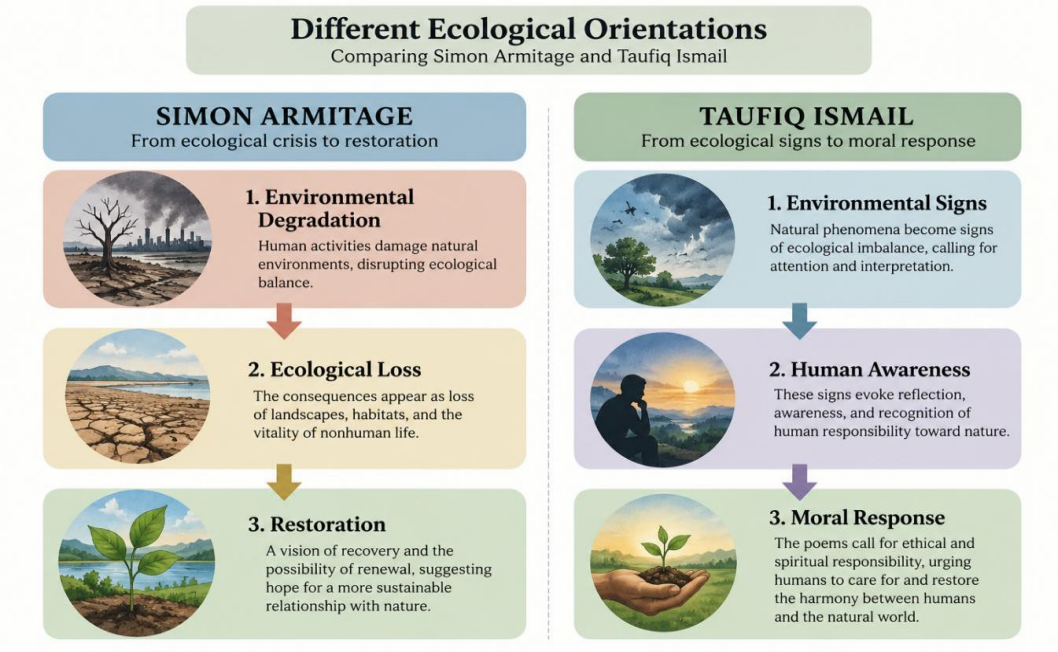


Figure 1. Different Ecological Orientations

This distinction demonstrates that global ecological issues can acquire different meanings when entering different cultural spheres.

Human Responsibility: Plum Tree Among the Skyscrapers and Aku Ingin Menulis Puisi, Yang

The second dimension concerns human responsibility toward nature. In *Plum Tree Among the Skyscrapers*, Armitage presents a tree amidst an urban landscape. The tree creates a contrast between organic life and the dominance of urban space.

From Buell's (1995) perspective, the tree's presence is significant because nature is not positioned merely as a backdrop for human activity. The tree possesses an existence that prompts the reader to reconsider the dominance of human-made spaces. The presence of a non-human element within the city raises questions about how humans share space with other forms of life.

In *Aku Ingin Menulis Puisi, Yang*, Taufiq Ismail's concern for the environment manifests through a series of hopes and social issues linked to the exploitation of natural resources and forests, as well as human responsibility. Nature is directly connected to the implications of human actions.

This difference reveals two distinct ecological orientations. Armitage tends to use natural objects as the focal point of the poetic experience, guiding the reader to acknowledge the existence and agency of nature. Taufiq, conversely, makes a more explicit connection between environmental issues and human responsibility.

This distinction can be explained through the concept of the "environmental imagination." Buell (1995) emphasizes the importance of examining how literature shapes the imagination regarding the human-environment relationship. In Armitage's work, the tree persisting within the urban landscape evokes an image of nature's existence inside a space dominated by humans. In Taufiq's context, the environment becomes part of an ethical inquiry into how humans ought to treat natural resources.

Thus, both poems demonstrate that ecological responsibility can be constructed in two ways: by acknowledging the agency of nature and by affirming human responsibility.

Ecological Resilience and the Intergenerational Dimension

The third dimension is ecological sustainability. In *Snow* and *Birthday*, Armitage draws upon experiences of nature and everyday spaces to construct reflections on change, loss, and the tension between the natural world and human life.

Snow can be interpreted through imagery of snow, melting, and metamorphosis. *Snow* is not merely a visual object but becomes part of a transformative process; these changes open up a space for interpreting instability and transience.

Meanwhile, *Birthday* utilizes the presence of a tree within a human-constructed space. The contrast between the tree and the parking area creates an ecological irony: organic life exists within a space designed primarily for vehicles and human activity.

In Taufiq's corpus—specifically *Biru Bukit and Bukit Kelu*—imagery involving nature, rain, and the changing seasons establishes a connection between environmental conditions and human experience. Meanwhile, *Wasiat 11 Bait untuk Cucu-Cucuku* extends environmental concerns into the intergenerational dimension.

The intergenerational dimension is crucial because sustainability concerns not only the environment's current resilience but also the state of the environment bequeathed to future generations. From this perspective, Taufiq's poetry gives more explicit form to the concept of intergenerational responsibility.

These differences highlight distinct tendencies: Armitage tends to rely on irony, imagery, and ambiguity to foster ecological awareness, whereas Taufiq more directly articulates responsibilities and messages addressed to future generations.

Both approaches are equally relevant to the study of literature. Armitage's strategy encourages interpretation and inference, while Taufiq's strategy fosters ethical reflection and argumentation.

Comparative Synthesis: Nature as Agency and Nature as Sign

Based on these three dimensions, the study finds that the two poets share a primary focus on three ecological issues: environmental degradation, human responsibility, and sustainability. However, a more fundamental difference emerges regarding ecological epistemology—specifically, how nature is situated within the process of meaning-making.

Armitage tends to present nature as an agent. Trees, birds, snow, and other natural elements are accorded a status that allows the reader to perceive nature as possessing an existence independent of human interests.

Taufiq Ismail tends to present nature as a sign. Changes in the natural world serve as signs that convey messages, requiring humans to read, acknowledge, and respond morally to them.

These findings can be summarized as follows:

Table 1. Comparative Ecological Dimensions of Simon Armitage and Taufiq Ismail

Dimension	Simon Armitage	Taufiq Ismail
Environmental degradation	Nature and nonhuman beings experience the impacts of ecological crises	Environmental phenomena function as signs of ecological degradation
Human responsibility	Constructed through irony, contrast, and the presence of nature	Constructed through appeals, reflection, and moral responsibility
Ecological resilience	Nature demonstrates vitality within human-dominated spaces	Sustainability is associated with awareness and responsibility
Position of nature	Agency	Sign
Dominant strategies	Imagery, irony, symbolism, and ambiguity	Anaphora, rhetorical questions, appeals, and moral reflection
Pedagogical potential	Encourages interpretation and inference	Encourages ethical and spiritual reflection

These findings demonstrate that comparative literature can contribute more than just the identification of similarities and differences; comparison can reveal distinct ecological ways of thinking.

This is also significant within the context of Indonesian literature's place in world literature discourse. Taufiq Ismail need not be read merely as an "Indonesian version" of Western poets; instead, his poetry can engage in a dialogue with international poetry based on its own aesthetic and cultural strengths and distinctiveness.

Pedagogical Implications: Comparative Ecopoetry Reading Framework

These comparative findings were subsequently translated into the Comparative Ecopoetry Reading Framework (CERF). This framework is not intended as an empirically validated learning model, but rather as a conceptual framework that teachers or lecturers can use to integrate comparative literature, ecocriticism, and climate literacy.

The CERF consists of five stages.

Contextualizing

In the first stage, students are introduced to the poet, the work, and their respective cultural and ecological contexts.

Teachers may pose questions such as:

In what social, cultural, and environmental context was this poem written?

The aim is to avoid readings that disregard cultural context. This principle aligns with the orientation of comparative literature, which situates works in relation to their respective cultural contexts (Bassnett, 1993).

Reading

Students conduct a close reading of the text. They identify imagery, metaphors, symbols, repetition, the lyrical voice, and representations of nature.

Guiding questions:

Which words, images, or symbols most powerfully establish the relationship between humanity and nature?

This stage ensures that learning remains rooted in literary analysis rather than devolving into a purely environmental lesson.

Comparing

Students compare two poems based on three dimensions:

environmental degradation → human responsibility → ecological resilience. They are not asked to determine which work is better, but rather to explain how the two poets employ different strategies to construct ecological meaning.

Guiding question:

How do the two poets depict environmental degradation, and why do their approaches differ?

Reflecting

Students connect the ecological representations in the poems to their own surroundings.

Guiding question:

Can the signs of environmental change or degradation found in the poems also be observed in our own environment?

This stage serves as a bridge between literary interpretation and climate literacy. Students move beyond merely understanding the text's content to questioning its relevance to their own lives.

Responding

In the final stage, students generate a response based on their reading and reflection. This response may take the form of a poem, a reflective essay, a poster, a podcast, a poetry video, or an environmental literacy campaign.

Thus, the learning process moves from:

Contextualizing → Reading → Comparing → Reflecting → Responding

This framework evolves learning from mere text comprehension toward interpretation, cross-cultural dialogue, ecological reflection, and the production of responses.

Pedagogical Discussion

CERF has the potential to develop several competencies simultaneously. First, students develop literary competence through close reading of the language and structure of the poems. Second, they develop critical thinking skills by comparing two cultural representations. Third, they cultivate ecological awareness through reflection on environmental issues. Fourth, they enhance their communication skills by producing creative responses.

The primary strength of this approach lies in its integration. Literature instruction retains its identity as the study of language and literary works while simultaneously opening a space for addressing global issues.

This approach also enables Indonesian literature to play a more active role in the study of world literature. When a poem by Taufiq Ismail is read alongside one by Armitage, students not only learn about a British poet but also recognize that Indonesia's ecological experiences hold value for global dialogue.

In higher education, this approach can be adapted for courses in Comparative Literature, Literary Criticism, Poetry, Literature in ELT, or other subjects integrating literature with global issues. In a school setting, poems can be selected according to students' proficiency levels and developed into activities involving critical reading, discussion, reflection, and creative production.

However, there are important limitations. CERF has not yet been tested through empirical research; therefore, this study cannot conclude that using the framework directly improves climate literacy. A more accurate claim is that the analysis reveals a pedagogical potential for developing climate literacy through the study of comparative literature. Therefore, further research is needed to test the CERF through classroom-based studies—for instance, by developing teaching materials, testing the validity and practicality of instructional tools, and measuring changes in learners' abilities to comprehend literary texts and ecological issues.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the poetry of Taufiq Ismail and Simon Armitage offers a productive space for ecocriticism-based comparative literary studies. Despite originating from different cultural contexts, both poets address three ecological dimensions: environmental degradation, human responsibility toward nature, and ecological sustainability.

The primary difference lies in how nature is positioned within the construction of meaning. Armitage tends to present nature as agency—a non-human presence possessing vitality and an existence independent of human interests. Taufiq Ismail tends to present nature as a sign—a series of phenomena to be read and responded to through moral and spiritual awareness. This distinction does not imply a hierarchy between the two traditions but rather highlights the richness of perspectives within environmental literature.

These comparative findings served as the basis for developing the Comparative Ecopoetry Reading Framework (CERF), which comprises five stages: contextualizing, reading, comparing, reflecting, and responding. This framework offers a conceptual alternative for integrating literature instruction with climate literacy through cross-cultural reading.

Thus, comparative literature can function not merely as an academic method for comparing works but also as a pedagogical strategy to help learners understand that while ecological issues are global in nature, the ways humans interpret the natural world remain shaped by cultural experiences. Within this framework, Taufiq Ismail's poetry can be positioned on more equal footing within the global discourse on environmental literature.

Future research should empirically test the CERF through classroom implementation to assess its validity, practicality, and potential to enhance learners' literary interpretation skills and climate literacy.

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